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# MAJESTY



## ELIZABETH R A BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE



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# Monarch in the Making

As the Queen prepares to celebrate her 83rd birthday, IAN LLOYD considers how those who influenced her formative years helped to make her the woman she is today



PRIVATE COLLECTION

**P**ARENTS' EVENING MUST be a daunting experience for teachers with an HRH in their class. When Elizabeth Clarke, headmistress of Benenden School, met the Queen to discuss Princess Anne's progress, she unwittingly discovered another problem. Having brought up the subject of the modern examination system, something nearly every parent would have experience of, she received a blank stare from across the desk. 'You'll have to explain that a little more fully,' the monarch said gently. 'Remember, I never went to school.'

The formal education of the future Queen Elizabeth II was, in the words of one biographer, 'essentially old-fashioned and somewhat limited'. Others have been more critical. While her fellow queens regnant, Margrethe of Denmark and Beatrix of the Netherlands, both attended school and university, the Queen's education was conducted firmly behind palace walls using teaching methods more or less straight out of a Jane Austen novel.

Nevertheless, while her schooling may have been limited, the young Elizabeth had lessons in statecraft, and life in general, from a close-knit group of relatives and staff that included her parents, grandparents, governess, nanny and nursemaids.

As with other upper-class households in the 1920s, day-to-day care of baby Elizabeth was very much in the hands of the nanny rather than the parents. The Duchess of York asked her own former nurse, Clara Knight, known to her charges as 'Allah', to look after the new arrival. According to biographer Anne Edwards, 'Allah was a dedicated nanny in the traditional style... She had her own ways and the Duchess seldom countermanded them.' The daughter of a Hertfordshire farmer, Allah had been brought up with deeply Christian principles, which she soon instilled into the Princess. ➤



In 1932 another Scots-born retainer joined the Yorks' household. Marion Crawford was only 23 at the time and had trained at Moray House in Edinburgh, where she taught underprivileged children, before becoming governess to the children of Rose Leveson-Gower, the Duchess of York's sister. The Duke approved of the choice, not for Crawford's academic prowess but, bizarrely, for her walking ability, since she was used to hiking six miles a day to reach her private pupils.

Had she driven to work or taken the bus instead, the royal family might have been spared the embarrassment of so many details of their private life appearing in print when 'Crawfie' wrote *The Little Princesses* in 1950.

At the time Crawfie became governess, it seemed likely that Elizabeth's 'Uncle David', then Prince of Wales, would marry and have a family of his own. The Princess would at some point have become the niece of the King and the cousin of his children. Perhaps it was with this eventuality in mind that the Yorks were, in the words of Crawford, 'not over concerned with the higher education of their daughters'.

Rather more concerned was Elizabeth's paternal grandmother Queen Mary, who remonstrated with her daughter-in-law over the fact that the children's education was confined to their governess.

'I don't know what she meant,' the Duchess of York told a friend defiantly. 'After all, I and my sisters only had governesses and we all married well – one of us very well...'

Crawfie's curriculum was based around singing, dancing, music and drawing until Queen Mary insisted that history and geography – particularly that of the British Empire – should be added. She herself later took them on what were ominously called 'instructive amusements' to museums or places such as the Tower of London and the Royal Mint.

Meanwhile Crawford, following the Yorks' orders that the girls were to have 'a really happy childhood with lots of pleasant memories', chose more relaxed visits to London Zoo, trips on the Underground, rides on the famous red London buses and tea at the YWCA off Tottenham Court Road. ➤

Allah was a strict disciplinarian and by the time Elizabeth was three she had been taught – at her grandmother's request – to stand still for long periods of time.

'Teach that child not to fidget,' commanded Queen Mary, and to ensure this was carried out successfully the pockets on Elizabeth's dresses were allegedly sewn up. Allah also made sure the young Princess could curtsey, respond to a salute, wave politely and, perhaps most importantly of all, control her bladder. The latter was achieved using the reward system of a biscuit, handed over on her return to the nursery if she had managed to contain herself.

An even greater influence on Elizabeth was Margaret 'Bobo' McDonald, who was first of all under-nurse to Allah and then, with the birth of Princess Margaret in 1930, was more or less in sole charge of Elizabeth while her sister Ruby helped with the new royal baby. From then on Bobo shared a bedroom with Elizabeth until the Princess was 13.

She was later promoted from nurserymaid to dresser and remained in service for 67 years until her death in 1993, at the age of 89.

'The forthright, red-haired Scots girl became the one person whom Elizabeth trusted outside her immediate family and had considerable influence over her, encouraging her to follow her own thrifty principles,' noted royal biographer Sarah Bradford. For instance, the Princess was made to keep a large box in which wrapping paper from Christmas and birthday presents was carefully folded away for future use.

Today, Bobo's lessons in good housekeeping are still apparent, from the moment the Queen helps herself to cereal from a Tupperware container on her breakfast table to the time she goes to bed, turning out the lights as she passes from room to room.





PA PHOTOS



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**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:**  
The Queen and Prince Philip visit Thames Valley University in west London on 20 February

Princess Elizabeth with King George V and Queen Mary after her first visit to Crathie Church, 1932

Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton receives his MBE insignia from Her Majesty at an investiture on 10 March

The York ladies and Allah Knight watch a hunt in Leicestershire in 1928



Newly-crowned Queen Elizabeth with Princess Elizabeth after the Coronation, 12 May 1937

Although Princess Elizabeth was only nine when her grandfather King George V died, the old man had already influenced her life in ways that are still apparent today. While visiting him at Sandringham, the King would take her to the nearby stud to see his favourite horses, Scuttle and Limelight. He gave her miniature model ponies to add to her growing collection and for her fourth birthday presented her with her first pony, a Shetland called Peggy.

As Sarah Bradford notes: 'It seems probable that Elizabeth's love of horses, racing and breeding racehorses was influenced by her grandfather's interest in them.'

When Edward VIII abdicated less than a year after the death of his father, the Duke of York acceded to the throne as George VI and his elder daughter became heiress presumptive at the age of ten. The new King and Queen decided their daughters' schooling should remain exactly as it had been to give them a stabilising influence amid all the disruption to their personal lives, including the necessary move to Buckingham Palace.

However, George VI began to prepare Elizabeth for the day she would succeed him. 'The King would talk to his elder daughter more seriously than most fathers would do to so young a child,' Crawfie observed. 'It was as if he spoke to an equal.'

Henry Marten, the Vice-Provost of Eton, taught the Princess constitutional history. She was also instructed in the rudiments of Latin and in 1942 the Belgian aristocrat Antoinette de Bellaigue joined the royal household to teach the Princesses French.

Queen Elizabeth made sure her daughters read 'the right sort of books' such as *Black Beauty*, *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* as well as stories from the Bible. She took the girls with her on some royal engagements, even when they were very young, so they would become familiar with the huge crowds of well-wishers and ever-present photographers.

Elizabeth was encouraged to attend luncheons when important guests were present. In 1942, Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the American president, sat next to the 16-year-old Princess and was very impressed, recalling later: 'She asked me a number of questions about life in the United States, and they were very serious questions.'

To help the Princesses mix with people of their own age, the King and Queen gave permission for the formation of the 1st Buckingham Palace Company of Girl Guides, though as an exercise in democracy it was limited. Most of the girls were the daughters of aristocrats and all were required to curtsy when the Princesses joined them.

The efforts of George VI and Queen Elizabeth to prepare their daughter for her future role reached a glorious climax with the 1947 royal visit to South Africa. It was the only time 'us four', as the King called his immediate family, would undertake an overseas tour together. The three-month imperial progress made a huge impression on Elizabeth.

Not only was it her first-ever trip outside the British Isles but it was also her first experience of Commonwealth and Empire, something that would later play a vast part in her life and reign.

Despite the limitations of her formal education, the Queen was certainly well prepared in other ways for the demanding task that lay ahead for her.

While Princess Margaret in later life was critical about her own lack of education, the Queen has given only one cryptic clue about the preparation she received. Speaking off-camera in the 1992 BBC documentary *Elizabeth R*, she reflected: 'I have a feeling that, in the end, probably, training is the answer to a great many things. You can do a lot if you're properly trained.'

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The Queen attends the Commonwealth Day reception at Marlborough House, Queen Mary's former home, in March