





Story of Us.
Round



Chapter 1. Shades of Me

Everyone has colours inside them - but you only notice if you take the time to look. At our storytelling workshops, we asked Roma people about something as simple as their favourite colour, and suddenly whole stories began to unfold: strength, memories, hopes, little pieces of life you wouldn't guess from the outside.

What stayed with us wasn't just the colours, but the way sharing them made people feel seen. That's how stereotypes begin to fall away - with small details and honest stories. As one Roma participant put it: "Don't judge a book by its cover."



RED

Erika likes red colour. She likes wearing red clothes, paints nails red.

It's a powerful colour. Just like her personality it is very energetic and strong. And it helps in life to have a lot of energy to overcome difficulties.



*My **superpower** is that I am not afraid of the new things! Like these workshops. I continue to do something even when I'm scared!*



Fazila's favourite colour is red too - just like her mother's! And her favourite day is November 24. It's her birthday!



I remember my birthday cake, it was a peach cake from SuperValu! And I had a party with friends! It was the best day ever!



BLACK



Helena's favourite colour is black. Since childhood. They even called her "goth" at school. She wears black and her hair and eyes are also black. Even the things in her house - she always chooses black. She says black is a very powerful colour. Black is the colour of serious people, she says.

Her friends say "if Helena is wearing red or pink, this is not Helena"

She laughs that when she is near her wardrobe she sometimes struggles "Which black to choose today?"



*My **superpower** is my strong voice, my personality. I treasure that I never give up and always find a way to get what I want!*



Tatiana moved to Ireland from Slovakia when she was 18. The biggest memory of the home town are beautiful decorations and ornaments. She misses them but she is happy here, in Longford, because here she has a new life and a wonderful son.



*My **superpower** is the love for my son! He is everything for me!*





BLUE

Muhammad likes blue as it reminds him of wild rivers of Kashmir where he is from. Blue waters and white tops of the high mountains. He arrived to Ireland 20 years ago but he still remembers how that snow is melting and falling down into the blue rivers... There were a lot of hardships in Kashmir as it was always in a war but the best thing about it is its amazing nature.



*My **superpower** is hope. It's not easy to be a migrant and you have to survive day by day. But I believe that after the darkest night there is going to be a calm morning. It's part of life! And belonging to the community is very important too. We are like stars and we are all guided by each other*



RED

For Olga red represents heart. And a heart for her is about love, love for your family and love for God. Olga says that it's very important to help each other in difficult times. One of her favourite folk tales is a story about Juraj Jánošík. After losing his parents he went to help his neighbours: he took from the rich and gave to the poor.



*My **superpower** is my family. All Roma people respect each other and God. We should come together more and talk more. Because this life is not like it was before. The family is not together. Everything is separated. I wish we could change that!*



BLACK

Mario is in Ireland since 2 y.o. He has a big family and he is a very important person in Roma community – helping everybody. But there was a time when he needed help – he remembers the darkest time of his life, when he was at the hospital after the car crash.



*My **superpowers** are the love of God and my family. My mom was talking to me during recovery and that helped me to get back to normal life.*



Chapter 2. A Treasure Box of Memories

At the storytelling workshops we put a box on the table, filled with all kinds of little objects. Everyone was asked to pick one that meant something to them.

It was a simple exercise, but it opened the door to very personal stories. A small thing in the hand could unlock whole worlds of memory and feeling - reminders of homes left behind and of the lives Roma families had to change when they came to Ireland.

This chapter is like that box - carrying fragments of the past into the present, so nothing important is truly lost.



A SHELL

Tatiana chose a shell and a brooch from the treasure box. She loves shells and once had a big collection.

“

My favourite one is a tiny blue shell I found in Longford town.

”

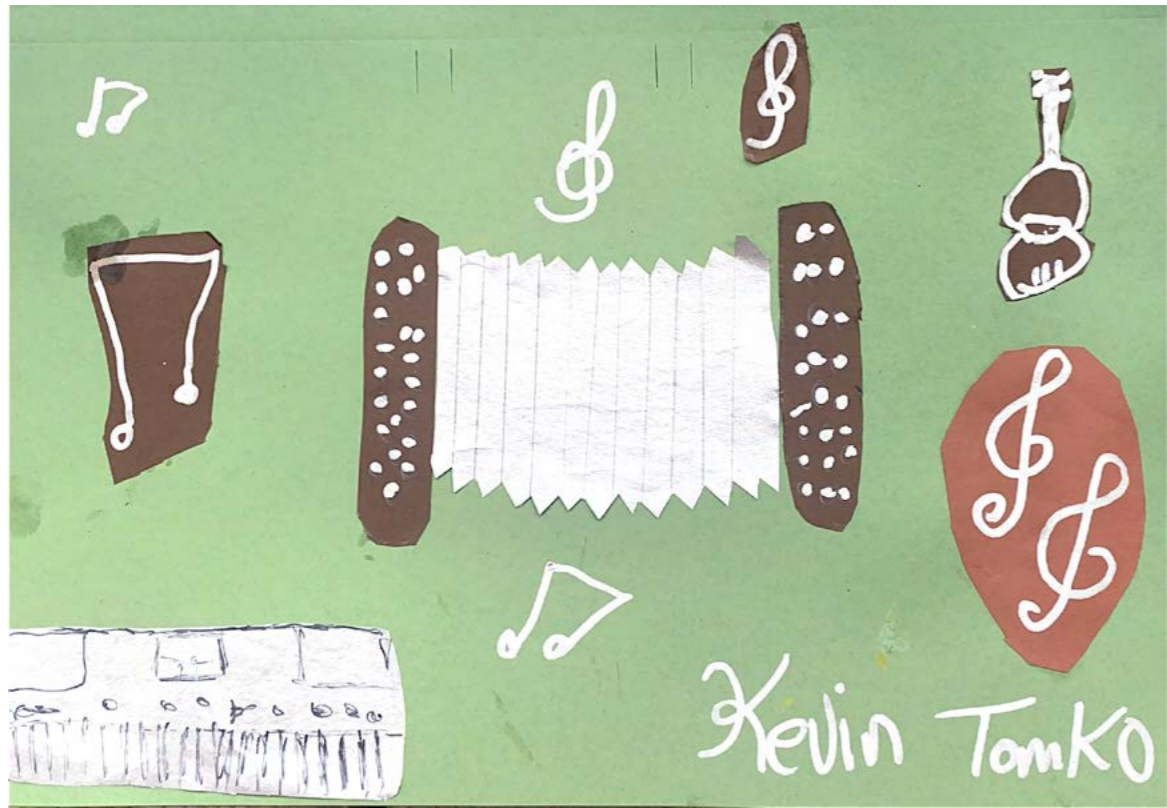
Another thing that caught her attention was a brooch.

“

It reminds me of the beautiful traditional clothes we wear for the wedding.

”





A GUITAR PICK

Kevin chose a guitar pick from the treasure box. He has been playing bass guitar since he was 11 years old.

It was a present from my dad.

Later, at 14, he also learned to play the piano. He enjoys playing Roma songs, especially "Jelem Jelem."

Sometimes I play when I want to calm my thoughts.

One day, he hopes to learn to play the accordion.



AN ACORN

Olga chose an acorn from the treasure box.

I used to collect acorns when I was a child - I liked playing with them.

Another thing that caught her attention was a wine cork.

When I lived in Slovakia, I made different animals from wine corks.



A PINECONE

Anna picked up a pinecone from the treasure box. Back at home in Slovakia she used to collect them and create different types of art for school projects.

I really liked art lessons but my favourite subject was math.

A CRAYON

Maria chose a crayon from the treasure box.

It reminds me of school back home in Slovakia. I liked school.

Maria's favourite subject was art.

A CRAYON

Helena picked a red crayon from the treasure box. When she was a little girl, her family didn't have much money. Every Christmas, her parents gave her crayons as a present.

I was a happy child back then. I might not have had a lot, but I was happy with what I had.

A PEN

Muhammad chose a blue pen from the treasure chest. It reminded him of school days. He liked school - always arriving early in the morning, never late, unlike his brothers. Muhammad is the middle of five siblings, and all the brothers went to the same school.

I enjoyed learning something new every day.

Here in Ireland, he has learned English and still believes you can learn something new every day of your life. But it's not that easy now.

I'm at the age when I think more about making money. If you have big goals, you need resources to reach them. Sadly, those who have goals often struggle to survive, and those who have resources sometimes have no goals at all.



Chapter 3. LIGHT AND SHADE

For Roma people, life has rarely been easy. Across the world, communities face poverty, discrimination, and exclusion. Many grow up in harsh conditions where chances are few and struggles are many.

Their own personal stories are full of pain too. And yet - even in that darkness, light is found. People hold onto their families, their faith, their traditions. They find strength in love, in music, in the hope of giving their children a better life.

The Mother's Heart

The hardest time for Erika was when she got sick after coming to Ireland and had to have stomach surgery in 2023. Doctors said she should stay in the hospital for two weeks, but she stayed only for one day.

“

I missed my baby too much. My daughter was only two years old and needed her mother.

”

That's what Roma do - they miss their families and always take care of each other.



Unbroken Spirit

Helena's life hasn't been easy, but her children gave her strength.

Before moving to Longford, Helena lived in Dublin and worked as a cleaner in a bakery. Her dedication and hard work paid off - after a year and a half, she was promoted to team leader. But not everyone welcomed her success. Some co-workers, who had been there for many years, began to bully her. One day, a woman deliberately handed her a bucket of water mixed with strong chemicals. Even through gloves, the mixture burned Helena's hands - she still has scars as a reminder of that difficult times.

The tension grew. Eventually, she had to leave the job she loved.

There was a bright side too. Her little son, Simon, who was just 3 at that time, had asthma, and now she could stay with him and help him get better.

She also has a daughter - beautiful Sandra, a kind and talented girl, who is deeply connected to Roma traditions.

“

“My daughter is only 16 and even though she was born in Ireland she choreographed a traditional Roma dance for International Roma Day and now teaches younger Roma girls to dance! I used to dance when I was young in Slovakia, and now I can't be prouder to see Sandra keeping those traditions alive.”

”

Helena's strength has always come from her children. They helped her overcome the difficulties and motivated her not to give up. Now she is back to a supervising position again, in Longford. But her proudest role is of course being a mother of wonderful children.



The Road Back

Mario's struggles began early, with bullying and fights in childhood. But the hardest period came after a devastating car crash that left him in hospital for ten months. The accident changed his life – his hand still trembles, and his speech is not as clear as before.

He remembers the pain of being dismissed when he asked for help in Mullingar hospital: "Are we your babysitters?" someone said. Those words cut as deeply as his injuries.

Yet Mario was not alone. His family stood by him and carried him through the darkest times. Step by step, he found his way forward. Today he studies at the National Learning Network, volunteers with LCRL, and even translates for the Roma community. His journey is proof that even after great loss, strength can be rebuilt with support, determination, and purpose.



Light and Shade of Kashmiri

For Muhammad, childhood in Kashmir was full of contrasts. His family lived high on a snowy hill, while rivers and houses stretched below. Every day he walked down to school, never knowing if it would be an ordinary day - or if conflict would flare again.

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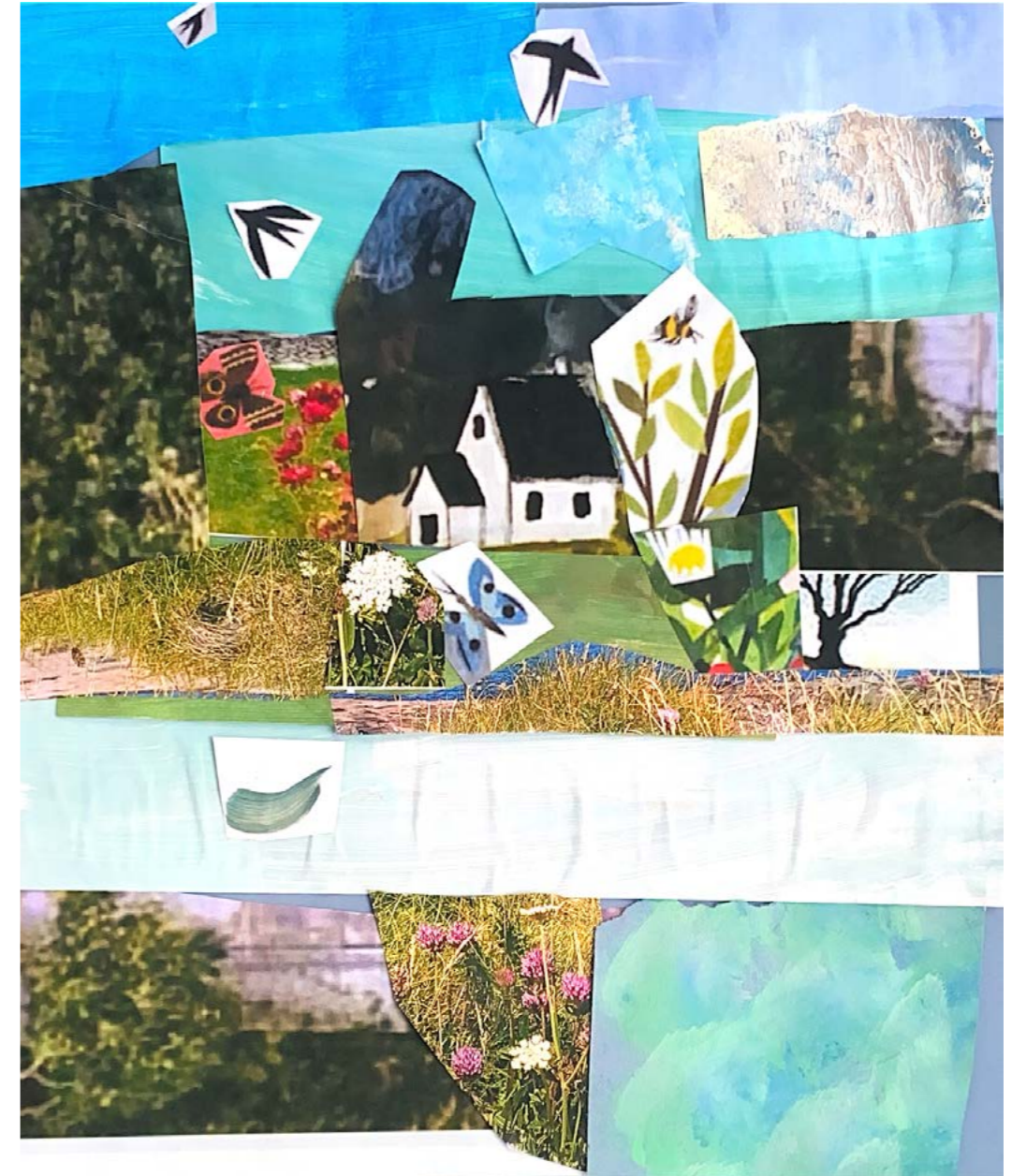
Life was always uncertain. You never know when escalation might come. But people still went to school, cooked meals, married, celebrated, lived. We had to adapt.

”

What he remembers most is not politics, but the wish that everyone carried deep inside: to live in peace. “All people want for others the same things they want for themselves. To be safe. To raise their families. To work and live in dignity.”

But politics was never far away. Since 1947, Kashmir has been disputed - caught between India and Pakistan, promised a referendum that never came. “We are not Pakistani, not Indian. We are Kashmiri,” Muhammad says. “We were independent before, and that is what we still dream of.”

He arrived in Ireland in 2011, carrying both the beauty of his homeland’s snowy hills and rivers - and the shadow of a conflict that has lasted all his life.





Chapter 5. Dreams

What would we be without dreams? They slip in even when life is hard, giving us something to hold onto. For Roma people, dreams are often simple - a safe home, children who grow up healthy, peace without fear. But in those simple things lies something powerful: the hope of a life with dignity.

Think for a moment about your own dreams. You might find they're not so different.

“

I want to travel and meet Roma communities all over the world!

Olya

I dream about learning to drive and having a car!

Anna

I want to learn English and I want a better future for my daughter!

Erika

All I dream about is happiness to my daughter!

Maria

I want to realise my dream of a better job! I also want to give a good education to my daughter, Fazila

Muhammad

”

“I want to become a doctor!”

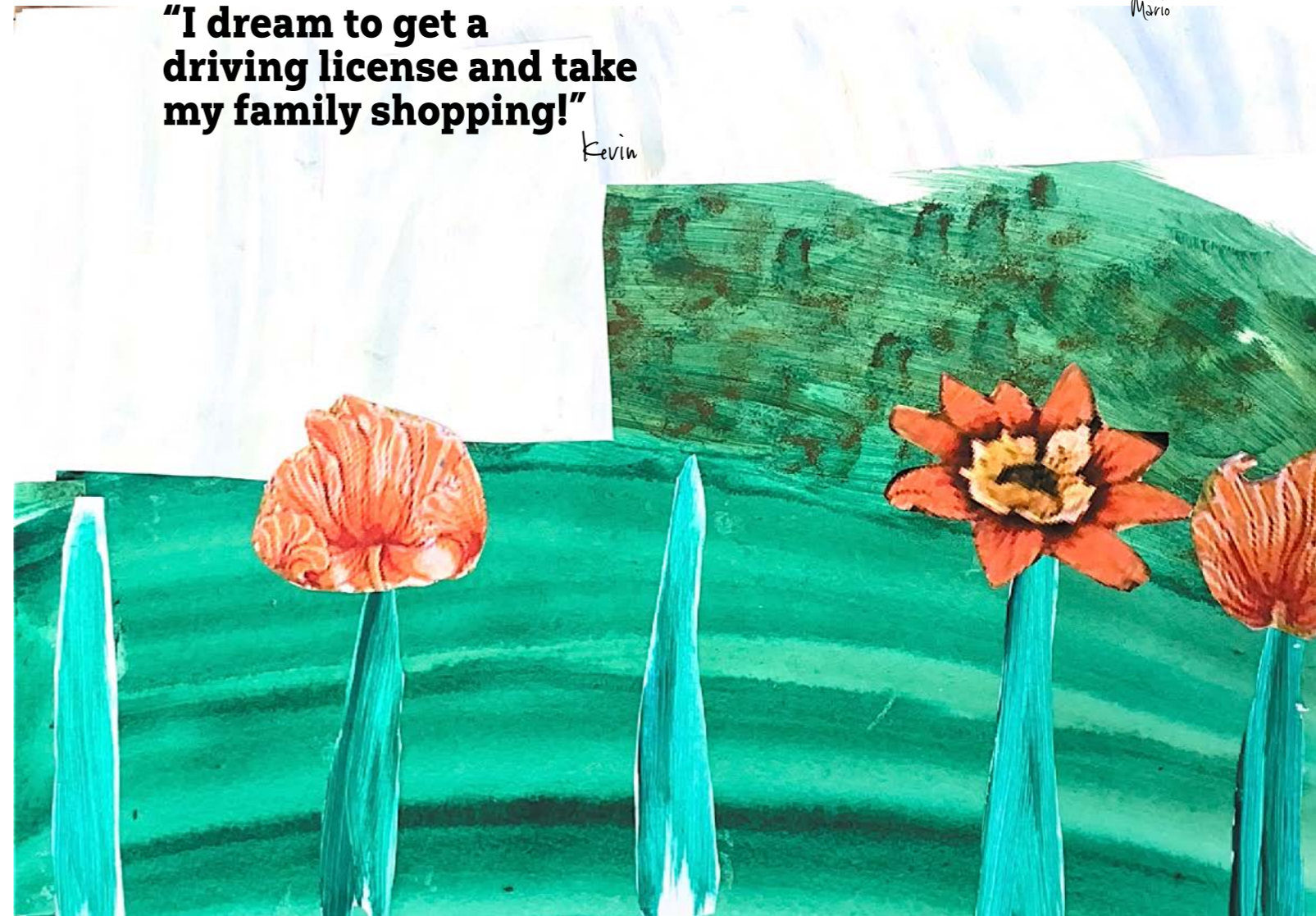
Fazila

“I dream that one day I play the violin again as I used to before the crash 7 years ago!”

Mario

“I dream to get a driving license and take my family shopping!”

Kevin





Chapter 5. Love and Light of our Lives

For Roma, family is not just important, it is life itself. It is the light that helps them through hardship, the bond that keeps them strong.

As you read, think of what you would write inside your own heart. Who would you place there?

Fazila
Amanda
Pakistani romantic
movies
Spaghetti



Erika spoke about the people she loves. Her daughter Fazila is one of them. She means the world to her. She also mentioned Amanda, a social worker and carer.

She helps me clean the house and plays with the children. She even does my hair.

Erika's favourite movies are love stories - especially Pakistani ones. "I usually cry when I watch them."



Family
Friends
Watching movies
in Urdu
Lamb curry

Muhammad's favourite people are his family, his wife Erika and his daughter Fazila. He has also two best friends - one from Pakistan and one from Poland. He enjoys watching TV and movies, especially Urdu films in his own language on an online channel. He also likes documentaries and biographies. His favourite movie is Labour - about people who face problems in the workplace and start a strike for their rights.



I like different kinds of movies. Every movie has a different lesson.



My mommy and daddy
 My Friend Amanda
 My Favourite Film
 ("Elephant is my Friend")
 Cats
 Soup with rice and
 potatoes

fazila

Mario

Jesus Christ
 My siblings: Laura, Katelyn, Anna-Maria,
 Luciano, Sebastian, Samuel, Vanessa
 My childhood Friend Anthony
 my girlFriend Kayla
 Biryani Al-Salam
 (rice with noodles with beef,
 chicken all together
 mixed)



Helena loves her family. Music fills their home. Her son plays guitar, taught by his father, who also plays piano. She sings Roma songs for her husband, and their daughter dances, spinning and stepping to the rhythm. Together, they are a truly creative family, each adding their own note to the music of their home.

My son Simon
 My daughter Sandra
 My mother Eva
 Father Mario
 Husband
 My best Friend
 Roma music
 Singing For my husband
 Goulash



Celebrating Love

Miroslav told us about the recent wedding of his son, which took place in his hometown in Slovakia and followed traditional Roma customs.

Before a Roma wedding, the parents of the bride and groom meet to discuss the match. If both sides are happy, a date is agreed. Celebrations begin well before the wedding itself. Both families host large parties where guests bring gifts for the future bride and groom. Miroslav's family held such a party in Slovakia, with around 260 people attending.

On the wedding day, his family went to the bride's house to formally ask permission from her parents and grandparents. As is customary, both families played jokes on each other. Miroslav's relatives teased about paying money for the bride, while the bride's family sent out a man with a covered head pretending to be her. Eventually, the real bride, Magda, appeared in her beautiful wedding dress and left for the hotel reception in a white limousine, followed by both families and wedding guests walking behind through the streets.



When they reached the hotel, both families broke plates in the lobby - a Roma custom to bring good luck to the new couple. Miroslav's son, Miro, had to clean up the broken pieces before anyone could enter. Only then could the wedding ceremony and reception begin. Later that evening, Miro and Magda changed into traditional Slovak costumes.

The celebrations lasted for a week - not unusual for Roma weddings, which can continue for up to two weeks. There was dancing to traditional music, food cooked from recipes handed down through generations, and the joy of two families becoming one. It was an unforgettable celebration of love, family, and Roma tradition.





That's How We Speak

A few words and phrases to remember



Hello!

Serus / serus/

How are you?

Sar Sal? /sar sal?/

Thank you!

Pajikerav! / padzikerav/

Please!

Prosim /prosim/

Great!

Miste! /miste/

Family

Fajta / fajta/

Home

domov /domov/

Love

láska /la:ska/

Goodbye!

Ahoj /ahoj/

Good luck!

Ach Bachtalo /akh bakhtalo/



Stories of Us: A Community Collaboration

Longford Community Resources clg (LCRL), in collaboration with the Employment Development and Information Centre (EDI Centre) Longford, is proud to publish Stories of Us.

We are grateful to the Roma community in Longford who took part so enthusiastically, sharing their stories and creating the beautiful artwork, and to a local publishing house Little Beetle Press that brings this book to life.

Our thanks also go to the EDI Centre for their partnership, and to the Longford Roma and New Communities CDP (LRNC) project staff, and to SICAP Ukrainian Support workers who developed the idea for this book and supported the facilitation of the storytelling and art workshops. The LRNC project works towards supporting the establishment of an autonomous Roma organisation in Longford, ensuring that the Roma community can participate meaningfully in the development of the county and have their voices heard in decisions that affect them.

The idea for Stories of Us came directly from the Roma community in Longford. Storytelling and art hold a central place in Roma culture, and LRNC staff were privileged to work alongside the community on this project. The process of creating this book was collaborative and participative, with Roma people sharing their lived experiences, traditions, and culture. We would especially like to thank Halyna Budilova and Alla Shmygovska for their skilled and creative facilitation of the workshops. With support from LRNC staff, this project provided a platform to celebrate Roma identity, highlight personal journeys from Europe to Ireland, promote literacy, and amplify the voices of a community often marginalised. Through shared storytelling, this book strengthens understanding and builds a collective narrative rooted in resilience, culture, and belonging.



Story of Us. Roma

This book is a creative project developed during community workshops facilitated by **Halyna Budilova** and **Alla Shmygovska**.

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The collages presented here were made by participants using various materials, including fragments from magazines and other printed sources. They are shown as authentic outcomes of the artistic process and are not intended for commercial reproduction of the original images. All rights to individual images used in the collages remain with their respective copyright holders.

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