

Joan Collins

Memories of Princess Elizabeth

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I am completely and utterly devastated by the passing of our wonderful, inspirational Queen, as I'm sure are so many in our fair isles. It is the end of the brilliant Elizabethan era. I was so proud to have been part of her last Jubilee. After being driven along the circuitous pageant route around London, I finished up seated in the Royal Box, waving at Her Majesty in what would prove to be her last appearance on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, where she sparkled in emerald green.

This brought back memories of May 1945, when we were all celebrating the end of the second world war. My father drove his Riley Saloon as close to the gates of Buckingham Palace as was allowed, so that my mother, my sister Jackie and I could wave to the royal family while surrounded by cheering crowds. Princess Elizabeth was in her ATS uniform and seemed to be just as excited as everyone else.

The first time I became aware of the two young princesses was when my mother found an old book about King George VI's accession, which featured cardboard cut-out figures of the entire royal family. They were impressive in their crowns and ermine robes. Studying and playing with these books was once an extremely popular pastime for British children. There were pages and pages of cut-out outfits to put on the little princesses, so you could change their costumes at will. Every manner of outfit, from dressing gown to riding habit to evening

dress, was there and I diligently cut out and kept, in a cigar box, a wardrobe fit for a princess. It provided hours of fun in those pre-TV, pre-smartphone and pre-gaming days.

Then the most glamorous event in postwar austerity-riddled Britain was announced – the engagement of Princess Elizabeth to the dashing blond god Prince Philip. I went into overdrive with the scissors, cutting and pasting every photograph, postcard, picture and press clipping of the young couple and pasting them into a scrapbook. Excitement was at fever pitch, especially in the fourth form at Francis Holland, where we would swap scrapbook items with each other. We all cherished these scrapbooks and kept on filling them with more and more memorabilia until the magical wedding day in Westminster. Princess Elizabeth was movie-star glamorous in her exquisite Norman Hartnell gown, and everyone at school had a crush on Philip.

I followed the Queen's life with great interest and was simply struck dumb with admiration when I met her for the first time at the London premiere of *Dr Dolittle*. She seemed quite interested in how the filmmakers had constructed the iconic 'pushmi-pullyu'. 'It looked so real, almost as real as the other animals,' she quipped.

Since then, I have been fortunate enough to meet and be presented to her about a dozen times. Each time, she appeared genuinely glad to see me, flashing that brilliant smile. I was always struck by her sense of style and colour coordination in her outfits. From the girlish, wasp-waisted twentysomething to an elegant older lady, she always looked perfect for the occasion.

What I always admired was the depth and breadth of her knowledge, and her ability to spend time conversing sincerely with each guest. At a reading of *Pygmalion* during a Bafta evening at Buckingham Palace, we reminisced about the various iterations of this play and who had played the roles over the decades. Her Majesty was completely in control of her facts, and thankfully my knowledge of my profession did not let me down. The evening was quite casual, and it was the first time I met her with a glass in her hand (which I noted was just plain water).

When the Queen granted me my OBE, she was congratulatory (and perhaps slightly complicit?) when she remarked that I deserved the accolade, having been an actress 'for many decades'. I smiled, remembering her mother saying to me at a premiere that they watched *Dynasty* every week. 'And do you hate me, ma'am?' I enquired. 'Oh no, we all LOVE you,' she replied. I do hope that her daughter did too.

What other leader would get tributes on a such a global scale upon their death, with the Eiffel Tower, Washington Monument and even the Vegas strip paying homage? She was an absolute star, a 'one of a kind' and, in the true meaning of the word, unforgettable.

WRITTEN BY *Joan Collins*