

## Tribute to Don Eduardo

In June 1944 my father in law to be, one Edward James Lees had just completed four years in captivity in German POW camps. I was newly born into a country at war that had killed many, including my own father. Ted had spent four birthdays including his twenty first in one of 'Hitler's Hotels', as he called them. He had queued in freezing cold in the early hours for the privilege of peeling potatoes in order to get an extra soup ration. He had to suffer a further year of deprivations before attaining freedom and returning to his own country at Greenock on June 12<sup>th</sup> 1945. Thus started the rest of his life, which as everyone here knows, was a full one taking him all round the world. He was at one time, amongst BOAC's most travelled customers.

Not long after I first met him, our conversation turned to his native language, Spanish, and how one should address a man in that language. "If, for example, you met me for the first time" he said "then it should be Senor Lees. If you get to know me well then it could be Don Eduardo. If you get to know me extremely well then you could just call me Eduardo."

I took the safe middle option of calling him Don Eduardo. Whenever I phoned him; this was how the conversation would begin. A quiet "Hello" from the other end.

"Don Eduardo" I would say, and he would reply with obvious delight and enthusiasm realising that I wasn't the tax man, "Don Miguel, Com esta?"

Many of you have known him for much longer than I, and will have many stories of his extraordinary life. As you know, I had the pleasure and privilege of helping putting his wartime journal together into a book: 'Behind The Barbed Wire'. During that time I felt I was beginning to understand Ted Lees, the man and what made him tick. He recorded his observations of his fellow man, both captives and captors during those years and all who have read the book could sense his determination to not only stick it out but also to benefit and learn from his experiences. He taught himself German, not from the soldiers but from the officers whose vocabulary and diction was in his own words, 'of a much higher standard.' When the war finished, he was fluent in four languages, these language skills were to be the foundations of his highly successful peacetime career with English Electric and Renold.

Jean and I were able to share a journey into his past when a few years ago we accompanied him to Vienna and onward to Budapest to revisit his long walk to freedom after his release from captivity. This time we did it by train though. Though full of wonderful reminiscences there was also a bit of unwanted drama when Don Eduardo stumbled and fell on one of Budapest's longest and fastest escalators. We had the pleasure of seeing the inside of Budapest's equivalent of the NHS at close quarters for much of the rest of that day but as always, there was no complaint from its British patient. He did always refer to his 'Budapest ankle' when it gave him pain from time to time.

Last year we went to Chile and had hoped to take him with us so that he could have given us a personal perspective of the 'Jewel of South America' as he often described the place where Olive and he had lived for a short time at the start of his successful career with their young family, David and Jean. Sadly, it was not to be as he did not feel up to the long journey.

In the thirteen years or so since I first met him, I have been privileged to enjoy his friendship and generosity. He was a charismatic and charming gentleman. He had a great sense of fairness and always listened to both sides of an argument before putting his own viewpoint. He was also courteous, polite and respectful right until his last weeks and days when, in the hospital in South Wales, he knew all the nurses, doctors and carers by name and even managed to teach some of them some Spanish! He was a bit of a showman and sometimes used to use a bit of spin on a story or even on an introduction. I remember our first meal at the renowned Queens Head in Glanwydden when to my embarrassment; I was introduced in quite a loud voice to the Proprietor in a packed restaurant as 'the well known Television Producer Mike Baker of the BBC!' I didn't know where to look, especially as my role in the BBC was at a much humbler level.

He loved meeting people and enjoyed good food and drink in good company. On his visits to South Wales he relished his visits with us to Farthings restaurant where, incidentally, Caroline and Suzi both worked for a time. He even managed to enjoy visits there several times during the last few months of his illness in his wheelchair. Of course, on those as all other occasions, the wine had to be red and Chilean! It should also be said that during his 85<sup>th</sup> year, he played scrabble, bridge, golf, drove his car, visited the theatre and was also the perfect host on our visit to his home in October.

He bore his final journey through his terminal illness with the same courage, inner strength and fortitude that had taken him through his captivity all those years ago. Giving in were two words that were not in his vocabulary.

Like you all, I will miss him terribly. In the time that I got to know him and his family, he had become the father that I had never known.