

Текст аудиозаписей

I. P: Do you consider yourself to be tall, medium or short? At one metre 84 I've always thought of myself as being a little on the tall side, particularly when I stand next to the people I work with here in the Round Britain studio. Rather curiously, most of them are below the national average height of one metre 78 for men and one 62 for women. But when I popped in yesterday to the annual conference of the TPC - that's the Tall Person's Club of Great Britain and Ireland - I felt decidedly small. I asked one of the organizers, Jenny Paditt, to tell me about the conference.

J: Well, this is the main event in the club's very busy social calendar. Throughout the year we put on a whole number of activities for members in their local area, like barbecue, theatre excursions, walks and so on. And this conference is the highlight of that year. It's a three-day event that gives tall people from all over the country the chance to meet in the comfort of a hotel, where they can chat, eat, dance and go sightseeing with others who are also above average height .

P: But there's also a serious side to it as well, I gather.

J: That's right, it's not all partying! We discuss a lot of important issues, too. One of the aims of the TPC is to promote the interests of tall people, to change current attitudes. We live in a heightist world, where tall people are discriminated against. Beds in hotels are usually too short for us, and we often have to sleep with our feet hanging off the end. Travelling by bus, train or plane is a major problem too - there's very little leg room and it can feel very cramped. The main difficulty, though, is finding shops that sell long enough trousers or big enough shoes. That can be a real headache.

P: I imagine too that the attitudes of other people can be a problem.

J: Yes, people do tend to stare at us when we walk into the room, treat us like circus freaks. And some actually laugh out loud, as if something funny has just happened. I think if I weren't so used to it now, I might take offence - I know many fellow TPC members do. But to be honest, I find it a little bit annoying. You get tired of it all, particularly when the fifteenth person in a day says something like 'What's the weather like up there?' And they think it's so funny.

P: Yes, not very original, is it? Does the club offer help to tall people who come across attitudes like these?

J: Yes, we regularly give advice to victims of insults and bullying at school or in the workplace. But perhaps the greatest benefit of the club is the opportunity to see that as a tall person you are not alone. When people come to their first meeting and walk into a room full of tall people, they start standing up straighter. They lose their shyness and very soon begin to feel less awkward, more comfortable about their height. It's a remarkable transformation.

P: You've mentioned some of the negative aspects of being taller than average. But surely there must be some advantages, too?

J: Oh yes, there are plenty of them. Erm, for example, you can always see over everyone's head if you're watching something in a crowd or an audience, and if you're in a supermarket you can get things off the top shelf that most other people have a job to reach. And then also you automatically become first choice for sports like basketball, volleyball or rowing. I've never been very good at volleyball, but I always got picked for the university team when I was a student.

P: Now, one thing of course we've failed to mention, Jenny, is your height. How tall are you?

J: One metre 88. And actually, I'm one of the smaller members at this conference. The tallest woman here is exactly two metres and the tallest man two metres 30, that's an incredible 7 foot six inches.

P: Goodness me!

J: Yes, impressive, isn't it? Incidentally, though, you don't need to be above a certain height to qualify as a member of the Tall Person's Club. Unlike some clubs in the USA, which can be difficult to join because of their restrictions, we are very inclusive over here. We believe that people know for themselves whether they are tall or not and it's up to them to decide if they should join.

P: Jenny, it's been fascinating talking to you ...

II. Argentina is a country known internationally for the tango, gaucho cowboys

and premium quality beef. To many people, therefore, it comes as some surprise to discover that in certain parts of Patagonia, in the south of the country, one of the 'must' for any tourist is a visit to a Welsh tea house, a place where you can sip tea and enjoy delicious cakes, baked according to traditional Welsh recipes. Perhaps even more surprising, though, is the fact that some of the locals can actually be heard speaking in Welsh. Exactly how many native Welsh speakers there are in the region is not known, but most estimates put the figure at several hundred, a relatively high number, given that there are just under 600,000 speakers of the language in Wales itself.

But how did these Welsh speakers come to be there? The first wave of settlers arrived from Wales in 1865. Unhappy with conditions at home, they were looking for an isolated area to set up a colony, a place where their language and identity would be preserved intact and not assimilated into the dominant culture, as had already happened in the United States. The 153 colonists who landed on the east coast of Argentina included carpenters, tailors and miners, but no real doctors and just one or two farmers. This was rather worrying, since the Chubut valley where they settled was virtually a desert, and what they needed most of all were agricultural skills.

Against all the odds, though, they survived, overcoming droughts, floods and a succession of crop failures. They were also quick to establish friendly relations with the local Indians, who helped the Welsh through the hard times and taught them some of their ways, how to ride and how to hunt. Twenty years after their arrival, some of the settlers moved up into a green fertile region of the Andes mountains, an area which they named Cwm Hyfryd, meaning 'beautiful valley'. Indeed, quite a number of places in Patagonia still bear Welsh names: Bryn Gwyn, which means 'white hill', Trevelin, meaning 'mill town' and Trelew or 'Lewis town', named after Lewi Jones, one of the founders.

The Welsh have left their mark in other ways, too. Their windmills and chapels can be found throughout the region and there are a number of cultural activities, such as poetry readings, male voice choirs and the annual Welsh song and dance festival,

a smaller version of the International Eisteddfod held in Wales each year. All of this help to keep the language and traditions alive in a small corner of the world, 8,000 miles from the homeland. And so too does the fact that every year, as part of a programme administered by the National Assembly for Wales, groups of teachers come to Patagonia to teach the language to the growing number of people who are interested in learning it.

And then, of course, there are the Welsh teas. For my afternoon treat, I visit Nain Ceri, reputed to be one of the best tea houses in Gaiman, where the streets and houses are adorned with Welsh flags, a reminder to visitors that they are in the self-proclaimed Patagonian-Welsh capital of Chubut. Inside, Nain Ceri is decorated with prints and paintings of Wales and the music playing is that of a traditional all-male choir. I sit next to the fireplace and my mouth begins to water as I look at the various cakes on offer. I am about to order the cream-topped apple pie to accompany my tea, when I catch sight of an irresistible-looking chocolate cake and choose that instead. I am not disappointed - it is absolutely delicious. Afterwards, I chat at length to the owner, Celi Morgan - in Spanish, as he speaks no English and I speak no Welsh. She tells me a little more about the history of...