

Pod of Wales- Rhondda Valley and Pontypridd

Cast:

Kiri Pritchard-McLean

Esyllt Sears

Guests:

Roy

Adrian

[Pod of Wales Intro Music]

Kiri: Croeso i Pod of Wales, welcome to Pod of Wales. I am Kiri Pritchard-McLean.

Esyllt: And I'm Esyllt Sears.

Kiri: And this episode we're in the Rhondda. Do you call it the Rhondda?

Esyllt: Um I don't know if I'd call it, as in it is technically the Rhondda but I think I'd just say Rhondda.

Kiri: Rhondda. I'm sounding a little unsure because this is a part of the world I don't really know about.

Esyllt: OK.

Kiri: I don't know which parts are part of the valley or the district.

Esyllt: Yeah and you don't want to get it wrong. But I've been so excited about this because I have a lot of roots in the Rhondda Valley and I am very passionate about it. This is going to be a weird dynamic I think because you don't know anything about this area.

Kiri: No.

Esyllt: And I am going to bore you with my family history going back probably about 200 years [laughs].

Kiri: Oh I love that, no I'm very into that. It is phenomenally beautiful here.

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- Esyllt: This is the stereotypical valleys, it's very rural but quite harsh in some parts but beautifully harsh, gorgeous.
- Kiri: We've got some lovely food journeys coming up.
- Esyllt: There are so many nice food places around here that people just don't realise what a culinary treat is in store for them here.
- Kiri: We're going to Treorchy and apparently the High Street is incredible.
- Esyllt: Booming.
- Kiri: Yeah.
- Esyllt: Absolutely booming.
- Kiri: Loads of independent shops which speaks to my soul. And finally I've never done it before and yet I absolutely reek of it, it's your friend and mine, glamping [laughs].
- Esyllt: [Laughs]
- Kiri: I can't wait!
- Esyllt: I've never glamped either but I have brought some cocktails in cans as I think that's the vibe isn't it? That's the glamping vibe.
- Kiri: I think so yeah.
- Esyllt: OK great.
- Kiri: Yeah absolutely.
- Esyllt: I've brought no thermals or anything like that but [laughs]
- Kiri: I've brought some bougie pyjamas that keep no heat in.
- Esyllt: [Laughs] I think we're going to have to just huddle up.

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Kiri: Yes I think so. The last bit of this podcast is just going to be us spooning from a yurt.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

[Interim Music]

Kiri: Just pulled up at a lovely farm in Penycoedcae?

Esyllt: Correct.

Kiri: Yes. And it's these fantastic stone outbuildings all around a stone farmhouse, it's stables everywhere. And beautiful farmland and I can see at the end of this yard, I can see a load of black and white ponies.

Esyllt: I'm so excited about this. We both love horses right?

Kiri: Yes. And this is a pit pony rescue centre.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: Which is incredible because I honestly thought they would all be, sorry to be a downer, dead.

Esyllt: Yeah [laughs].

Kiri: I thought they would all be dead. So the fact that there is a centre that exists like this is amazing.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: And it's run by a guy called Roy and his family so we're coming here to meet Roy. He's going to hopefully let us touch the ponies, that's the main reason we do the whole podcast.

Esyllt: I mean even if he doesn't let us I'm going to touch a pony.

Kiri: [Laughs] Do you remember when they first said 'Would you like to do this podcast?' and we were like 'Yes' and then they were like 'What are you interested in?' Do you

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remember what we said, 'Food, booze and ponies'.
[Laughs]

Esyllt: Yes [laughs].

Kiri: So I think the next few days in The Rhondda is hopefully going to tick all the boxes.

Esyllt: Yeah. And do you know what's even better than a pony? It's a pony with a backstory?

Kiri: Oh, yes. Well it's like X Factor we love a sob story don't we?

Esyllt: Yes [laughs].

Kiri: Make 'em an underdog. So yes I think we're going to go and meet, I think this is Roy coming up to us now in his, that is a jacket that...

Esyllt: I think I need one of those. It's like floor length practically isn't it?

Kiri: Floor length, mac, yeah. With those shoulder flaps. He's not messing around, no.

Esyllt: You know those kind of wax coats, is it right that you have to treat them with urine?

Kiri: No.

Esyllt: OK.

Kiri: [Laughs]

Roy: We're going in...

Kiri: Oh lovely.

Roy: Do you want to throw him over some food?

Kiri: I'd love to yeah.

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Esyllt: I was once bitten on the boob by a horse.

Kiri: Oh really?

Esyllt: Really hard.

Kiri: Are you going to brag for the whole podcast or?

Esyllt: I am going to brag for the whole podcast [laughs].

Kiri: Right. So have you got a Shetland there as well?

Roy: Yeah that's Poppy.

Esyllt: Aww.

Roy: That's the cleverest Shetland you'll ever meet.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: Would they have had ponies as small as that going down?

Roy: Yes.

Kiri: Really?

Esyllt: Do they get any respiratory issues from being down the mine?

Roy: Yes coal dust on their lungs like the men.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: Wow.

Roy: I truly believe it was something that used to happen and when you saw Black Beauty the film and you saw the coal mine bit of that, yeah that's what it was like.

[Interim Music]

Kiri: Well we're both very excited about this aren't we Esyllt?

Esyllt: Yes.

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Kiri: Fforest Uchaf Rehabilitation and Rescue Centre. Roy, you are the boss of that.

Roy: [Laughs]

Kiri: Have I said that right?

Roy: Well I'm a trustee yes.

Kiri: OK.

Roy: We don't have bosses really.

Kiri: [Laughs] I like that vibe, very relaxed, very hippy of you. So this is a gorgeous farm in a beautiful, beautiful valley and it's full of rescue pit ponies, is that right?

Roy: [Chuckles] Yes, most of those ponies have come and sadly gone. We've only got one pit pony left.

Esyllt: How many ponies have you seen come through the farm?

Roy: About 15, but I've never counted them that way.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Roy: I mean they've come in ones and twos.

Esyllt: So where would the mines get the ponies then? Where would they source them initially? Just from local farms or?

Roy: Yeah I mean it was a huge industry.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Roy: This farm bred pit ponies.

Esyllt: How long ago then would they have been breeding them here at this farm?

Roy: A hundred years ago.

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- Esyllt: You see I'm very excited about this because I'm starting to think, because two of my great grandfathers mined over in Treorchy and Cwmparc, I love to think that maybe some of the ponies that were bred here, maybe they worked with them.
- Kiri: That's lovely.
- Esyllt: They both came from farming backgrounds so I like to think maybe they're weren't [Bleep] to them.
- Kiri: [Laughs] I mean what was it like with some of them when you got them? I bet they hadn't seen grazing like this or?
- Roy: No, it's been a wonderful experience, it really has. Some of them were such characters. Most of the pit ponies that came here were used to explosions. I could start a chainsaw up next to them, they wouldn't bat an eyelid.
- Kiri: Wow.
- Esyllt: I guess it's like police horses isn't it? Because they have to train them to be desensitised to everything.
- Kiri: Yeah.
- Esyllt: Imagine a policeman on a Shetland [laughs].
- Kiri: [Laughs] I am so impressed with those ponies and their resolve. Because I grew up with horses and mine wouldn't go past a plastic bag on a windy day.
- Esyllt: [Laughs]
- Kiri: So the fact that they deal with explosions that well.
- Esyllt: I love imagining them just kind of kicking their heels out in the fields. Oh it's just, I'm getting very emotional.
- Kiri: No it's lovely. And it also shows you how like resilient they are that they're able to bounce back. And what I thought I would come here and see was ponies that were sort of a

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bit sad that you know had their best days behind them. But they were all jostling around in the yard with each other, playing, sort of fighting for dominance. They are a very happy, content, well fed group of ponies. What can people expect when they come to visit you?

Roy: Well don't come in the winter.

Kiri: [Laughs]

Roy: Come in the summer. May is the best time to come. The May blossoms there and it's warm and everything. You know the ponies when they're out in the field they're very settled. They're generally one herd in the summer, you go out there six o'clock in the morning and it's like you found a pony's next.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Roy: There's a big crowd of them all laid round, they've been slept there all night.

Esyllt: Aww. And they must get quite a lot from the visitors as well. Some of them really were vying for our attention when we were out there.

Kiri: Yeah.

Esyllt: So they must enjoy seeing new people coming in.

Roy: The youngsters particularly yeah. Especially if you've got a handbag, they love to sniff and check you out for Mars bars and things like that.

Kiri: [Laughs] I'm the same. I will sniff your handbag if I think there's a Mars bar in there.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: And I will bite you for it.

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Roy: Dogs are OK on a lead. People in wheelchairs, if we know they're coming we can organise things so that they can see some ponies.

Kiri: Amazing.

Roy: We do have, it's called a Mill, it's a 4x4.

Kiri: My parents have got one of those, it's like a golf buggy for a farm isn't it?

Roy: Yes.

Kiri: It's the best thing in the world.

Roy: It is, it's just so noisy you can't have a conversation over it.

Kiri: [Laughs]

Roy: But it's good, it will go anywhere and we can take them right up to the ponies.

Kiri: Very good for collecting firewood.

Esyllt: Do you have any spare firewood going?

Kiri: We're obsessed with free wood [laughs].

Esyllt: Kiri and I, we've got a competition going because we love collecting free wood.

Kiri: We love not paying for things for our wood burner that's what I mean.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: It's so nice what you're doing here because it's preserving and talking about a really important part of our history and also giving these gorgeous animals a really lovely retirement, it's beautiful, well done mate it's so great.

Esyllt: Yeah thank you so much for showing us around.

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Roy: And we have a little gift shop in the summer. One of the stables turns into a little giftshop.

Kiri: I love a gift shop.

Esyllt: Do you have any merchandise?

Roy: Yeah that sort of stuff.

Esyllt: Because what I'm saying is...

Kiri: She wants to buy something for her kids.

Esyllt: I'd like to buy something from you [laughs].

Roy: These are trolley tags made to look like a little stable.

Kiri: Sold! I'll buy one of those.

Esyllt: Oh wow I'll buy one of those definitely.

Roy: So that's the sort of thing we sell.

Esyllt: Oh look at that! Oh for the trolley I never have a pound for the trolley.

Kiri: Yes exactly.

Esyllt: Ah!

Kiri: And I hate that we always have to have a pound in it, so you've sold two of those, we'll buy those [laughs].

Esyllt: I will give you £50 for it! [Laughs]

Kiri: [Laughs]

[Interim Music]

Esyllt: We've just come from the pit ponies and I am hungry and we found a lovely little place in Pontypridd called A Bunch of Grapes.

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Kiri: Which I hear through the bunch of grapevine that it's quite not famous but very well thought of.

Esyllt: It is. Amazing. And you wouldn't even know, again like with the pit ponies, you wouldn't know it's here.

Kiri: No.

Esyllt: Because if you're passing because you have to do like a proper hairpin...

Kiri: And handbrake turn yeah. A handbrake turn into the small road that leads onto it.

Esyllt: Yeah make sure your tyres have been checked.

Kiri: [Laughs]

Esyllt: You come down here and it's so nice and welcoming and warm and there's a real buzz in here.

Kiri: Yeah.

Esyllt: It's really full.

Kiri: Loads of local stuff on the menu, loads of local stuff on the bar as well.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: And can I just say as the tedious vegan of the podcast my main role.

Esyllt: It is tedious.

Kiri: [Laughs] It's tedious being made to eat meat on my behalf I imagine. The vegan option is absolutely incredible and really thoughtful as well, it's not just your usual stuff.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: I am so excited to eat here.

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Esyllt: Good.

Kiri: So I'm having to start oh my gosh, pan fried soy glazed tofu with napa cabbage, can't wait to find out what that is. Pear coriander salad, ginger and chilli lime vinaigrette.

Esyllt: I mean even for a big meat eater like myself I would be very happy with that.

Kiri: So nice.

Esyllt: Lovely yeah.

Kiri: Those flavours as well. Again, that's what I mean really thoughtful about what goes together.

Esyllt: Yeah. Yeah. Well [chuckles] I'm definitely going to have to go with some sort of pork belly because every single place we go to eat if there's pork belly on the menu you make me order pork belly.

Kiri: Yeah so I can watch you eat it.

Esyllt: Yeah [laughs].

Kiri: And there's absolutely nothing weird about that. Especially considering we didn't know each other very well before this podcast.

Esyllt: [Laughs] I mean we've bonded over pork.

Kiri: Sometimes I'll whisper slower as you're eating it.

Esyllt: [Laughs] I've seen you dribbling, it's fine. So I'm going to start with the smoked pork belly burnt ends. And then I've spotted the brisket with charred onions.

Kiri: And then for main I'm going to have pan roasted celeriac, basil oil, sambal and then tender stem broccoli, I'm so excited.

Esyllt: Good, are you having chips?

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Kiri: No I don't think so.

Esyllt: Oh! OK.

Kiri: A pulse.

Esyllt: If I order chips you can't then have some of my chips.

Kiri: That's not why I signed up to this.

Esyllt: Right OK.

Kiri: Not to be given rules like that [laughs].

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: What kind of vegistic remine am I living under?

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: Also I bet they're really good chips and they cook them in like goose fat or something delicious like that.

Esyllt: I'm going to go to the toilet to eat them.

Kiri: [Laughs] I wish you'd stop saying that about the meals we have together.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

[Interim Music]

Esyllt: How was your food?

Kiri: So good.

Esyllt: Was it?

Kiri: Really, really good.

Esyllt: Good.

Kiri: I had some of your chips as well so thanks so much for that.

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Esyllt: [Laughs] But only because my brisket it was a sandwich was massive.

Kiri: It was huge, it was the size of your head.

Esyllt: [Laughs] The size of my head but the shape of a foot.

Kiri: [Laughs] I imagine you would never listen to this podcast and think we enjoyed our meals.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: But they were so nice. Because this is like a really gorgeous pub. And what I've got kind of used to as a vegan is going into Welsh pubs and being like 'Oh we'll have whatever bad version of a vegan burger you've got'.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: But that was really amazing proper food.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: Lovely ingredients. The celeriac was incredible, so many good complementary for that and the tofu as well.

Esyllt: I notice you didn't offer me any.

Kiri: No. I silently ate with my head down and finished before everyone else and then started on your chips [laughs]. That's exactly how it went. How was yours?

Esyllt: It was amazing. Like the brisket was just perfect. Like it was just chewy enough.

Kiri: Yeah.

Esyllt: But like also falling apart. And like there was some kind of dressing in there as well which I kind of want to know what it was but also I don't, I like the mystique of dressings.

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Kiri: Oh sure.

Esyllt: I'd like to be able to remake it but actually just keep it as no.

Kiri: Yeah you won't so. It's really nice as well because it's not hammered in here but you can tell people love this pub, people have been sat here for hours. Like there's couples in here and there's the usual old men propping up the bar but big groups were having food.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: It's obviously very well loved.

Esyllt: Yeah. I would move here just for this pub.

Kiri: [Laughs]

Esyllt: I moved to where I am now because of the pub so yeah I've got form.

Kiri: They floated a dessert menu to us.

Esyllt: Uh?

Kiri: Which normally means for me it will be a sorbet and nothing else.

Esyllt: Yes but then I noticed and then I got very excited for you because there's a vegan Welsh cheeseboard.

Kiri: I cannot genuinely cannot believe it. I pride myself on knowing a lot about vegan cheese and a lot about Welsh produce and according to this it's five cheeses from North Wales.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: From a place called Satsuma Pips, I am, well in fact I swore loads when I saw it.

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Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: But they've also got vegan panna cotta which is notoriously hard to find. So I might, is this gross? I might order the panna cotta and ask if they can give me a cheeseboard to takeaway.

Esyllt: And you're going to eat it in bed tonight.

Kiri: I'm going to eat it in bed yeah and you're going to have to watch me do it.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: We're going to top and tail, we'll be next to each other like Eric and Ernie and I'll be the ones putting crumbs in the bed.

Esyllt: OK enough about you, what am I going to have?

Kiri: What are you going to have?

Esyllt: I don't know.

Kiri: Am I allowed to pick for you? OK there's some words that are jumping out to me.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: And it's ice cream and it's Welsh cake.

Esyllt: OK.

Kiri: Because it's Welsh cake flavoured ice cream.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: That right?

Esyllt: Yeah.

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Kiri: Or maybe you could ask because they've got a sticky toffee pudding, maybe you could ask for that with a scoop of Welsh cake ice cream.

Esyllt: [Draws breath excitedly]

Kiri: And then you'd have the best of everything.

Esyllt: Yes please [laughs].

Kiri: Yeah see.

Esyllt: You're like um, what are you like?

Kiri: Creepy?

Esyllt: [Laughs] Yeah.

Kiri: A feeder? I feel like I'm you now some women pay to have their colours done and a woman comes and holds pashminas up, I feel like I'm that for food. I know what people want for food before they even know it.

Esyllt: So like you'd be holding, like cured meat up against my face [laughs].

Kiri: Yeah I'd be holding a piece of pork belly next to your face going 'See, see how that lifts you? You don't look as drained now'.

Esyllt: And you'd be right.

Kiri: Yeah [laughs].

[Interim Music]

Esyllt: We've travelled all the way from Pontypridd and we're now in Treorchy

Kiri: I'm blissed out on pit ponies mate because it's been so beautiful and blustery as Wales has it in her arsenal to be. I think I'm exhausted from oxygen.

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Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: You know when you've had too much air.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: But I'm really excited for tomorrow. I think we've got a really fun day.

Esyllt: We're going to go along Treorchy High Street.

Kiri: Award winning I believe.

Esyllt: Yes! Full of independent shops and restaurants and cafes and stuff. From my experience here because I've lived here for a couple of years and what I noticed was that as soon as a shop shut for whatever reason it would immediately be replaced by a new business within a month.

Kiri: That's so delightful to hear because one of my great worries for many places in Wales is that when those shops disappear they stay like a tooth that's been pulled out and they're not always replaced.

Esyllt: Yeah and thing is because it's near right at the end of the valley, it kind of has to be like that. It kind of has to be on the High Street so there's a feeling of if they don't create it, if people here don't build those businesses then there wouldn't be anything here. So yeah I think there's a cycle and it's a very positive one.

Kiri: Yeah it means it's a community investing in itself as well.

Esyllt: Mm yeah.

Kiri: So I'm really excited to use all that sort of intellectual justification for going around some chazzers.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

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Kiri: Going round some charity shops tomorrow, spending money. And then glamping.

Esyllt: I cannot wait.

Kiri: I don't even know if we're staying in tents or yurts or cabins? I'm really excited.

Esyllt: In my head it's a bell tent.

Kiri: It's a cave.

Esyllt: Are we in a barn?

Kiri: I'm very excited to see where we are. Well I think it's going to be great in that I'm going to feel like I'm camping but with none of the perils. And that feels great because then I can tell people I've camped.

Esyllt: OK yeah.

Kiri: But then I can still have a hairdryer.

Esyllt: [Laughs] OK. So there will be electricity there. OK the producer is nodding. OK yeah that's fine. If there's electricity I'm happy.

Kiri: What a low bar you've set for this podcast.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: Do you know what? I'm so worried they'll use that as a little clip and then be like, oh podcast about visiting Wales, 'As long as there's electricity I'm happy'.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: Like oh brilliant.

Esyllt: [Laughs hysterically]

Kiri: This doesn't seem parochial at all.

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Esyllt: [Laughs hysterically] Have you ever gigged around here?

Kiri: Blackwood.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: Blackwood Miners Institute.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: I'm gigging in Mountain Ash, I think that's close.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: I'm doing a festival in Mountain Ash.

Esyllt: Oh.

Kiri: Merthyr I did, is it Redhouse? Yeah so I've been in this area but never to here.

Esyllt: I've definitely gigged in Pontypridd at the Muni Arts Centre. I know there's loads of comedy on there from time to time. And I have gigged in Treorchy as well because the Lion where we're going tomorrow, they definitely used to hold quite a lot of gigs, English and Welsh language.

Kiri: Oh brilliant.

Esyllt: Yeah they were really nice. So yeah we'll go and find out tomorrow if they're still running them and if not give them a prod.

Kiri: Yes. Can you book us please?

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: We've got some material about glamping [laughs].

[Interim Music]

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Kiri: Good morning, bora da, we're waking up in Treorchy we're in a coffee shop at the moment and it is absolutely rammed in here. It's called Hot Gossip and that is exactly what it feels like people have come here to do.

Esyllt: Yeah. There's a big café culture here. Well across most of the South Wales valleys. Obviously you've had the influx of Italian immigrants during the industrial revolution.

Kiri: Mm-hmm.

Esyllt: And you know a lot of them opened cafés and stuff and I think even if those original cafés don't exist anymore I think there's still that desire for that café culture here. And I love the fact that people are still opening up cafés and yeah.

Kiri: That's great. I didn't know that. I didn't know that's where it came from. So we're going to have a day on the beautiful High Street which is very cute, award winning, loads of indie shops. Loads of shops right up my street. I will shop until you drop if there's chazzers and a hardware shop, that's genuinely my favourite kind of high street, yeah.

Esyllt: But yeah let's go shopping.

Kiri: Great.

[Interim Music]

Kiri: I love those soup bowls that have the recipe on the side of them, they're great. I feel like they're due a resurgence. Isn't that perfect? It's got horses on. It's sort of retro. Top shelf, three quid.

[Interim Music]

Esyllt: I think we're done shopping aren't we?

Kiri: Yeah.

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- Esyllt: I think we've spent enough.
- Kiri: Mm-hmm. The plethora of mad stuff that I'm coming home with.
- Esyllt: I got my kids the Welsh traditional costumes because they've grown out of the ones they wore last year. I like the stuff that looks like proper wool and cloth.
- Kiri: OK yeah.
- Esyllt: And I found some for both of them.
- Kiri: Really?
- Esyllt: Yeah and they're really pretty and my son is going to be wearing a bow tie and a flat cap.
- Kiri: Very cute.
- Esyllt: And a waistcoat. And a felt leek which he will pin to his cap whether he likes it or not.
- Kiri: This is so lovely.
- Esyllt: [Laughs]
- Kiri: That is so nice.
- Esyllt: This is how we force culture on our kids in Wales.
- Kiri: Again a thing I missed out on.
- Esyllt: We're going to have to rectify that. I'm going to buy you the biggest petticoat [laughs]...
- Kiri: Thank you.
- Esyllt: ...you've ever seen. And a huge apron and one of those really heavy shawls you know if it gets wet it will really weigh you down. One of those. It's happening.
- Kiri: What a horrible promise.

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Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: I also got some tracksuit bottoms with a Welsh dragon on them, why not? My two favourite things coming together. Patriotism and trackies.

Esyllt: OK I didn't see these.

Kiri: I've also got from a chazzer, I got a brand new tags on...

Esyllt: [Draws breath]

Kiri: Leopard print. I think shirt dress that's sort of pink and black tiger.

Esyllt: I like that.

Kiri: So I'm really happy with loads of my stuff because it's a good mix of like yeah new stuff and chazzers which is my favourite.

Esyllt: Oh it was great.

Kiri: It was so fun.

Esyllt: There was a hardware store. Hairdressers...

Kiri: A couple of nail bars.

Esyllt: Nail bars.

Kiri: And some florists.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: There's kind of everything that you would need.

Esyllt: You can get a wedding dress here as well.

Kiri: I know. And formal wear for men.

Esyllt: Yeah. Next to each other.

Kiri: Yeah.

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- Esyllt: I did see a wedding dress in the window that I quite liked. Shall I buy that? No.
- Kiri: Yeah absolutely, that seems like an absolutely normal thing to do.
- Esyllt: Yeah [laughs] For camping, yeah.
- Kiri: For camping, really putting the glamour in glamping.
- Esyllt: [Laughs]
- Kiri: But we're off now to the Lion. Big pub here.
- Esyllt: Yeah I'm really hungry.
- Kiri: And I think we're going to speak to Adrian who runs the Lion and has had a lot to do with the High Street's regeneration is sort of word on the street.
- Esyllt: Yeah.
- Kiri: He's big on campus.
- Esyllt: [Laughs]
- Kiri: That's the vibe I get from Adrian. Oh and I got a giant pizza cutter, and industrial catering sized pizza cutter for 10p. Genuinely that's fantastic.
- Esyllt: [Laughs]
- Kiri: As quite a pizza heavy household I'm really impressed with that.
- Esyllt: What do you mean by industrial? Massive?
- Kiri: Massive wheel in it. Really big wheel. Robust, easy to clean.
- Esyllt: I don't have any, I cut pizzas with a scissors.
- Kiri: I think that it perverse.

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Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: Honestly I've got a real problem with that. Scissors are for paper, cloth and pubic hair.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: They're not for pizza.

Esyllt: I don't use the same scissors for my pubic hairs for the pizza. I've got different ones for different jobs.

Kiri: OK fine, all right I'll let it slide.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

[Interim Music]

Esyllt: We have just spent most of our money on the High Street.

Kiri: Mm-hmm.

Esyllt: Got some great hauls from charity shops.

Kiri: Yes.

Esyllt: And some of the independent stores as well.

Kiri: Everyone wanted a good a good old [speaks Welsh] good old chat in the shops as well.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: Which was really nice.

Esyllt: And everywhere was really full.

Kiri: Hammered.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: [Laughs] To the point where you're sort of like shuffling around and I didn't queue up to see the queen lying in

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state but that felt like that was the closest that I could was moving around the community shop at the end there.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Adrian: That's not bad for a second week in January.

Esyllt: No.

Kiri: So you just heard from Adrian. We're sat in his beautiful pub now the Lion, gorgeous, really nice. And it feels like a bit of a beacon on the High Street as well where it's placed and you could see people congregating in here. So how long have you been here?

Adrian: So I've been here almost 12 years now. The pub was boarded up and the town was in a little bit of a sorry state as well you know like most other valleys towns we're sort of slipping backwards. But we've really seen a regeneration in the last five or six years. So there's been a lot of businesses that have been here for generations, some 30, 40, 50 years. And then we've had about 40 new businesses in the last five or six years.

Kiri: Wow!

Esyllt: Wow! Gosh.

Adrian: So it's been a real mix you know and when you've got businesses that the owners live in the place, they've grown up in the place, they've got the kids go to school in the place, they've got skin in the game.

Kiri: Mm.

Adrian: So they want to give a lot more to the town. And they get involved in the events.

Esyllt: Yeah.

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Adrian: And you just feel that you know you could go to a Costa, the coffees decent, you spend your money and it goes to some big chain you know big head office. Whereas when you go to a local independent coffee shop or café it goes towards someone's ballet lessons for their kids.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Adrian: It all goes back into the economy as well.

Kiri: This is all absolutely amazing and it feels so exciting for the people of Treorchy as well to live somewhere like this. People coming and visiting, what can they expect other than a big community feel?

Adrian: Well you mention visitors. We don't use the word tourism right because you go back even three or four years, that's an alien term. Why would tourists come here? Right. We go elsewhere. I think our future, our next industry is going to be tourism. You've got Zip World which is just ten minutes on the mountain there. You've got Bike Park Wales just over the mountain 40 minutes away. They're putting in planning now for a massive indoor skiing resort in Merthyr as well. There's a potential that the Rhondda tunnel will reopen and if that reopens it will be the longest tunnel in Europe, second in the world that you can walk and cycle through. The goal is that within ten years there will be a family in London and the father will say 'Where do you want to go kids? Do you want to go to the Lake District? The Cotswolds? Or the Rhondda Valley?' And to be mentioned in that sort of you know.

Kiri: Yeah.

Adrian: We're not there yet.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Adrian: But that is honestly the potential.

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Esyllt: Yeah.

Adrian: I think a place is about its stories as well. And we've got plenty of stories around here you know.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Adrian: But it's about remembering all them times and then it's about looking forward now to what are we about? I think that's tourism.

Esyllt: I think that storytelling element is really important as well because I think one characteristic of Treorchy people is that you are very good storytellers and they are all comedians. Every single one of you.

Kiri: [Laughs] Well remind me never to do a gig here.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Adrian: Especially in a pub. And I think we're in a pub now right? And for me I'm biased because I'm a publican, a pub landlord but the pub is the hub. This pub was a catalyst in the town.

Esyllt: I think it's a beating heart in the community is a good pub.

Adrian: For the champion High Street there was three towns within the four countries, so Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. And there was a public vote as well. So the judges came and Treorchy Male Voice were here to do a flashmob.

Kiri: Oh!

Esyllt: Oh wow!

Adrian: Yeah so they were all in here incognito.

Esyllt: Oh gosh!

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Adrian: All the gentlemen, right the pub was packed. And we were sat down with the judges and one of the staff came to me and said 'I think you better start the choir is getting pretty um'.

Kiri: [Laughs] Well oiled?

Adrian: Well oiled. And I was like 'Come on we better do it'. As they walked towards the door then, they burst out into song.

Esyllt: [Draws breath]

Adrian: And one of the judges had never seen a Welsh choir before.

Esyllt: No.

Adrian: Because they're from London. And I said, 'Oh every Tuesday these lads do this'.

Kiri: [Laughs]

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Adrian: Do you know what I mean, every Tuesday, I'm sorry about that guys do you know what I mean. And it absolutely hammered down. But a little ray of sunshine came through and followed us around the town and it was absolutely amazing. We had about 300 to 400 people involved in the day.

Esyllt: Wow.

Adrian: Shopkeepers, choirs, all different stuff.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Adrian: And the judges said they didn't realise what a community was until they came here.

Esyllt: When you talk about it I get goosebumps.

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Kiri: I got goosebumps! I know exactly, well the heater is on so I'm not cold.

Esyllt: I know and again it's that feeling of passion that comes across. And I think that's what we've noticed with all the places we've been to so far in Wales. Is that the people you talk to within these communities they are so passionate about not just where they live, but where they work and they want to share it with people. They want to shout about it and it's so lovely. And hopefully that's what we're doing is being able to pass that onto people and make sure they come here.

Adrian: Yeah and we're not just proud of Treorchy, we're proud of the Rhondda and the Valleys as well.

Esyllt: Right.

Adrian: Because if the next town down either side are thriving right it will have no detrimental effect on us whatsoever.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Adrian: Nothing.

Kiri: It's just going to bring more people to the area.

Esyllt: Yeah of course.

Adrian: They'll just bring more people right. But we need to come up together.

Kiri: Yeah.

Adrian: Because if somebody is going to come, if visitors are going to come from outside the area they'll have to pass through two or three towns to get to us. And what we don't want is them passing through boarded up pubs and shops and you want them coming through this lovely area and then coming to us.

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Esyllt: Yeah it's so true.

Kiri: Absolutely.

Esyllt: I know we've said that the pub is more than just food and alcohol but what would you recommend today? Because I'm absolutely starving.

Kiri: Yeah.

Adrian: Well there's a money back guarantee on the fajitas. If you don't like 'em I guarantee you won't get your money back.

[Laughter]

[Interim Music]

Kiri: Now this is our final sort of stop on our Rhondda Valley and Pontypridd leg of our journey but I wasn't expecting to end up in a quite luxurious glamping site.

Esyllt: [Laughs] No you're right. And again it's one of those things I think so many of the things we've seen these last few days are things that you just wouldn't know that they were there.

Kiri: So we're at the Fernhill Valley Farm glamping site. And the satnav gets you there brilliantly but there is the last sort of two minutes you're like, I must be lost. Because you can't see it and it feels like you're just driving into a valley.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: And then it just suddenly appears with these little pods.

Esyllt: Yeah which is perfect then because it feels like you've mentally and physically left the town and then you're here.

Kiri: Yeah. Aww they're really cute.

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Esyllt: Aww.

Kiri: Aren't they lovely? The view is wild as well.

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: Because they just light up, well this was a colliery. I feel like a pit pony.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: And by that I mean rub my sores. These are the kind of pods I've seen on the 'gram but never in real life. They're sort of you know dome shaped little barrels.

Esyllt: Yeah like curvy chalets. Curvy chalets.

Kiri: Another great drag name [laughs].

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: This is your one. Do you want to go in?

Esyllt: Am I going in number 1? Great. Oh wow look! Oh.

Kiri: It smells amazing.

Esyllt: Doesn't it? It smells fresh and new.

Kiri: It's the wood.

Esyllt: The wood.

Kiri: I don't know what it is, whether it's pine or whatever but it smells so delightful.

Esyllt: Must be pine, it looks like pine.

Kiri: You've got Welsh cakes, you've got welcome Welsh cakes.

Esyllt: [Draws breath] Yes.

Kiri: This is so lovely. So it's like a double bed, couple of chairs, like a little living room. Little dining room table.

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Esyllt: Yeah and a kitchenette!

Kiri: Kitchenette.

Esyllt: Aww. You know I see no firewood.

Kiri: You can't burn a Welsh cake guys. This is so lovely.

Esyllt: Do you know I think I could live like this? OK no, I like to think I could live like this but I've got too much stuff.

Kiri: Yeah this would be a storage facility.

Esyllt: Yeah. Imagine having a dog in here?

Kiri: Reek, it would absolutely reek. It's fantastic. Shall we get drunk?

Esyllt: Oh please.

Kiri: [Laughs]

[Interim Music]

Kiri: Bora da.

Esyllt: Good morning.

Kiri: How are you feeling?

Esyllt: I'm all right. It's um I felt like you know how people say snug as a bug in a rug.

Kiri: Yeah.

Esyllt: I was a bit like that last night.

Kiri: Yeah it did feel quite cwtchy didn't it?

Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: So I woke up about 3:00 but with that lovely feeling of like rain and wind lashing the side of the pod but feeling like ah I feel really cosy and really safe.

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Esyllt: Yeah.

Kiri: And I thought I'd be cold.

Esyllt: I was really hot at one point.

Kiri: Yeah it was roasting.

Esyllt: Yeah [laughs].

Kiri: Because it's like a little wooden barrel isn't it? But yeah it was really lovely. I saw my friend last night from Merthyr, she was like 'What are you doing in Treorchy?!' And I was like 'Oh we're doing this thing about you know places to visit in Wales.' And she was like 'In Treorchy?!' But then when we outlined everything we'd done there's loads to do.

Esyllt: Yeah. And there's stuff that we haven't done as well.

Kiri: Yeah.

Esyllt: That we really should come back and do.

Kiri: Yes. Ponty Lido we're looking at you.

Esyllt: [Laughs]

Kiri: Everyone we've met has been absolutely diamond. Whether they've known we're making this or not they've been gorgeous.

Esyllt: Yeah. I've always said to people that I would happily live anywhere in the world, it could be somewhere really awful, as long as I could take Treorchy people with me. I would love that and it's true and I think from speaking with Adrian yesterday it's so apparent that for so many destinations the people really make it. And they're just very lucky that they are surrounded by amazing countryside and that they have some amazing experiences here as well, it just kind of tops it all off.

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Kiri: Yeah. So should we come back?

Esyllt: Oh yeah I'm actually thinking I might just stay now. I don't really want to get up and leave.

Kiri: [Laughs] You're into your woman lives alone in cabin in the middle of a valley era.

Esyllt: [Laughs] I just need to stock up on cocktail in cans.

Kiri: Yeah.

Esyllt: Does that make sense?

Kiri: Yeah.

Esyllt: OK.

Kiri: That's what we were drinking last night.

Esyllt: [Laughs hysterically]

Kiri: And also it's testament to why it's so hard to think this morning [laughs].

Esyllt: Why does it wound like I've smoked all my life?

Kiri: You sound quite rough [yawns].

Esyllt: Yeah, thanks [laughs]

[Outro Music]

Esyllt: This has been Pod of Wales in Pontypridd and the Rhondda Valley. Thank you so much to everyone who has helped us on our trip. I've been Esyllt Sears.

Kiri: I've been Kiri Pritchard-McLean.

Pod of Wales is a Little Wander production in association with Visit Wales.

[End of Podcast]