

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Two letters decades apart connect Queen Elizabeth II to the desert

Royal party came for 1983 visit with Annenbergs at Sunnylands

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The royal visit was anxiously anticipated. The Desert Sun reported in advance: "Hailing Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip when their jet lands at the Palm Springs Municipal Airport Sunday will be Palm Springs Mayor Frank Bogert; his wife, Negie; and Rancho Mirage Mayor Bill Hannon and his wife, Mary."

The desert in February 1983 was still a very small community. The arrival of the queen was a big deal for the valley. Special preparations were made, and the residents of the valley were duly notified that likely their only opportunity to see the queen would be from afar, "along the chain-link fence along El Cielo Road, directly across from the Department of Mo-

tor Vehicles." Those are the sort of directions only locals understand.

The newspaper, perhaps due to the small-town nature of the desert or just to be whimsical, coached the public on proper etiquette: "Do address the queen as 'Your Majesty' on the first reference and 'ma'am' thereafter. Of course, the British make it sound more like 'mum' when they pronounce it." Do shake hands if the queen or prince extend theirs. "This means a delicate grasp, not a pumping handshake you get from a used car salesman."

Don't ask for an autograph, as "Monarchs don't sign autographs. If you have her signature, it means you have performed some professional service to her country" and it is a very great honor. Further, "don't rush up to her to take a snapshot. One does not push an Instamatic into the royal face and click away."

Lady-in-waiting Susan Hussey accompanied Elizabeth and Philip on the visit to the desert and certainly understood the proper etiquette and the best of manners. Lady Hussey (now long-since Baroness Hussey) was at the the queen's side for decades. (She has received the Royal Household Long and Faithful Service Medal every decade for more than 60 years of



Letters

Continued from Page 21A

service.)

According to Wikipedia, Hussey is the fifth and youngest daughter of the 12th Earl Waldegrave and Mary Hermione, Countess Waldegrave. In 1959 she married Marmaduke Hussey, chairman of the Board of Governors of the British Broadcasting Corporation. She is the sister of the 13th Earl Waldegrave and, most interestingly, she is a godmother of Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, who, with the accession of his

father Charles to the throne this week, is now heir apparent.

The 1983 royal party, including Hussey, came to the desert to visit and have luncheon with the Annenbergs at Sunnylands. The Annenbergs had been good friends to the crown since Walter Annenberg's stint as Ambassador to the Court of St. James' from 1969 to 1974. The visit had been arranged by letter to the queen's private secretary, extending an invitation. The palace accepted, and all the arrangements were made.

Famous for sunshine, the newspaper reported the desert was instead "wrapped in a pall of drippy, typically English weather" for the royal arrival.

"But the persistent clouds and rain failed to dampen the enthusiasm of the more than 500 well-wishers in Palm Springs and 200 in Rancho Mirage who clapped and cheered to greet her." Always prepared, the queen "wore a tweedy lilac jacket and skirt, pearls, white gloves and lilac beret. She carried a handbag and an umbrella." She waved at the crowd at the airport in Palm Springs before being whisked off by limousine to Rancho Mirage.

The elaborate luncheon at Sunnylands was meticulously planned by Leonore Annenberg. The table was carefully set with Royal Copenhagen's Flora Danica china, the same used in the royal household. The Queen duly noticed the deft gesture and quipped that she had the very same dinnerware but "the Annenbergs had more of it."

The centerpiece display for the lavish table was of Boehm porcelain flowers, personally arranged by Mrs. Annenberg.

As a memento of the visit, Mrs. Annenberg gave the queen two gifts. The first was a Boehm porcelain of a cluster of California quails. The Desert Sun reported at the time: "The second, acquired from a collector, was a framed letter handwritten in 1935 by the Duchess of York, now Queen Mother. The message, a get-well wish to the recipient, also bears the signatures of 9-year-old Elizabeth of York and 4-year-old Margaret. Elizabeth, of course, grew up to become Queen Elizabeth II, who visited our desert community Sunday."

The royal entourage doubtless packed the precious porcelain and the framed epistle for their safe return to England.

Decades later, Hussey would have an amazing and improbable connection to the desert in the form of yet another letter.

In April 2021, The Desert Sun commemorated the previous visit with a story in this very column prompted by the death of Prince Philip.

At the time, mourners from all over

the world sent the queen condolences. One lovely sympathy letter written by Rancho Mirage Marian Moody took notice of the previous trip to the desert.

Moody explained to me a few months later: "In April (there was) an article in The Desert Sun about the (royal) trip to California ... I have dual U.K./U.S. citizenship ... and when I read your article, I thought that as I had decided to send the queen a condolence card, I would enclose your article. I knew that the royal family often sends an acknowledgement of correspondence they get but didn't expect a letter from the queen's senior lady-in-waiting Baroness Susan Hussey, whose official title is Woman of the Bedchamber to Queen Elizabeth II. Her deceased husband was Baron Marmaduke Hussey, sometime chairman of the BBC. I thought you would enjoy reading the letter ..."

Moody graciously forwarded to me the personal letter from Hussey. Printed on beautifully engraved Windsor Castle stationery, it read, "The queen wishes me to write and thank you very much for your kind message of sympathy on the death of Her Majesty's beloved husband the Duke of Edinburgh.

"It was also kind of you to enclose an article with memories of the visit made by the queen and His Royal Highness to California in 1983 which Her Majesty was interested to read."

"The queen has been deeply touched by the messages she has received from all round the world and is most grateful for your thoughtful words."

Baroness Hussey, who all those years ago was here in the desert for the royal visit, was chosen to accompany Elizabeth II at the queen's most sad occasion for: the funeral of her husband, Prince Philip last April.

Hussey is doubtless now bereft at Her Majesty's passing.

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