

ED GILBERT

(06-29-1931 – 05-08-1999)
”THE BALOO I KNEW”

I was fortunate to have known Ed Gilbert for a couple of years in the early 1990s. I’ve been a huge Tale Spin fan ever since it’s premiere in Sept. 1990, largely because of Baloo from Disney’s 1967 version “The Jungle Book”, which still today is one of my favorite animated movies. I was not a big fan of television animation – until Tale Spin came on the air as part of “The Disney Afternoon” block of cartoons on then Disney-owned KCAL Ch. 9 in L.A. I was fascinated in the quality of the animation and the ‘mostly’ adult-based storylines. I was also amazed in the transformation of happy-go-lucky Baloo going from jungle bum to the ‘urban’ jungle of Cape Suzette and the fact that even lazy “Ol’ Baloo” would have to work, and would sacrifice his life & fortunes for others, including his ‘boss lady’ Rebecca Cunningham, “Lil’ Britches” Kit Cloudkicker, Rebecca’s daughter Molly and mechanic Frank Wildcat. The other JB characters (Like Louie and Shere Khan) fit nicely in their roles as entrepreneur businessmen in the TS world of Cape Suzette.

In early 1991, I was halfway through my undergraduate studies in Radio/TV & Film at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) when my advisor suggested I try out another internship. I said ‘sure’. It was in Hollywood, at KBIG 104 radio – and I took it for one semester. While at KBIG, I met someone who helped me meet Ed, sort of. His name was Greg Johnson, another intern who was going to another Cal State, CSUN (Cal. State Northridge) and we talked about Tale Spin (He was a fan, too) and the great stories coming out of the series. He knew someone who worked for Disney in Burbank and that he met some of the voice actors of the series, such as Jim Cummings and Ed Gilbert. I told Greg I would love to meet at least one voice actor. He said he would help. By summer, I was stressing out from studies, I was also in a fraternity (Acacia) I joined in the fall of 1990, and had problems from my girlfriend. Greg also knew I was very busy and had gotten stressed out at times, and he came back to me in late Sept. 1991 when he suggested I try yoga. I said, “Why Yoga?” He said he knew it could help my stress issues and he had used this instructor – who also helped Disney employees, actors and others try out yoga at an affordable price. I, being one who liked to try new things, said okay. I remember her name being Marisa and her home was in North Hollywood – near all the major studios. Greg came along with me to my first yoga workout in early Nov. 1991. I remember all the beetle & bug displays in her house, while the yoga studio was a converted garage in the back, nice foam mats covered the ground with incense burning from a window shelf. I didn’t meet Ed that first or second time, but Greg had met Ed there before. He knew, but didn’t really tell me until I asked the instructor if any Disney actors came to the yoga class. She said she knew a couple of actors and employees – including one guy named Ed Gilbert. I said “what?” I was shocked. I was finally that close of meeting Ed – I asked her when Ed was coming back. She said next week, I said if I could come to the workout, she said ‘yes’ – I was “gone”, like ... “real gone!!” I was finally going to meet Ed the following week.

Of all the TS voice actors, I wanted to meet “Baloo” (Gilbert) – my favorite character of all time. November 12th, 1991 – My ‘third’ workout, I arrived a little early, and I came by myself. Before Ed showed up I asked Marisa how she met Ed...she didn’t really tell me how long he was doing the yoga. She just told me she knew him for some time – (Later I realized Ed had suffered health issues that led him to the yoga class) and about his other interests such as insects including her interest in beetles as well. She told me Ed would bring ‘samples’ to her. She gave me info about Ed being from Chicago and had been a world traveler, bringing back beetles and other assorted bugs from South America. At 6:30 pm when Ed came in, I was in the garage sitting down being patient. He walked in and Ed was already in sweat pants. I was thinking “This was the voice of ‘Baloo?’ I thought I would imagine him a big man – but, he was only 5’10 and little older than I would have thought. He did sport a beard and looked pretty average in terms of weight. He sat in the front of me – I tried to not say anything while our workout, as in yoga you don’t chit-chat, you follow the instructor and keep quiet. We did small ‘warm-up jumps’ and jumping jacks, all while soothing Indian music was gently going in the background. I tried to keep my emotions down while concentrating on the mantra. It was not easy. I’m a big guy, and while Ed would easily bend his body with ease, I would stumble. Still, the exercises were fun and relaxing. Ed obviously had been doing this for a while - probably after working in a sound studio for hours this was a nice relief for him.

After our workout, I approached him. I introduced myself and commented “I’m such a big fan of yours” being the voice of Baloo on Tale Spin. I was a little surprised when Ed said, “Thanks and Marisa told me you were going to be here” (I guess the word was out). I spent about twenty minutes with Ed while changing clothes talking about Tale Spin. He told me he loved working on the series – It was a great experience. ”Much more than “The Transformers”, he said. I told him why he was picked over Phil Harris, and he told me “Phil was originally going to voice Baloo in Tale Spin,” Ed continued, “Disney shuttled a limo to Harris’ house in Palm Springs and drove him to the sound studios in this area (N. Hollywood) and after four takes, he said Harris didn’t ‘have’ it due to age and the fact microphones today are ‘a lot more sensitive and digitally clearer’ than the older metal coil analog microphones.” In other words, they had to get another voice. Gilbert was picked after two others failed. He did not tell me their names. He also talked about doing this upcoming voice over he was doing for “The Tom & Jerry Movie” by the name of “Puggsy” - He did Puggsy’s voice in my presence and I laughed. It was just as cool as Baloo’s. He did do Baloo’s voice for me, he just said “Ohhh yeah...” “Ol Baloo”. (I originally had forgotten, as I told Laura Ann Trombley he didn’t) He also explained he did beetle collecting and traveled around to collect and study bugs. Ed was that type of guy, he would tell you the world and he was very friendly and cordial. Between 1991 and 1993, I would have seen Ed a total of 20 times. Later on, we talked politics (He was a proud Libertarian) and traveling. He was always fun to talk to and one day when I was talking about Baloo to him, Ed would say, “Why are you so fond of Baloo - he’s an idiot, a buffoon”. I responded back, “He has faults, but he also has a heart of gold, like you.” Ed smiled...I got him. I said once to Ed why did Disney kill off Tale Spin after 65 episodes - I thought they should have made this show a long running series like “The Simpsons” (and competed head-on against them in prime time). Ed responded he had

hoped TS would have gone on, but they had this plan with “The Disney Afternoon” to make a series and then stop at 65 episodes, then move onto another project. Ed thought it would have been a great idea to make Tale Spin a long running series. “The series was based in the late 1930’s South Pacific la-la land – before WWII - The ingredients were there to extend the series, but they decided not to continue.” Ed said.

After the ’92 riots, I had ended my internship in Hollywood and was spending most of my time in the So. Bay area of L.A. and Long Beach – I only continued to go to yoga when Ed would be there. He was a busy man as he traveled, but he did give me his phone number and address, as he lived north of Beverly Hills. I never came to his house, but did meet his wife Virginia once at a workout (They both made a great couple). By 1993, I was about to graduate from Long Beach State and I stopped going to yoga on a regular basis as Ed stopped going too (I rarely saw him in class). I didn’t know (or forgot) he had a heart attack in ’89 or ’90 that caused him to reassess his priorities. Yoga was a great way to relieve stress and recover from health issues. I last spoke to Ed over the phone in the summer of 1994 – He told me he was working on another Disney project. He said he was very happy and he continued to travel, he also advised me of some stock ideas and travel tips. I remembered him telling me to ‘Keep Spinnin’ - As when he signed my comic book Tale Spin in Dec. 1991 with this inscription “Keep Yer Tail Spinnin’ and Don’t Fall Outta The Sky” Ed Gilbert “The Voice of Baloo”.

I miss you Ed, as I lost contact with you and didn’t know you were ill. I never got a chance to say goodbye face to face - but I will here now...“I enjoyed the times we’ve spent together, thanks for the memories and I will see you someday in the sky Poppa Bear”. Peace – Joe “The Bear” Gorla