



## **Croeso: beginners' Welsh**

*Welsh in a year*

Jen Llywelyn has described with honesty and humour her own story of how she learned Welsh in a year in an inspiring recent book, and for this podcast we asked her to tell us something of her experiences and to pass on a few tips.

Helo, shw'mae? Jen Llywelyn ydw i. Dw i'n byw yng Ngheredigion, a dw i wedi dysgu Cymraeg.

I hope you are enjoying this course with Open University. I am really pleased they have started it – I did my first degree with OU between 1996 and 2000, and I recommend OU courses to everyone. I did History, not languages, however!

I am officially only a quarter Welsh. My Grampy was from Cardiff but dropped his Welsh – it was unfashionable when he was a young man – and my Dad therefore didn't learn any, although he remembers his aunt, my Grampy's sister, speaking Welsh. Strangely, though, since I was 4 years old, I have known Wales was my land, and Welsh was the language I wanted to be speaking.

In 1997, I moved to Wales with my husband but didn't start learning Welsh until 2002. I thought I'd just wander through it slowly, but then a friend challenged me to learn enough Welsh in one year to be able to have a meal with him without using a single word of English! I'll never do that, I thought. I was working and trying to write a PhD thesis. It's too much, I said to myself, it would never work. But then, I thought, why not have a go? I want to be a Welsh-speaker, after all, not a Welsh learner. So I set off to attend all the courses I could – but also to push myself out of my comfort zone, reading things, watching S4C, hearing Welsh as much as I could and – daringly! – using it!

Somehow, after tears and discouragement and the odd victory, I managed it. It was quite a year. Several times I almost gave up. What kept me going, apart from the challenge, were the friends who talked with me about Welsh, about Wales, about the situation of the Welsh language, and about the wonderful Welsh-language culture that was waiting for me. But even with their help, I didn't really believe I would ever be able to read Welsh novels, or speak nothing but Welsh for a whole day with work colleagues, or to switch easily from English to Welsh and back.

I hated mutations. They made me feel so stupid. I hated it when I couldn't talk on the phone with friends because without their facial expressions, their body language, I had only the words. It was so hard. I was confused by the possessives – eich car chi, and so on – and the singular nouns after numerals – wyth ci, instead of wyth cŵn! But gradually it came, and now I can communicate with just about everyone. That, to me, is the most important thing – not perfect Welsh, but communication – cyfathrebu.

It's wonderful learning a second language (many of you have probably learned a third and perhaps a fourth and maybe more). It can make you feel stupid, but it's so worth carrying on. Try barging through the mutations and getting on to the next thing – the mutations will catch up with you in the end! It really is worth it. It has changed my life! I can read novels in Welsh. I use Welsh in my work as an editor with a Welsh publisher. I sing Welsh folk songs. I just love to be able to use the language wherever I go in this wonderful land I live in. Learning Welsh has changed me too: I have found aspects of my personality I didn't know existed. I'm much more extrovert, confident and happy now I speak the language of the land of my fathers!

I hope you've been encouraged by Jen's experience. You might consider going to the National Eisteddfod at the beginning of August where you would be able to practise using your Welsh at the OU stand and elsewhere.