

A Tramp's Story

Written and shared by Andy Owen



The American tramp is also called a Hobo, or in certain states - an Okie.

For as long as I can remember, I have always found their tales to be fascinating. Songs and films too.

Perhaps I am a part-Hobo at heart? I've been called a bum, many times...

I found this anonymous ballad in a book called *'Read Them Aloud'*, which was compiled by one of my best chums - Roger Millington, who sadly passed on, a few years ago.

I was intrigued by it - and, during my research, I found that an independent movie company in the States, had turned it into a short film.

The anonymous tramp in the ballad, was given an identity - Joe Brown.

He was described as a jovial, good-natured blacksmith in a little town in the Lehigh Valley.

Lehigh Valley is a scenic region of eastern Pennsylvania.

The traditional boundaries of the region, are the Pocono Mountains to the north, the Delaware River and New Jersey to the east, the boundaries of Berks and Montgomery counties to the southwest, and the boundary with Bucks County to the south.

Joe was happily married with a sixteen-year old daughter he adored. The family lived happily together and with careful saving and hard work he managed to buy a modest little home.

Nellie, his daughter was extremely pretty and was predictably courted by every farmer's son for miles around. But she wasn't taken by any of them - and she said once, that no man in all New York State is good enough for her.

Joe was busily at work at his forge one day, when a young stranger, leading a horse, appears. The horse has lost a shoe and during its replacement, Nellie appears on the scene.

The young stranger is immediately smitten with the girl's winsome face and when she leaves, he follows her. They meet later and he confesses his love for her.

In the handsome young stranger, Nellie has at last found her hero and after a short courtship, of which her parents are unaware, he persuades her to elope with him.

The next morning Joe and his wife discover the loss of their daughter. Her mother becomes violently ill and is immediately bedridden.

Nellie goes to the city with the young man and after a month, in which she implores him to marry her, he leaves her for another woman.

Nellie returns home, heartbroken and very ill - and, after confessing the unhappy ending of her romance, drops dead at her father's feet.

Her mother, frantic with shame and grief, survives her daughter by just a week or two - and then she died, too.

Joe was understandably devastated and grief-stricken. His life was wrecked, his happiness destroyed.

The only solace he could find was the Gin bottle.

He was consumed by hate. He knew he had to find the scoundrel who betrayed his daughter. He became a tramp, and after several years' searching, he finally found the man in a bar.

Joe delivered the appropriate punishment and for the first time in years, he was happy.

He had got his revenge and fulfilled the oath he had made to himself.

Here is 'The Tramps Story' that Roger found. The original author has never been identified. Take Roger's advice in the book - and read it aloud.

This wonderful ballad has even more power when you do that...

A Tramp

Lemme sit down a minute, a stone's got in my shoe
Don't you commence your cussin', I ain't done nothin' to you
Yes, I'm a tramp. What of it? Folks say we ain't no good
But tramps has to live, I reckon, though folks don't think we should.

Once I was strong and handsome, had plenty of cash and clothes
That was afore I tipped - and gin got into my nose
Down in Lehigh Valley, me and my people grew
I was a blacksmith, Cap'n - yes, and a good one too

Me and my wife and Nellie — Nellie was just sixteen
She was the prettiest the valley had ever seen
Beaux? Why she had a dozen, had 'em from near and fur
But they were mostly farmers, none of 'em suited her

There was a city stranger, young, handsome and tall
Damn him, I wish I had him strangled right agin that wall
He was the man for Nellie - she didn't know no ill
Mother tried to stop it, but you know a young gal's will

Well, it's the same old story - common enough you'll say
He was a soft-tongued devil - and got her to run away
More than a month after we heard from the poor young thing
He'd gone away and left her without a wedding ring

Back to her home we brought her, back to her mother's side
Filed with a raging fever - she fell at my feet and died
Frantic with shame and trouble, her mother began to sink
Dead in less than a fortnight - that's when I took to drink

So, gimme one glass, Colonel, and then I'll be on my way
I'll tramp till I find that scoundrel, if it takes till Judgement Day