



EPISODE #27

A Flatlander in the Welsh Mountains:

One author's story

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I grip the steering wheel, driving on the wrong side of the car, on the wrong side of the highway. The hairpin turns are more than a little hair-raising. There's barely enough room for two cars to pass. My shoulders involuntarily shrug to keep from scraping the side of the car against the craggy rock face of the mountain. And contrary to the popular saying, knuckles don't really go white: they stiffen around the steering wheel on fingers that seize like claws.

*"But my grandfather was "from Wales" and I wanted to walk in his footsteps.
So I decided to go and see it for myself."*

That was how it felt the first time I drove in the mountains of North Wales. The signs are in Welsh first, and when you see the word "ARAF" you really need to slow down: a 180-degree turn could lie around the next bend. Not what I'm used to on the TransCanada in Saskatchewan, where the highway is straight and flat and you can pull over onto a shoulder that's easily the size of the highway in Wales.

If the mountains unnerved me, it was likely because I was born a flatlander. But my grandfather was "from Wales" and I wanted to walk in his footsteps. He died before I was born, and my father and his brothers also died young. So I decided to go and see it for myself.

But I was not prepared for the pull of some 2000 years of history in the rocks and roads and architecture. I was impressed, and by more than the scenery. Even the highway: no potholes to swallow your tires, and very little in the way of garbage and litter on the roadsides. And who wouldn't stop the car to admire the view at a sign marked "Fairy Glen"?

Getting used to the narrow highways was only the first part of the journey for me. It stretched me in ways I could never have imagined. The result? Travel articles, a young adult medieval fantasy series, and a new perspective on my Welsh heritage.

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That first time, I spent a week on a sheep farm near Dolwyddelan. Visiting that castle gave me a glimpse of the stark history of the House of Aberffraw. There was no gate, no ticket salesperson, no little shop selling souvenirs, no tour guides, and lots of signs with pictures that showed people falling off rocks: enter at your own risk. So I did.

Unlike the big imposing English castles, Dolwyddelan was smaller and kind of cozy inside. When I started reading the placards on the self-guided tour, I discovered the heart-rending story of the last Welsh prince.



As I climbed the stairs and looked out over the landscape from the wall-walk, I couldn't help but imagine what it must have been like in 1282-83. Imagine that peaceful mountainside surrounded by thousands of ruthless armoured soldiers. What would it be like to lose a war, to lose your law, your language, your very way of life?

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<https://globalwelsh.com/story/68/a-flatlander-in-the-welsh-mountains-one-author-s-story>

And more importantly, how did the Welsh people come back from that, 800 years later, to restore their language and culture after it had been banned for so long?

So I started to read and research, and then I was writing about it. There was no way not to write about it, really. And of course, I had to go back. I took a Welsh class at Nant Gwrtheyrn, walked to the waterfall at Aber to imagine the events of November 1282, and explored the ruins of Castell-y-Bere and the picturesque town of Dolgellau.

Virtually everything I saw became the basis for the major settings and events in my novels *Last of the Gifted: Spirit Sight* (Book 1) and *Water Sight* (Book 2). This medieval fantasy series tells the story of two siblings who pledge their magical gifts to protect their people from the invading army of Edward I, with the help of the last Welsh prince -- after his murder.

And I plan to go back again, as soon as travel restrictions are lifted. The Welsh mountains hold so many stories for me -- and hopefully many more novels!

About Marie Powell...

My castle-hopping adventures across North Wales to explore family roots resulted in my award-winning historical fantasy series *Last of the Gifted*. The series includes two books to date, *Spirit Sight* and *Water Sight* (participation made possible through Creative Saskatchewan's Book Publishing Production Grant Program). I'm the author of more than 40 children's books with such publishers as Scholastic Education and Amicus, along with award-winning short stories and poetry appearing in literary magazines like *Room*, *subTerrain*, and *Sunlight Press*. Among other degrees, I hold a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia (UBC). I live on Treaty 4 land in Regina, Saskatchewan.

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