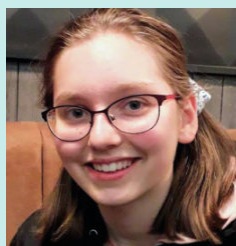


Outside looking in



ALLIE

Imagine you are 16 and going into sixth form at a different school. You must leave your current circle of friends behind, and make friends with people who have already known each other for five years. You must merge your way of speaking – your accent, your topics of conversation, your slang words – with this different way of speaking. You must become a part of a new community. You're an outsider.

Such was the experience of some fifty newcomers at HBS last September. It was at this time when I first started thinking about the other side of this term 'community'. People often associate communities with

happiness: we picture the coming-together of old and young, rich and poor. Different races holding hands. But what so many fail to realise is that there are some people for whom the concept of 'community' is scary. Though very common, the experience of coming *into* a new community can be a terrifyingly difficult experience.

Consider moving to a new country. Last week, my parents and I watched the Korean-American film *Minari*. The film follows a family of Koreans in their pursuit of the American dream and a better life of selling crops. But the moment which stood out most to me was when the family attended the local church in Kentucky. As they walked down the aisle, every eye followed their every move. Probably, most of these eyes were only curious. But the film shed light on the perspective of the outsiders; we as an audience were placed in the Koreans' shoes, and construed these eyes to be hostile, menacing even. Personally, I was made to appreciate just how disconcerting it is to move into a new community. Not to mention the fact that the Korean family spoke hardly any English, nor did they look anything like the other church members.



Allie's mum

It's important that we don't forget the experiences of the millions of people who migrate to new communities every year. If you are one of the 'in' people, it's not enough to be passively tolerant; you must be an active welcomer. As *Minari* taught me, even if you are staring at newcomers out of curiosity, it can easily be misinterpreted as unfriendliness.

Equally, if you are one of the 'outsiders' in a community, ask yourself what you can do to fit in. When my mother (originally from New Jersey in America) first moved to London in 2005, she found it difficult to integrate into British society. Even though she didn't suffer from a language barrier, she found the more reserved sensibilities of the British to be an obstacle to her making friends. She recently recalled a piece of advice she received from her friend: "join every club you can". Sixteen years down the line, and my mother's social life is thriving! From

the Hampstead Women's Group to her niche writing club, she has become a part of more sections of the London community than she ever could have expected.

Ultimately, we must remember that the beauty of communities lies in their diversity: the mixing of different origins and cultures into one big bubbling melting pot of interconnection. How boring would it be if we all looked and talked exactly the same way? Very! Because it's precisely our differences which make our communities special. Indeed, as Virginia Woolf delightfully described in *'Mrs Dalloway'*, communities connect us by tying between us all an 'invisible bond'.

So, if we all do our part to make the transition from the 'outside' to the 'inside' just that little bit easier, our communities will all become so much the richer for it.

SUBURB

YOUTH

Church scene from the film *Minari*



Tolerance and open mindedness



ROSA

One grey Tuesday afternoon, I called a local friend of mine to go for a quick walk after our online lessons. We wandered around the nearby streets for a while, before we saw something slightly odd: the gate to the field we always walk around in was locked. As we walked towards it to investigate, we noticed a fleet of caravans parked behind a building.

Our interests piqued, my friend and I tentatively wandered around the settlement and reached another gate to the field. We went and sat down, half-chatting and half-observing the scene, trying to make sense of it. I'd heard that a group of Irish Travellers had been staying nearby, and when three teenage boys came to ask us "ave you girls gaht a lighter?" with a soft Irish lilt, our assumption was confirmed.

Neither of us knew any more about the Irish Traveller community than the name, so when the oldest, Jonny, as he later introduced himself, invited himself to sit with us (despite our lack of lighter), we were fascinated. Jonny told us that his family were Travellers, and explained his relationships with the other families within their roughly 40 strong group. In rather vague terms, he told us of their travels around the UK: he loved Scotland, and hated Birmingham and High Barnet. We asked about education, to which he replied "I stopped school when I was about 11," and that he had been to "twenty". He then, rather confusingly, told us that he "never learnt to read", though "can read perfectly". After further probing, he clarified that he has since been homeschooled.

As we spoke, a rotating cast of young boys walked over to us. I asked a few of them about school, and one boy, around 7 or 8, seemed visibly upset at the question. "The people were mean," he said, "even the teachers," to which Jonny replied "nobody understands the lifestyle, and people are so judgmental about anyone different." He told a story about a parents' evening when he was 9 in which a teacher made a joke about taking off her jewellery before the meeting because she "knew that gypsies steal." This harmful stereotype about Travellers

had clearly plagued Jonny and his younger brother their whole lives and made mainstream education challenging.

Halfway through this conversation, it occurred to my friend and I that though we'd encountered perhaps as many as a dozen of the Travellers, teenagers, children, and adults, we had not seen any girls. We asked about the role of women, and learnt that they rarely go out and are expected to maintain the household. Jonny shockingly said "it's different for guys" "because boys are better than girls," and further questioning revealed that this attitude was inherited from the Bible. Though this troubled my friend and I, as intersectional feminists, Jonny insisted that everyone still within the community was genuinely happy to be part of the community.

Ultimately, the lesson I learnt from meeting Jonny and his family of Irish Travellers was that there is not just one formula for a happy life and community. Though atypical, and alien to my lifestyle, they seem to love the way they live. Jonny was generous, hospitable, and funny, and though his beliefs starkly differ from mine, I enjoyed speaking to him. It was an interesting experience precisely because of these differences, and it seems to me that harmful preconceptions about the Traveller community are an obstacle and a shame, as we could all learn something by being more open-minded and tolerant to all different societies and cultures.

