

For Beatrix, a home-coming of sorts

By Margo Roston
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According to most reports, she's bright, outspoken, lively, and popular with her subjects. And when Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands arrives in Ottawa this morning, many people will be anxious to wave a cheerful welcome to a queen who is making a return of sorts.

Tourists to Ottawa are often told that Stornoway, the official home of the leader of the opposition, is where she, along with her mother, then Crown Princess Juliana, and her sisters, spent the dark days of the Nazi occupation of Holland.

As Princess Beatrix, she lived in Rockcliffe from 1940, when her mother fled to exile in Canada, until August 4, 1945, with her sister Princess Irene and Princess Margriet, who was born in 1943 at the Ottawa Civic Hospital. To ensure that the baby would be Dutch, the Canadian parliament enacted a special bill declaring extraterritorial the area where the princess was born. On the same day, the Dutch flag flew from the Peace Tower.

The thousands of tulips about to bloom in Ottawa are a souvenir of those days — a thank-you gift from Crown Princess Juliana for the hospitality shown to her.

The family was separated until the liberation of Holland, with her father Prince Bernhard spending the war years in London, with his mother-in-law, Queen Wilhelmina, and the

Dutch government.

While in Ottawa, Princess Beatrix attended kindergarten primary classes at Rockcliffe Park Public School, where schoolmates and teachers called her Trixie, and residents of the area became used to the sight of the little princesses riding their bikes around the local streets or playing with Canadian friends at their homes.

Dr. Peter McLaine, a pediatric kidney specialist at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, remembers when they went to school together.

"We used to play at Stornoway and we used to sit in the car together. She was lots of fun, just like any other kid on the street."

McLaine saw her again when she and her sister Irene visited informally in the summer of 1953 and then again in 1961 when he was invited to Government House by then-governor-general Georges Vanier for a luncheon in the princess' honor.

"She was still called Trixie then," he remembers.

That practice stopped years ago. Renée Smith, a long-time friend whose mother was lady-in-waiting to Juliana during war years in Ottawa, says the formality of the present monarch is part of her personality.

"She's very conscious of doing things correctly and doing them well" (Beatrix, page D9)

Beatrix

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cut corners," says Smith. "She's also very aware of other people's feelings. It's true she's more formal than her mother. She's spruced up the job a bit."

Her mother had a very informal image in both Canada and Holland, becoming a familiar figure on a bicycle in Ottawa and afterwards at home.

After the war, Beatrix was educated at regular Dutch schools in the town of Baarn, near the royal palace of Soestdijk, and then entered Leiden University, where she studied pure and applied sociology, jurisprudence, economics, parliamentary history and constitutional law. She received her degree in 1961.

Her marriage to German diplomat Claus von Amsberg in 1966, caused anger amongst many Dutchmen, but with the birth in 1967 of Prince Willem-Alexander, the first male heir to the throne for more than a century, the Dutch began to accept the prince as one of their own.

The couple have two other sons, Prince Johan Friso, born in 1968 and Prince Constantijn, born in 1969.

Prince Willem-Alexander is an officer in the Netherlands navy and taking history at Leiden to prepare to take over as monarch some day.

A spokesman for the Queen points out that the Dutch princes have led as normal a life as possible, attending local schools and taking regular exams. They graduated from Dutch high schools, and the crown prince graduated in England from the Atlantic College. They are often in Amsterdam and The Hague at local discos where they like to go with their friends.

In 1980, Beatrix became the constitutional monarch of the Netherlands on the abdication of her mother Queen Juliana, who then reverted to the title of Princess.

"Beatrix is very intelligent and does her homework," adds Smith.

"She's bright and has an inquiring mind."

Just ask a lower level diplomat from New Zealand who is posted in the Netherlands. As he approached the Queen at her annual New Year's diplomatic reception in her palace in Amsterdam a couple of years ago, she instantly held out her hand and welcomed him in Dutch. To this day he's still wondering how she picked him out of the long line of diplomats and knew that he had been born and brought up in Holland.

A typical day in the life of the constitutional monarch, if there is a typical day, involves a heavy round of official duties and work, says a palace spokesman.

After breakfast and a thorough reading of the newspapers — acquaintances say she has no love for the media — she prepares to receive her closest advisers for a weekly meeting to discuss incoming mail, requests for her attendance at upcoming events, foreign visits and speeches she must make. This is usually followed by a meeting with the director of the

queen's cabinet who is the liaison between the head of state and the political side. This is the time the queen signs royal decrees and new laws which have been passed by parliament.

One afternoon a week, she meets with the prime minister and the late afternoon is the time for visits to events in the country.

Before dinner, the queen, together with Prince Claus, often meets informally with foreign diplomats or visiting dignitaries and after a family dinner, they might attend a concert or cultural event.

In a country known for its tolerant attitudes, where soft drugs are sold in coffee houses and euthanasia is openly discussed and practised, the Queen is a popular figure.

Crowds throng to see her ride in a golden carriage each fall when she goes through the streets of The Hague to open parliament and celebrate enthusiastically on her official birthday at the end of April. Although the birthday is really Princess Juliana's, Beatrix

accepted it officially as her own upon Juliana's abdication. The streets of Holland were especially lively this year as the Dutch celebrated their queen's 50th birthday.

"She's very popular," says Smith, "and very loyal to the people she cares about; her friends and associates. People don't forget that and that's a quality her mother has."

Known for her cultural interests, Smith says the queen is such a talented sculptress, she could probably make a living at it. She's also a well-known collector of Dutch contemporary art.

"She researches it well and knows what's going on in the country."

During her nine-day Canadian tour, the Queen and Prince Claus will visit Ottawa, Halifax, Quebec, Toronto, Burlington, Hamilton, Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria.

But she won't be having a nostalgia trip here. There'll be no visiting of old haunts. It's all strictly official business.