

Toni Weldon (RIP)

Worked with EO	from 1967 to
Age on joining EO	
Nationality	
Role at EO	Leader/Driver, Director
Expeditions/Brief Encounters etc. led or taken	
Why did you want to work for EO?	Peggy Gregory-Jenkins wrote in October 2017: "I was on the trip from Kathmandu to London when we picked up Toni near the Nepal border. He started out as a passenger then said he would help Stuart drive us home. He worked at Wren Park for a while after that helping to get the trucks ready."
Occupation before joining EO	
Occupation after leaving EO	
Now living in	

Then photo(s)	
 <p>Toni at Wren Park (<i>Vaculug</i> magazine Autumn 1969)</p>	 <p>Jonathan Rohan-Kickham (L) and Toni Weldon (R), South Africa</p>

Memories or anecdotes

This is a tribute to Toni Weldon, written by Tony Jones in October 2017 in response to a request for information from Toni Weldon's daughter Samantha:

"I have many memories of Toni (Weldon) - as would Rob Rumball among others e.g. Martin Watkinson. There is a lot to tell about Toni and a lot worth knowing not least in the EO context. I have never tried to 'calculate' just how much EO - and me in particular - owe to him. At last October's EO reunion in Nepal Rob made a particular point of recalling Toni's memory to the assembled company. I am so grateful that he did but of course knew at the time that the name would have meant little or nothing to most people.

I would be entirely happy Sarah for you to pass any of this on to his daughter - though I myself am a little reluctant to communicate direct, not least 'cos I don't feel I have the time to do it justice. However, I could change my mind on that as it is beautiful to learn of someone who clearly wants to know more about an absent parent.

Forgive any inaccuracies - Toni came to E.O in about 1967/8. He already had well-developed skills - both management and mechanical. He led what must have been the 2nd southbound trans-Africa trip - two vehicles and, for the first time, RL Bedfords to replace Austin K9s and by so doing increasing group size from 12 to 20. Toni had already lead several other trips. Including not only Lon - Kathmandu but also on from there with one (or was it two??) Landrovers in S.E.Asia; shipping from Madras to Penang before an itinerary thru Thailand, Cambodia, Laos. This, in part, was in anticipation of being hopeful of permission to cross from N.E. India into Burma to thus motor London -Singapore. I can no longer recall why there was no follow up trip, (like all Toni's trips it was operationally successful).

Toni had also operated at least one 'Brief Encounter'. To Morocco and I have to put my hand up to admit to booking on that trip Ann Jonas who subsequently became Toni's first wife. I also recall Toni never ever being without his slide-rule. . . . way better than any computer which I always think Toni would have mastered in moments - but the world had lost him well before their day. In the early days of EO, Toni took himself off to Bedford Motors in Luton to help keep his own and EO's body and soul together, signing on there several times when times were ropery at a very rudimentary Wren Park.

It was Toni who lead us out of the dark ages of the hand-delivered telegramme (ENCOUNTER SHEFFORD would find us from anywhere in the world) into the light that was the telex. The transition wasn't that painful as both had drama on receipt. drama which seems deliberately lacking in today's office.

Toni's leader/driver selection thought-processes were good to have around a table; his views left room for those of others though I seem to recall sometimes finding them 'surprising'; that's to say sometimes his seeing and valuing someone as being much in his own image and sometimes being drawn to someone who absolutely wasn't!

Were Toni around today I wonder what in EO he would say give him the most to feel good about - there would have been quite a few. But were I to choose for him it has to be leading the 1st South (& Central) America trip that set off for Los Angeles from Buenos Aires in 1972. A great piece of filming exists of that extra-ordinary journey with approx 40 EM's, two RL's and his two colleagues, Martin Watkinson and Barry Thorn.

By way of an aside, I am not sure that EO ever bettered those glorious days when all was new and challenging across three continents (and by which time we already had offices in Jo'burg and a presence in both Sydney and San Francisco). However that is not to say we did not rise to similar heights further along the way. Without really realising it we were by a country mile the definitive Adventure Travel outfit.

Toni had already accepted a position on the board of directors. Toni was thorough, methodical and precise. Frankly I suppose this did not make he and I natural partners but I don't think I realised just how uncomfortable he might well have been with some things. For my part I found Toni sociable yes, but sometimes a bit distant and perhaps with a sense that his abilities were not that much valued. Let's just say they should have been.

On returning to London from South America Toni found himself helping EO to face a dreadful fatal accident in Eastern Turkey. There were few if any actual recriminations as such but the tragedy forced a review of matters and of priorities and I think Toni had more foresight than I, for one, probably had and he may well have sensed that, unique though the company clearly was, it was not inclined to be run seriously enough as a proper business.

Toni resigned, and in due course joined the newly formed Exodus Expeditions. He remained there about a year I think, leaving when perhaps a few too many uncomfortable things were familiar. . . . or whatever.

Quite how and when Toni met and at some point married Jill I can't chronicle. They settled in South Africa. All I can be sure of is that whatever Toni undertook there he would have made a spectacular job of it.

And then the shattering news that Toni was dealing with a brain tumour, my bother Wally, in Jo'burg, stayed in touch and speaks with awe of Jill's grace and steadiness under horrendous fire."