

## A Trip to London with Mrs Eyres

Did you ever go to a Christmas Party when you were the only one who didn't get a Santa gift ?

Maybe not, but that's how it felt when I accompanied Val Eyres to the RDA Annual General Meeting being held at the prestigious Saddler's Hall, London EC1. All the "big wigs" were there including HRH Princess Royal and Ed Brasher (President and CEO accordingly). There were wonderful people there too, from RDA groups all around the UK, all of whom were wearing name (with numbers) badges. The numbers, we discovered, were to indicate the order in which they were to be presented to Princess Anne.

But there were no such numbers for Val (or me for that matter). We were personae non gratae.

After the 10 minute formal AGM had taken place, the aforementioned "number badge" folk, some 150 of them, were ushered in small groups, to meet HRH who had now been closeted in a different room. Val and I stood around sipping coffee in the big hall for an hour waiting for the final speeches which would bring the whole shebang to a close. Our time spent waiting, however was not wasted, and we chatted to lots of the guests about their RDA Groups and learnt about how they went about things.

Eventually, the Princess Royal, preceded by a bit of a fanfare, made her entry into the big hall and the speeches began. Ed Brasher introduced himself and then proceeded to make some awards. There was one for those involved in creating the new National Training Centre (Lowlands) which opened this year, and one for a lady who had devoted 30 years of service to RDA.

One would have thought that nothing could top that, but it did. Val's name was called, and forward she came to receive from the Princess the final award, the Dudley-Smith award which was a charming cut-glass trophy embossed with her name. Ed explained the wonderful work that Val had put into Kipling and also went on to tell the entire audience about Val's determination, despite everything else with which she'd had to cope, to see Kipling succeed. Everyone was delighted for her.

I must tell you about the speeches too. Ed's final words were full of wisdom, amusing too, and one can't help but see that the RDA is in safe hands. And although the Princess Royal gave the final speech, nothing could have topped a spellbinding oration given by an RDA member called Emma from Lincolnshire. She explained that she was born with spina bifida, but that it was her "crazy" mother who had plonked her on a pony as a bit of a joke. From then on, Emma was utterly besotted with horses.

Emma explained that all too often, people with disabilities are constantly told of the things they "cannot do". This effectively conditioned the mind and leads to a loss of confidence and positivity. But it was RDA that made Emma realise that everything **is** possible, not just for the disabled but also for able-bodied too. Her description of the relationships she had with horses and the feelings she enjoyed when riding, were utterly poetic. The confidence she exuded in speaking her words was breathtaking and at the end, the audience didn't want to stop clapping. What blew me away though was discovering that Emma was only 17.

It was such an uplifting day. Apart from inspirational speeches and awards, Val and I who are not frequent travellers to the capital, were delighted by the courteousness and help given to us by many of our fellow travellers.

I mention this because, as you will be aware, today there was a terrorist attack on London Bridge which prevented us and many others to make a smooth return home. It came as no surprise however that there were those on London Bridge who had showed incredible bravery and selflessness in tackling the perpetrator, despite him being armed with knives and what seemed to the Police to be an explosive device.

A remarkable day all round,  
Peter Horwood

Friday 30th November 2019