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The Welsh Accent

by Sue Hitchcock

People rarely look the way you expect them to, even when you've seen pictures, but voices are even more misleading. My father was Welsh, so a Welsh accent always evokes for me my childish image of the ideal man. Of course my father was quite ordinary, quietly spoken and no singer. He did love opera and poetry and I was quite young, when I first heard “Under Milk Wood” read, of course, by Richard Burton. When I first saw a picture of Dylan Thomas, round-faced, bug-eyed, I was horrified and where was his Welsh accent?

Similarly when Bryn Terfel came to sing “Belshazzar's Feast” with our choir, I could not believe that such a voice belonged to that stringy-haired, scruffy git.

So you see, I have a problem.

In the 1980s I worked for British Telecom answering peoples' queries,initially by telephone. One day, on the umpteenth call, a beautiful Welsh accent of a man, surely equally beautiful, asked, “My bill seems rather high. I don't think it is right.”

My instinct was to protract the encounter, rather than deal with the enquiry as efficiently as possible. There was a routine – to compare usage with previous bills, to ask about exceptional calls, abroad or to carphones and about other users, visitors or even workers in the house. There was nothing remarkable about the bill he was questioning. The usage had only increased a small amount, but I agreed to check the meter readings. In those days individual calls were not recorded. Pre-digital meters only clicked on as the electric charge went through.

After checking I phoned my Welshman a few days later and the conversation seemed rather a repeat of our earlier one. Again he would not accept and I agreed to a meter test. A week or so later I phoned him to tell him that the meter was working correctly. He was jovial, friendly, but somewhat unaware of the test. I was trying to define what was happening. Later that day he phoned again, asking about the test. My suspicions coalesced.

“Did your brother answer the phone, this morning?”

“Oh, you've got me. Yes, we're twins.”

“So how do you know what calls have been made?”

“O.K. I'll pay it tomorrow,” he laughed.