

A Princely Life

FINDING PHILIP

IN HIS
OWN
WORDS

“Being married to the Queen, it seemed to me that my first duty was to serve her in the best way I could.

“You can take it from me, the Queen has the quality of tolerance in abundance.

“Lilibet is the only thing in this world which is absolutely real to me.

FROM A KITCHEN TO THE CASTLE

He was born on a table in Corfu and died at Windsor Castle. It was an extraordinary journey, writes **Kerry Parnell**

Prince Philip was an extraordinary man, not least because he had an extraordinary early life. Born on June 10, 1921, on the kitchen table of the family villa in Corfu, Philip was the fifth child and much-adored only son of Prince Andrew of Greece and Princess Alice, daughter of Prince Louis of Battenberg.

The idyll wouldn't last — at 18 months old, his family was exiled from Greece, transporting Philip in an orange crate on their journey to Paris. When his mother had a nervous breakdown and went into an institution and his sisters all left to marry German princes, a young Philip was shipped off to the UK, to his grandmother Victoria Mountbatten at Kensington Palace and prep school at Cheam in Surrey, ending up at the new Gordonstoun school in Scotland, with its radical curriculum of sporting self-discipline. Philip later credited his time here as the making of him. His happiness was interrupted in 1937 by the tragic death of his sister Cecilie and her family in a plane crash. Philip went to the funeral in Germany, where photos show him starkly standing out in his plain suit, among the

Nazi uniforms. The stateless, homeless, young royal was now taken in by Dickie, Lord Mountbatten, the man who would have the most profound effect on his future — steering him into joining the Royal Navy in 1939, aged 18, and harbouring, as it turned out, even loftier ambitions.

BECOMING PRINCE CHARMING

It was during a visit to the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1939 that a 13-year-old Princess Elizabeth first clapped eyes on Philip and her governess Marion Crawford later noted, she “never took her eyes off him the whole time”. When war broke out Philip was posted to a battleship escorting Anzac troop ships and saw action on his battleship Valiant, after which the young war hero was invited to Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

Elizabeth had decided he was the one but her parents were less enthusiastic, considering her too young. And courtiers were downright hostile, thinking him too rough, too unpolished and too German. Nevertheless, he popped the question, renounced his right of succession to the Greek throne and took the name of Mountbatten.

Having given up his past — he even had to ditch his Greek Orthodox religion — he was later particularly bitter that he was expected to give up his new family name, too, famously declaring after the news the Royal Family would be styled Windsor: “I’m nothing but a bloody amoeba.” In the end, he got his way and his descendants now go by the surname Mountbatten-Windsor. In 1947, their wedding ceremony in Westminster Abbey



was listened to on radio by 200 million people and footage was shown in cinemas all over the world.

Their first married years were some of their happiest, as Philip continued his active service based in Malta and Prince Charles and Princess Anne were born. But, in 1952, while in Kenya, the couple received the news the King was dead and their life would never be the same. The Queen was 25 and Philip 30.

WALKING TALL INTO LATER LIFE

In 1953, the pair set off on their long Commonwealth tour, arriving in Australia in 1954, where the crowd was as enchanted with Philip as they were the Queen.

It was in Victoria where a TV crew caught some unexpected footage of the couple having a bust-up, including tennis shoes and a racquet being hurled at the Prince. It was a slight wobble

on what would be a long, slow, journey together, with the couple becoming the longest-serving British monarchs in history. Two more children were born, Prince Andrew and Prince Edward, and although much has been reported of his distant relationship with Charles, he is said to have been a fun father, especially when the children were little.

Certainly, he was a loving grandfather, with one of his defining moments being the strength he showed to Princes William and Harry on learning of the death of their mother, Diana, telling the boys before the funeral: “I’ll walk if you walk.”

Despite health issues, he did not slow down, mentally or physically. And he was never happier than when chatting to the opposite sex — snapped aged 90 casually chatting to Gwyneth Paltrow and, the same year, enjoying an animated chat with Pippa Middleton after William and Catherine’s wedding.

THE LAST WORD

In 2017 Philip retired, aged 96, officially bowing out from royal duties with a tip of his

hat in the pouring rain at Buckingham Palace.

He spent his retirement at Wood Farm, Sandringham, carriage-driving and reading voraciously, before moving to Windsor Castle during the pandemic.

He was due to hit a century in June and was reportedly appalled by the idea there would be a party, telling a palace aide he wanted “nothing to do with any celebrations”. In the end, he got his own way.

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I think the main lesson we have learnt is that tolerance is the one essential ingredient in any happy marriage.

“

It's my invariable custom to say something flattering to begin with so that I shall be excused if I put my foot in it later.

“

I've just done what I think is my best. Some people think it's all right. Some don't. What can you do?

“

It is a complete misconception to imagine that the monarchy exists in the interests of the monarch. It doesn't.

PRINCE PHILIP
1921-2021



1997

He stood tall with his grandsons William and Harry, walking behind their beloved mother's coffin during the state funeral for Princess Diana.



1999

The entire family at the royal couple's beloved Balmoral Castle, where Prince Philip enjoyed taking his grandchildren on walks and hunts through the wild Scottish countryside.



2011

