

My first recollection of Gran dates from the very early 1940s when she was in her seventies. She always wore a man's peaked cap or sometimes a trilby, always on the side of her head, never on the top. She had smoked a pipe from the age of three. Apparently, every time her grandad packed his pipe, he would pack a small one he had fashioned for his granddaughter, light it, pop it into her mouth and she would sit there puffing away until all the tobacco had gone.

All she had was one tooth, her sharp-pointed eye tooth, which she called her 'pickle-onion tooth' because at the start of an evening she would wedge a pickle onion onto it and she could suck on that all night. Her dresses were long and voluminous and came right down to the ground. You couldn't see her feet but you could hear her coming because she always wore hob-nailed boots. She wore these for one reason and that was for kicking people when she was drunk, which was quite often. She loved stopping near a market town where they had an extended licence. If she got into the pubs early and had a really long session she could drink about twelve pints of stout.

There was many a time when my Mom, with her brood of seven children, was going through a village or town when suddenly Mom would say, 'Oh my God, there's your Gran coming out the pub. Quick!' She would drag us away before we were seen. Gran would be staggering about, drunk as a 'bobby owler', staggering all over the place, with her hat on the side of her head, her arms up in the air and fists clenched, shouting and bawling, 'Come on, who wants a fight? Man or 'ooman, don't be cowards, who's gonna take me on?' Should anyone approach her, she would have a go at them. We were

in one village and saw the policeman coming down the lane; he saw Gran, turned round and went back the other way. The last time he had tried to arrest her it had been raining, he slipped over and Gran sat on him.

Romanies love colours, and Gran got a black straw hat from somewhere covered with multi-coloured flowers. She loved that hat. The day after she got it she put it on and went up the village to swank and show off her new hat. Picking up her shopping bag and putting on her hat, she went into the local store, filled her bag with groceries and left the shop to go back to the camp. Unfortunately, by this time it was raining so she stood under the shop's awning to wait for it to stop. It didn't, it came down faster and faster. She was being watched by five men – the two shopkeepers and three villagers who were standing across the other side of the square under another awning. After about twenty minutes Gran decided she must get back to cook some of the food, but she didn't want to get her lovely hat wet, so she caught hold of the hem of her dress and lifted it up behind her, eventually pulling her frock up over her hat. Then she bent down to get her groceries and one of the men across the square shouted, 'Oi Louie, we can see your backside.' To which Gran replied, 'I don't give a bugger. I've had this backside seventy-six years, I only had me hat yesterday!'