Opinion
News
Guest Voices

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II smiles as she leaves St. Paul's Cathedral with the Revs. David Ison

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II smiles as she leaves St. Paul's Cathedral with the Revs. David Ison and Michael Colclough following a thanksgiving service to mark her diamond jubilee in London June 5, 2012. (CNS/Reuters/Andrew Winning)



by Patricia Lefevere

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

May 31, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

From June 2-5, Britons will enjoy a four-day extravaganza marking Queen Elizabeth's 70 years as sovereign — the longest reign by a monarch in British history.

Millions in the Commonwealth of 54 nations, representing one-third of the world's peoples, will also celebrate the woman who has gloriously reigned through the tenure of 14 British prime ministers, 13 U.S. presidents, seven popes and seven Archbishops of Canterbury.

Indeed, one of Her Majesty's roles — besides being head of state and of the armed forces — is that of Supreme Governor of the Church of England. In this capacity and with guidance from the prime minister, the Queen appoints new archbishops, bishops and deans of the Anglican Communion.

Advertisement

Will Americans be interested in any of the falderal likely to be dispatched to our television, computer and phone screens June 2-5? Some perhaps, lured by the majesty of British royal events. Some admiring the stamina, longevity and resiliency of the 96-year-old ruler, recently widowed after 73 years of marriage to Prince Philip, the father of her four adult royals. Others "no way."

I for one will be watching in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Not long ago, I read that Dorothy Day once told Robert Ellsberg (then a college student, now a Catholic writer and publisher) that happiness comes with finding and loving your vocation. Often, we recall our vocation as inspired by parents, teachers, professors or mentors that have crossed our life, leaving their influence.

Mine, however, I owe to Her Majesty. No, I never strove to be a monarch or dreamed of living in a palace. But as a young child riding a Greyhound bus from Osseo, Minnesota, to Minneapolis, I was gifted with a copy The Minneapolis Morning Tribune . The man whose seat my mother had directed me to on the crowded bus had left his paper behind.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, pose at Windsor Castle Nov.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, pose at Windsor Castle Nov. 18, 2017, in celebration of their 70th wedding anniversary. (CNS/CameraPress handout via Reuters/Matt Holyoak)

Not that we did not get the same paper each morning at our farm in Rogers. I often carried it the long distance from our mail box to the house where my dad would claim the sports pages while my mom searched for the obituaries. Even before I could read well, I loved trying to figure out the different-sized headlines on the front page and looked deeply at the photos for what stories they might tell.

When I unfolded the paper left on my bus seat, what to my vision did appear but colored photos — the first I'd ever seen in this newspaper of the coronation of the British queen. My mother, sister and I had listened to parts of it on the radio the day before. Our house had yet to have a TV in 1953.

Little did I know that the forsaken broadsheet had been meant for me, that seeing it, opening it, being transfixed by the events that it reported would affect my life for

decades to come. I had hit upon hidden treasure.

I could not take my eyes off the picture of the Archbishop of Canterbury placing the jeweled crown on the head of the young queen. The photo reminded me of God the father placing a halo atop those who made it to the heavenly palace. Child that I was, I thought the archbishop resembled the grandpa figure in "Heidi." But Queen Elizabeth II looked older than Shirley Temple.

How exciting it was to see photos — these in black and white — of Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa climber Tenzing Norgay atop Mount Everest. The pair had reached the peak just days before the queen's enthronement. Even on the hot Greyhound, I shivered seeing them at the summit of the world's tallest mountains, their beards frosted with ice.

Further down the front page came news of a tornado ripping the tops off houses, barns and schools in a place I no longer recall. These pictures of utter destruction were also in black and white.

U.S. President Joe Biden and Britain's Queen Elizabeth II stand in front of the Royal Guard at W

U.S. President Joe Biden and Britain's Queen Elizabeth II stand in front of the Royal Guard at Windsor Castle June 13, 2021. (CNS/pool via Reuters/David Rose)

I needed to read on, to look inside. Where were all these events happening? To whom? Why such pageantry in England, such adventures in The Himalayas, such devastation closer to home? I longed to learn more.

Gently, I opened the paper so as not to bump the woman sitting next to me, content it seemed, to look out the bus window at greening acres and an occasional horse at pasture.

Oh my, I could feel my heart race as my eyes combed the inside pages filled with a half-dozen-colored photos of Elizabeth. One of her young children — Charles, only a few years younger than I — processing behind mom's long ermine train down the aisle of Westminster Abbey. Their dad, tall and taller with his plumed hat riding inside an open horse-drawn carriage seated with his royal family as tens of thousands of Londoners and others waved from the pavement.

Looking at that newspaper, I could almost hear the chimes of Big Ben, the steady bending toll of the bells ringing atop church towers across the city. Peel, peel, sound

the joy, clop, clop, listen to the stately mares carrying the monarch toward her Buckingham Palace home where the Queen Mother and sister Margaret await them.

> In the warmth of that bus seat in 1953, I made up my mind and my heart. My destiny was sealed. I would become a journalist.
>
> Tweet this

Clap, clap, "bravo, bravo" the sound of countless hands embracing and cheering Her Majesty only months after the sudden death of her father, King George VI in 1952 and Elizabeth's accession to the throne, and only 12 years since German bombs lit up the sky, boom, boom, scarring much of London.

O "The Ode to Joy" on that June morning aboard a Greyhound bus en route to Minneapolis to buy a wedding gift for a favorite uncle who served in London toward the end of World War II. O blessed glorious day after the coronation for the English world and its new queen.

O herald of Patricia's future. I had discovered a golden pea hiding in the Greyhound's mystery mattress. In the warmth of that bus seat in 1953, I made up my mind and my heart. My destiny was sealed. I would become a journalist. I would always be a lady in waiting — this close to royalty, to the highest peak, to storm clouds and to all who survive them.

Thank you, ma'am, for my vocation. I am your liege.