

Things to say about Lee

Lee was born on May 11, 1936 in Victoria, BC. His brother, David, will be able to tell you more about Lee's early years but I can tell you about the man that I know and love.

Lee and I met in 1990. I had a girlfriend who wanted to take dance lessons, but her husband wasn't interested, so she asked me to go with her. We signed up for a class at Gordon Head Rec Centre, which was being taught by Ron and Patsy Taylor, and Lee was there as an assistant, and his role was to dance with any single ladies in the class. During one of my 'turns', I mentioned that I wished I could find someone to go dancing with, and I honestly wasn't fishing, but Lee said right away, I'll go dancing with you. After that, we'd meet once a week, usually at the legion. We started out as simply friends and dance partners, but the rest, as they say, is history. We married on April 29, 1995. Next year would have been our 20th wedding anniversary. Not that either of us made a huge fuss out of one day in the year, in fact, sometimes it slipped by. I remember one year, my mother calling me up on our anniversary to offer congratulations and ask if we had anything nice planned for that evening (which we probably didn't, because we were probably working, and that by the way, is the one drawback to being ballroom dance instructors, no social life). So I said to her, not really, why? And she said, because it's your anniversary today! Oh my gosh, I thought, I've forgotten our anniversary. Lee has probably bought something for me and I don't have anything for him. I better fess up. So I went up to him and said, do you know what day it is today. He thought about it for several seconds, then said, well, it's Tuesday. And then I knew that he had forgotten too, so everything was fine, and we both had a good laugh about that. The truth is, every day is important and special, not just that one day per year.

Lee was a very hard worker, excellent at DIY, and a very smart man. In the early years of his marriage to Jean, Leanne's mum, he worked two jobs in order to support his family and give them a good life. He scrimped and saved so that he could buy the two lots on Prospect Lake Rd., and built the beautiful house that is still home for Leanne and me. The man should have had his own TV show because he was Mr. Project. He couldn't stand not having something to work on and he loved figuring out how to do things. He was forever making improvements to our home. It was his idea to enclose an open sun deck and turn it into a dance studio. The sun room which had stood in one corner was moved to the back of the house and he fenced in part of the back yard to create a beautiful protected area with open deck and lovely garden. Several years ago, with the help of our dear friend and neighbour, Doug, he decided to make our bedroom bigger and the odd thing is, even then, and this was before his cancer diagnosis, he said, he wanted it to be a refuge, a place large enough to have a sitting area with TV and a view out into the garden, in case he ever got to the point, where he was confined to bed. I probably didn't pay that too much mind at the time, but now I realise what foresight he had. Lee had enjoyed boating all his life and introduced me to boating early on. I quickly became hooked and I think I actually wound up being a more avid boater than even he. We started out with a small 25 footer, but eventually two footitis set in (as it's known in the boating world) and we started looking around for something a bit more spacious. We found a 32' Bayliner and I can remember Lee saying, as if it were yesterday, it's perfect, we won't have to change a thing.

Famous last words. I should have known better. That boat now bears absolutely no resemblance to the one we bought back in 2000. It's been repainted, the hull's been modified, new carpets laid down, Doug and Lee completely gutted the galley and constructed a brand new one, the seating area was also removed and new furniture installed, the fly bridge was completed redesigned and new seating constructed, and every single piece of navigational equipment that one could ever possibly want and/or need has been installed...except for an auto-pilot, that would have been next on his list. At the moment, our boat is sitting in a boat yard having brand new diesel engines installed. We ordered them last winter, not too long before we learned that the cancer had spread to Lee's bones, but decided to proceed anyway. We had hoped the work would be completed in time for Lee to enjoy the new engines, but it was not to be. But he never gave up hope. A few weeks back, when he was in the palliative care unit at Saanich Peninsula Hospital, I went in for my daily visit, and he said, I've been thinking about how I can get on and off the boat. I can rig up a block and tackle system, and winch myself aboard in a sling! I've been lying here thinking about that and I think it will work really well. Of course, I did not disabuse him of that notion but complimented him on such a great idea, but I think, even then, I knew it was not to be. It is a source of sadness to me that he never got to try out the boat with the new engines, but as soon as she's ready, Leanne and I will take her out, have a toast in his honour, and think of it as one of his final gifts to us.

Lee had a great sense of humour. Some of you may be familiar with the British comedy "The Vicar of Dibley". One of the characters is a loveable old ditherer and stammerer named Jim Trott, and if he was asked a question to which his reply was yes, it would come out like this... no, no, no, no, yes. He was Lee's favourite character, and Lee liked to mimic him sometimes. The day before Lee passed, Friday, he was very restless and had a hard time getting comfortable in his bed. This was a hospital bed, where the head could either be lowered to a completely flat position, or raised to a sitting position. The legs could also be raised or lowered, as could the entire bed. As Lee became weaker and more unresponsive all week, even speaking became a great effort, so communications were very brief and sometimes not completely clear to us. On the Friday, he was having major pillow issues, and we spent a lot of time trying to understand what he wanted and needed to make him comfortable. He would use hand signals and say things like, bed down, body up. He wanted the pillows lower, then higher, fluffier then firmer, more then fewer...I know now that in his head, he was completely clear about what he wanted...it was us who were the thickies and we were having a hard time grasping his messages. Anyway, we were all getting a bit frustrated and after what seemed like the 100th adjustment, Leanne and I asked him...how is that Lee...is that OK? And he answered...no no no no no yes. We all cracked up. How amazing is that, that the day before he passed, his sense of humour was still as strong as ever, and he had the presence of mind and wherewithal, to know that what we all needed at that moment, was a good old belly laugh – and he provided it.

Of course, Lee will be perhaps best remembered for his love of dancing, and dance instruction. He never felt that it was 'work', but looked forward to each and every class. He was a very patient teacher, having much empathy with his students because he himself felt that he was a slow learner. And he was a "people" person and loved the social aspect of ballroom dancing. Some of our very best friends today are people we met through dancing. We have received

tremendous support from the dance community, and are very appreciative of the many e-mails and cards we have received. In slightly different ways, they all say much the same thing – what a gentleman Lee was, what a kind, patient and humorous instructor, and how does he move his hips like that? It's wonderful to hear what fond memories they have of their time spent in his class, and how grateful for having been introduced to the wonderful world of ballroom dance. What a tremendous legacy.

Lee and I loved to travel, sometimes to far off and exotic places in our effort to see as much of the world as possible, but our happiest times together were much closer to home, when we were out on our boat, just the two of us, safely anchored in a beautiful bay, comfortably settled at happy hour, drinks in hand, and then our afternoon entertainment would be watching other boats come in and try to anchor too. Sometimes we'd chat and reminisce, sometimes just sit in companionable silence and appreciate the view. We enjoyed exploring our beautiful marine parks by foot and kayak, and the gulf islands by bike. For such an active man to be rendered immobile was a very bitter pill indeed to swallow. Our last vacation together was to Hawaii in January. Upon his return, he received radiation for the bone cancer in his right hip, which unfortunately was of limited help, and as the pain became worse, the challenge then was to find the appropriate level and type of pain medication, which often left him feeling very ill. He was able to keep teaching up until about the end of February, at which point, he became too ill, and in too much pain to continue. That was a very hard, and a very sad day for him. But he bore it with his usual stoicism. Lee was a "glass half full" kind of guy. While still hoping for a miracle, he also said he was grateful to have had such a full, active and happy life. While it was incredibly painful to see him decline, I also feel that we were very blessed to have had that time together as a family, to prepare, to grieve and cry together, to say what needed to be said – to forgive and be forgiven, to reminisce, to reassure, to say I love you and I'll always remember you.

Lee could be stubborn, he didn't like to think that he might be in the wrong about something, and he had quite a temper. But then, he could just as easily say the same about me. So, as you can imagine, there were the occasional fireworks in our marriage. But his cancer diagnosis made us put things into perspective, particularly as the disease progressed and we knew time was getting short. We began to appreciate each other more and weren't so likely to get our knickers in a knot over something trivial. I've learned many things from Lee. Some lessons were easy, like how to enjoy a really fine scotch – the secret is to let it melt and muddle and sip is lovingly and slowly. Other lessons are more difficult for me – don't hang on to things, don't worry so much, move ahead, look forward, appreciate the things that you do have, instead of wishing for more. One thing has become very clear to me – how blessed we are in our friends and families, who have stepped forward to offer care and support in any way they can and I can never thank them enough. Special mentions must go to my mother, who has been a rock and has always been there for me, offering whatever practical and emotional support she can. No mother could do more and I am one very lucky daughter. My big seester, Carolyn, has to be the best sister in the world. The very next day she was over from the mainland, bottle of wine in hand, to spend time with Leanne and I and her loving care helped me to not feel so lonely. Lee's daughter, Leanne, has also been tremendously supportive, in the midst of her own grief. I

really struggled with the last few minutes surrounding Lee's passing and she has patiently listened to me go over and over it many times and has helped me come to terms with the fact that things happen the way they are meant to, his passing was peaceful and on his own terms, and I do not need to feel guilty about anything. I know that we did everything we could for him, took excellent care of him, and most importantly, were with him at the end. Tim & Susan Davis have become wonderful friends to us, and we are particularly grateful for Tim's spiritual and pastoral support and care. He checked in with us every day during the last few days, even going so far as to camp out on our living room couch one night, and came over to spend time with us the night Lee passed. Likewise did Mark & Bobbi Frantzen, two of the dearest friends a person could ask for, who live just up the road from us. When Lee was ready to come home from the hospital, and we knew mobility would be an issue, Mark came over and installed a ramp for Lee from our bedroom so that he could access our back garden. And Bobbi, the words that you shared with me that evening, from your conversation with Lee last summer on our canalboat holiday, were the greatest gift – you know the ones. We will be forever grateful to Eric Jenkins for his assistance regarding the installation of a stairlift for Lee. Not only did he source it for us at cost, but he very generously installed it at no charge. Rod Abbott has been tremendously helpful with overseeing the completion of Lee's latest project, the installation of the new engines in our boat, a project which had turned into a nightmare, and which Rod has helped to rescue and put back on track, and given me one less thing to worry about. Of course, there are many, many other people who have helped in many different ways, and we thank you all.

My darling Lee, I will not say good-bye, but simply “au revoir” – until we meet again. You are the most patient man in the world. I think you have spent your whole life waiting for me. Waiting for me to finish off my office work in the morning and get off the computer so we could get on with the rest of our day, waiting for me to take my umpteenth picture of the same beautiful view as I waited for the light to be just so, waiting for me to get myself put together if we were off to a special occasion (unless it was formal night on a cruise and you were wearing your kilt, in which case it took you longer than me), waiting for me while I popped into yet another shop, just for a ‘quick look’, and waiting for me to come back after I'd been out of the room for a few minutes to ensure that I was there with you, holding your hand, when you passed, as I'd asked you to do. I know you are with the Lord in Heaven, and your loved ones that have gone before, your parents, Leanne's mum Jean, your beloved black lab Lance. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to wait for me one more time, until it's my turn to join you in Heaven too.

With all my love forever...

Elizabeth