



# Nan: The Life of an Irish Travelling Woman

*Sharon Bohn Gmelch*

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Nan Donohoe was an Irish Travelling woman, one of Ireland's indigenous gypsies or "tinkers." Traditionally, they traveled the countryside making and repairing tinware, sweeping chimneys, selling small household wares, and doing odd-job work. Over time, they came to live on the roadside in trailers and in government-built camps. Told largely in her own voice, Nan's saga begins in 1919 with her birth in a tent in the Irish Midlands; it follows her life in Ireland and England, in countryside and city slums, through adversity and adventure. Gmelch brings to her task not only the resources of anthropology, but the skill of a sensitive writer and a warmth that allows her to see Nan as a person, not a subject. What emerges is a human story, filled with cruelty and compassion, sorrow and humor, bad luck and good.

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