



Portrait of an icon: Ratan Tata, up close & personal

We all know Ratan Tata the industrialist. He was in a class of his own. But what was he like as a person? What sort of childhood did he have? Were there women he loved but did not marry? And what were the things that mattered the most in his private life? Normally we would never have found out. The great joy of Thomas Mathew's recently published book *Ratan Tata: A Life* is that he reveals the answers.

Tata's parents divorced when he was just 10 and he was brought up by his grandmother. Lady Tata was a *grande dame* who lived in a huge mansion with dozens of liveried servants and a Rolls Royce.

When I interviewed him for the BBC, Tata insisted he wasn't spoilt but admitted

he'd been pampered. He said it with a wink and a smile.

Mathew tells us his parents' divorce had a huge impact on both Ratan and his brother Jimmy. It made them insecure. They were ragged, even humiliated, in school. At this point, he became very close to his grandmother; in fact, devoted to her.

After finishing Senior Cambridge, Tata went to America. His father wanted him to go to the UK to study chartered accountancy but he had set his heart on architecture. In the end, he got his way. Years later, the adult Tata designed his own house in Bombay called Halekai.

Tata fell in love with America. If his elderly grandmother hadn't wanted him back, Mathew says, "he would have stayed in America working and spending his life in

the US, which he calls his second home".

It was in Los Angeles that he met his first love, Carolyn Emmons. Her father Frank, his first boss, introduced them. There were three other loves in his life but Tata never married. In the BBC interview, he said other things took priority and it just never happened.

However, Tata kept in touch with Carolyn. She attended his 80th birthday in 2017 and Mathew points out "Ratan takes Carolyn out for dinner almost every time he is in the US". Am I wrong in sensing this is a bittersweet tale? It certainly feels like one.

Thomas's book reveals fascinating aspects of Tata's personality. For instance, he loved check shirts. "Nearly 90% of the photos taken when he is not in his formals, whether as a boy or in his adult years" feature him wearing a check shirt. He also had a fascination for cars. They were stored in a specially built basement in Halekai. American "muscle cars" were his favourite.

Those of you who saw his funeral on TV will recall how Goa, his dog, jumped up and sat beside the casket. That was a hint of how close Tata was to his dogs. Mathew reveals a fuller story.

You get the feeling his dogs were the children he never had. Most of them, it seems, were called Tito and Tango.

Mathew tells us of three generations with the same name!

In 2008, one of the Tangos broke his leg. Tata "scanned the world for a vet who could save the limb" and eventually flew Tango to Minnesota.

Towards the end of his life, Tito was his principal companion. "Today Tata has only Tito," Mathew writes, adding "for whom every evening is invariably reserved. He does not like anyone or any programme to disturb that schedule. He says that the time he spends with Tito is the best time of the day for him."

Perhaps unbelievably, Tata loved pranks. After he noticed that at board meetings elderly directors would take off their shoes, he would quietly kick them as far as he could and grin when the poor men couldn't find them. Of all the nuggets in Mathew's book, I found this the most delightful.

Of course, there's a lot more—including chapters on Cyrus Mistry, Tetley Tea, Corus, and Jaguar. How could that not be? But it's the personal details that grabbed my attention. I hope they've grabbed yours too.

Karan Thapar is the author of *Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story*.
The views expressed are personal