

Dining Out

I've been "dining out on this story" for years...

In 1997 the Carriage Association of America board meeting was scheduled to be part of the annual CAA trip to Windsor. As a courtesy, Jill Ryder, Executive Director, invited HRH Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh to attend our board meeting knowing that because it was the opening of parliament and the Royal Windsor show he would probably be too busy to attend. Jill received a note saying that though Prince Philip would not be able to attend the board meeting, he would be glad to attend our luncheon. She promptly acknowledged his acceptance of our luncheon invitation. (A luncheon had not been on the agenda but now it was!) At the time, Stewart Morris, Jr., was President and I was one of the V. P.'s. Stewart informed the board members that we would be asked to introduce ourselves, our spouses and, in a few words, tell Prince Philip why we had joined the CAA.

How many different ways can you say "I like collecting and driving carriages?" If I could speak first, maybe what I said wouldn't sound trite. I asked Stewart if I could be the first speaker, but I didn't receive an answer. I had something "up my sleeve" but I didn't know if I had the courage to pull it out.

Jim and I arrived in Windsor the morning of the luncheon; thoroughly jet lagged. We went to our B & B and showered, my hair dryer blew up as it didn't like the electric converter and we rushed to the Harte and Garter for the luncheon. Steve and Lynn Olsen brought a case of California wine to be served before lunch but the board members were all too concerned about perfect behavior to take a glass. We had a crash course in how to behave with royalty—don't speak until you are spoken to and don't touch or shake hands unless HRH takes your hand—fat chance. There we stood like a bunch of wooden cigar store Indians afraid to say a word as it might be the wrong word. The Prince arrived and we all went in to find our place cards in the dining room. Low and behold my assigned seat was right next to Him! The Prince was sandwiched between Jack Pemberton and me.

Part way through the luncheon, Stewart stood up and introduced himself and thanked Prince Phillip for attending our luncheon. I think every board member was holding his breath. Stewart called on me. I stood up but I didn't introduce myself or Jim. I had decided to liven up our little group. If I said something a little outrageous and got a laugh, maybe everyone would relax. I said, "When I was a little girl, my mother told me that if I was good, someday I would meet a prince." Prince Phillip laughed, in fact he guffawed. The ice was broken and everybody laughed. Prince Phillip leaned over and asked me if I was good and I told him that I was very good.

I introduced myself and Jim and said that I began driving because of a love for horses and then became interested in carriages. I finished by saying that I had only been in England a few hours but I thought I knew the difference between an American and an

Englishman. An American thinks that 100 years is a long time and an Englishman thinks that 100 miles is a long distance. Prince Phillip laughed and pounded the table, too. It's not that funny so he must have been obliged to sit through a lot of boring speeches. The board members seemed to relax. No one was planning to say anything as outrageous as what I had already said. They were home free.

Prince Phillip was a stimulating luncheon conversationalist. He had firm ideas and those who know me feel I do as well. He asked, "What kind of horses do you drive?" "I drive crossbred ponies," I answered. He said, "You mean mongrels." I said, "No, I mean ponies with hybrid vigor." He asked, "What kind of carriages do you drive?" I said, "I prefer to drive antique carriages as I think the ride is superior." He replied, "I will only drive modern vehicles as antiques are dangerous." I replied, "I think it depends on the driver."

When the luncheon was almost complete, I asked the Prince about the Fell ponies he drove. I told him that I had only seen one Fell pony. He asked if I would like to see his ponies and before I could answer, Jack Pemberton leaned over and said, "If Vicki is going to see the ponies, we are all going to see the ponies." I've always been a little in awe of Mr. P. and maybe the Prince felt the same way because the next morning, 125 CAA members trooped into the Royal Mews to see the ponies and the carriages. As this tour was definitely not on the schedule, the staff had been up all night polishing the carriages.

The CAA trip provided a "once in a lifetime" opportunity for a woman who grew up on a farm in Wisconsin. Is it any wonder I "dine out on this story?"

Submitted by Vicki Nelson Bodoh, Past President CAA

Email your comments to Vicki by clicking here: vjb@centurytel.net