

“LOOK BACK IN LANGOUR”

MY LIFE



ERIC NORMAN DAVIES

(1947 – 20..)

Eric Norman (sometimes known as NED or DAVE) was born in Dollgellau Maternity home in a room full of females, one of whom was his mother, Irene Winifred Davies (nee Tate) and Eric Gwynn Davies, his father and a brother for Michael.

He long held the belief that he was named after his father and grandfather Norman and that his initials END reflected his father's words on first seeing him in the cot saying "that's it, the END" and shortly later his father and mother separated.

He was exported from Wales to Liverpool to his grandparents, and eventually Mum moved to London with the two boys and found work as a housekeeper to a director of Howard and Wyndham theatres. Mum was paid little but was given tickets to many West End shows and Eric recalled seeing first performances of Oliver, My Fair Lady etc. He met many stars of the day including Kenneth More, Tommy Steele and he was the only witness to the actor Michael Horden throwing a cat from a third floor balcony in Hampstead – the cat landed dead at Eric's feet.

They lived in some penury in one room on the border of Swiss Cottage and Kilburn. In 1958 Mike joined the Royal Navy whilst Eric was placed by the old GLC into a Roman Catholic boarding school run by a brutal Mother Superior and equally fierce Nuns. Attendance at RC Mass was compulsory which puzzled Eric as he had been baptised into the Church of England!

As time passed Mum took up with an old flame Arthur Carlisle Sharp who proffered marriage and a home in Accrington, Lancashire and with little notice he was uprooted from Surrey to Lancashire which was quite a shock, being dropped into a class where his accent made him stand out, indeed on the very first break he was dragged into the boys lavatory and his head was stuck down the pan and the chain pulled!! He quickly found it prudent to gain a place in the school football team which had the effect of protecting him from the school bullies!!

Sadly this marriage failed and he sought to follow his brother into the Royal Navy.

As soon as was legally possible he applied, sat and passed the selection board for entry and was 14 3/4 when he signed the papers. So on the 8th of January 1963 he arrived at HMS GANGES as the lowest form of life in the Navy, a Junior Seaman Second Class, where his brother had trained 5 years earlier.

He specialised in Communications as a telegraphist and the Morse code, along with Naval Coding and Cryptography; and a career that spanned 25 years began, which was to see him serve with HRH The Prince of Wales and HRH The Duke of York. He led the life of a matelot, once being chased out of an Aborigine bar in Darwin into which he had ventured by mistake. Whilst in Taranto he borrowed a rowing boat as the fastest way back to his ship, setting back Anglo/Italian relations which had only just recovered from the battle of Taranto!

His adventures took him to Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Med and the West Indies along with most of Europe; virtually around the world.

In 1979 he was selected to act as one of the bearer party for the funeral of Lord Mountbatten in Westminster Abbey after which his boss showed him his 6 monthly report, which, in the general comments section, his boss had written; "Davies is not very bright but can carry heavy weights."

In actual fact the bearers received much praise from the Royal Family, Heads of States and senior politicians, and the Board of the Admiralty for their professionalism and conduct.

Little did he realise that day in the Abbey that 12 years later he would be escorting a high court Judge for 18 years to Legal Services in Westminster Abbey.

If he could Eric would say that the greatest achievement the Royal Navy gave him was his dear wife Elizabeth; in his words the most beautiful WREN in the Navy. They met in 1972 whilst he was doing his best to fail a promotion course. His memory is that if they had three dances they would have to marry, and to his astonishment she agreed.

The rest, as they say, is history. Elizabeth was the perfect wife and mother to son Owen who, as he would like to say, is his hero.

So the years rolled by and eventually in 1987 he retired from the RN and sought a second career. From 1987 to 1990 he worked as a financial consultant with Barclays, a branch manager with Alfred Marks, as a head-hunter in the gas analysis industry and finally a High Court Judge's Clerk at the Royal Courts of Justice where he was appointed to the Hon Mrs Justice Bracewell. They were considered to be a formidable team for some 17 years before cancer took the Judge and he contracted Parkinsons, taking early retirement on medical grounds.

During their 17 years they sat in The Court of Appeal, the Old Bailey and most of the major courts of England and Wales.

In 1997 they were invited to Egypt to advise the Egyptian Judiciary on appointing female Judges. They arrived in Cairo and were taken to meet President Mubarek and interviewed on Egyptian TV.

The British Ambassador invited them to the embassy but he arrived late, in a dishevelled and hung over state, indicating that he had been at a cocktail party in Alexandria on a Royal Navy Frigate, to which the Judge dryly indicated that her clerk was the expert in these areas! Regrettably there seemed little chance of persuading Egypt to promote females above lawyer status.

On one memorable occasion after a busy day of meetings and workshops, they were stood outside the Judge's club in Cairo waiting for the embassy car to take them back to their hotel, when a man on a bicycle hove into view, took one look at the club and them and in perfect Oxford English asked if they were here for Egyptian Justice? Eric smiled sweetly back and affirmed this was the case, whereupon the native spat on the floor and rode off into the night. Joyanne (the Judge) turned to Eric, smiled, and said the immortal words "Must be a litigant in person....."

Both the Judge and he were invited to dinners in the Inns of Court and Chambers parties on circuit. Barristers would seek his advice on taking silk and indeed at least one, now Lord Justice, bemoaned the fact that he would no longer apply for a Judgeship; Eric reassured him to apply and be patient. What the applicant did not know was that Eric had seen the next appointment list.

On one occasion at Court he found himself alone in a lift with Catherine Zeta Jones, well not quite alone, her husband Michael Douglas was also present. He looked Eric up and down and enquired as to which way he was going. Eric indicated he was probably going down and managed to resist the temptation to chat Catherine up in Welsh in the hope her husband did not understand.

On another memorable occasion, Elizabeth's 40th birthday in the Ritz Hotel, he made excuses to Elizabeth and sneaked off to reception to check that the flowers had arrived. Whilst walking through the hallway to reception, two gentlemen and a rather languid looking lady draped over a chaise lounge, clicked fingers and beckoned him over to attend on them. He was asked if drinks could be supplied; Eric simply bowed and indicated he thought the hotel had a liquor licence. They ordered two G & Ts and a brandy. Eric, bowed, left, and returned to discover drinks had been supplied. Asking if all was well, one of the men muttered ya ya. Eric bowed again, lent forward and said "then I will return to my party in the restaurant!"

He could on occasions be forgetful. Elizabeth recalls him arriving home and on wishing to go out later found the car had rolled across the road and embedded itself in a neighbour's garage. He had forgotten to apply the hand brake!

Elizabeth and Eric made the conscious decision that Eric's disability would not impact on their life. They took pleasure in living in Buriton, amongst friends and neighbours. The love of Lynne, Hugh, Carol and Micky, Phil and Caroline, Yvette, David and Eirfyl, and Mai, John and Renate meant a great deal to them.

They cruised and steam trained across America along with vacations in Mauritius and the Maldives, cruised the Rhine and Danube, enjoyed theatre trips to London and described the Ritz as their works canteen!

In 1998 Eric achieved a long held ambition to get a letter printed in The Times. He spotted the blessed Delia had a new cookbook out entitled "How to Boil an Egg" and another article stating that Dinosaur Eggs had been discovered on the Isle of Wight. His letter read:

Sir

I look forward to Delia Smith explaining how to cook the surfeit of dinosaur eggs discovered on the IoW.

This prompted a raft of replies, culminating in a Dr Keeling of Oxford writing "please no more letters about Delia and Dinosaurs. Un oeuf is un oeuf"

Eric has a raft of tales of the High Court. One relates to arriving early one morning to discover the messenger, a usually urbane Essex lady, in some distress. On enquiring what was up, she indicated that across The Strand a couple were having consensual sex on the doorstep of the Building Society!!

Was the building society open asked Eric?

Looking at him as if he was mad she replied "no but he was making a deposit of sorts whilst she was attempting to withdraw!"

The second tale relates to the then senior family Judge in the country who discovered two baby pigeons on a balcony of her room and promptly ordered her staff to destroy them. At this point you can write your own Daily Mail headline:

“SENIOR FAMILY JUDGE ORDERS EXECUTION OF BABY PIGEONS”.

Suffice to say that they were spared and fostered by Jack Duckworth.

Eric’s favourite joke was when his computer asked for an 8 character password, he typed in:

SNOW WHITE AND THE 7 DWARVES.

He loved the tale of the matelot taking horizontal physical exercise with a working girl in a naval port. On enquiring how things were going, she replied, you’re doing three knots. Puzzled he enquired how that was. Well, she replied, you’re knot hard, you’re knot in and you’re knot getting your money back.

He was a man who walked and talked with our future King, Presidents, Admirals and the top Judiciary. His advice was treasured and all here and those who cannot be will miss him.

A boy from a broken home who chose the world to roam

A son, a brother, a husband and a Dad

We will remember a gentle man, one who made me glad.

I would suspect he would quite like to be with us here today and in a way he is – just on another plane.

Thank You.