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# GEORGE M HOEKSTRA

18.10.1936 - 26.04.11

Unique is not a term to be applied loosely but in the case of my friend, George Hoekstra who died recently, it's not only apt but true.

George was born of Dutch extraction in Batavia the capital of the Dutch East Indies. Nowadays we would know it as Jakarta the capital of Indonesia. Very early in his life with the onslaught of the Second World War he found himself interned by the Japanese, a time he did not talk much about as it was still painful even up to the time of his death. He moved with his family after the armistice back to Holland in 1947 after spending a year in Australia. He remained there till 1958 although he found Dutch life not his taste. He was not a small town character and began to travel the world, in particular to Switzerland, which he found very much to his taste and where he studied and worked for the rest of his life. His studies included Chemistry and Civil Engineering and he was also a polyglot, fluent in English, German, French, Italian and Dutch at the very least. He worked for many years for a building firm in Bern which brought him into contact with the Swiss Railway System which was to fascinate him for the rest of his life. He retired relatively early and operated for many years after as a freelance journalist, specialising in railways and also acting as a consultant for many various projects. He was also at one time the Peco representative in Switzerland.

He met his wife, Gloria, whilst they were youth hostelling, she was the rock behind him. Gloria is American and this unusual partnership and marriage lasted to the end, they had four children who have also, like their parents, travelled the world. They had homes in Kandersteg, Switzerland and Tenterden, Kent. When I say homes I should explain that the flat in Kandersteg was minute and the tiny cottage they had in Tenterden was nearly as small. They chose to live simply despite their formidable intellects. Better to be happy than be an integral part of the rat race.



George Hoekstra and Pauline Farr at Locarno.

I first got to know George when I edited *Swiss Express* to which he became a regular, valued and completely reliable correspondent. He introduced me to many well-known personalities within the Swiss transport industry and without his help it would not be the influential journal it has become within Switzerland. He stayed with me many times, in particular on his regular visits to the Warley Model Railway Exhibition and was often accompanied by his long standing friend and colleague Martin Von Meyenburg, the editor of LOKI. We also often went on jaunts round the UK visiting preserved and obscure railways. He grew fond of my family

and was surprisingly in awe of my wife Deb who was one of a select few able to silence him with a word, something I was totally unable to do. Not for nothing was he known as "der Sprachmaschine" to his friends, he could talk like no-one else I have ever met and annoyingly was almost always right. He had an incredible memory and would relay details of conversations we had had many years earlier, particularly during an argument or discussion. He enjoyed food, wine and loathed most television preferring the radio or reading.

Despite being on occasion one of the most irritating people I have ever met I am pleased and privileged to have known him and for him to have considered me a friend, he was intensely loyal to those whom he liked and was always ready to assist, offer advice and tell you what you were doing wrong!

George became unwell in January and by March knew that his illness was terminal. He took the news with great fortitude and was philosophical about his own demise. His suffering was short and he did not linger; he would have hated that and did not deserve it. He gave a lot and will be missed by his friends and colleagues.

The world has lost a remarkable eccentric man. 

RIP

Toggenburg

## Swiss Tip Some good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

When travelling between Bern & Luzern it can take only an hour by using services via the high speed line and Zofingen. It is far better to use the BLS trains on the old single line through the hills and along the river banks savoring the peaceful beauty and intimacy of this less important, rural 'main line'. It meanders through fields, farms, and villages, clambers up gorges and ravines on 1 in 45 grades, looks across at forests and snow-covered mountains. The route is the lifeline of the Entlebuch and the upper Emmental. Various branches lead off into remote and rustic corners and reappear at important junctions far away, huge farmhouses and two monasteries are on the way, every year it's broken somewhere by floods and landslides, and the faster trains, at least for another year or so, are hauled by Leviathans, the BLS 460 class, and made up of former SBB Swiss Express sets, with an unexpected air of style. A mini *Swiss Tip* is to take the PostAuto from the stop at Escholzmatt, to Kämmereibodenbad (just try saying it out loud) and have a notoriously huge lunch, with meringue glacée to follow. These trains serve a different kind of people and although they take a bit longer the trip is infinitely to be preferred.