

A Brush with Royalty

“You will play a very important role at the Royal Event.” my boss said. After months of briefings and endless planning, the reception for 750 guests at St James’ Palace was just over a week away. I’d worked for Retail Trust as an Event Organiser for just over two years. Queen Elizabeth was the patron and the charity was celebrating its 175 year history. The event, in February 2008, had been in the diary since I’d started working at the Mill Hill Head Office. Colour co-ordinated spreadsheets were set up; every guest had to be ID checked, they were allocated an entrance to use and staggered arrival times. The Queen’s aide actually confirmed that the correct pronunciation was Ma’am as in jam, not Ma’am as in farm!

My son Joe, aged 19 and at university at the time, was invited to attend the Royal event as a guest, he had volunteered to help at the charity’s annual major fundraiser, The London Ball. It was held at The Grosvenor House for over a 1000 people, raising in excess of £1 million. We had many volunteers, but only a few were invited to St James’. Joe was told he would be in a group of eight that would be presented to Prince Philip. Of course not all guests would be so lucky!

I met many ‘celebrities’ whilst working at the charity and had brief conversations with them, Bradley Walsh, Brian Connolly, Ruby Wax, Jimmy Carr, Clare Balding and some of the Strictly cast. Supporters of the charity included Sir Philip Green and Mohammed Al Fayed. But this piece is not long enough to talk about those, so back to my brush with royalty!

The day arrived, it was bitterly cold, in the grand reception rooms of St James’s Palace you could see your breath. We were told the heating would be put on half an hour before the guests arrived at 5.00pm, we got there at midday. The guests were spread through 4 large reception rooms, each separated by two sets of large double doors.

The moment arrived, Joe was presented to The Duke of Edinburgh,

“So what do you do?” said Philip.

“I’m currently studying at Canterbury University, but I volunteer at the charity Sir.”

“Oh so what does volunteering involve?”

“I help with fundraising at the London Ball Sir.”

“Is there dancing at the ball?”

“Err yes Sir.” Joe started to blush.

“What like girls up on stage go-go dancing? Or is everybody waltzing around?”

Joe later admitted that he had no idea what ‘go-go dancing’ was. Prince Phillip was moved on whilst Joe mumbled something about ‘just modern dancing Sir’!

I am including a photo with this piece, can you spot me? I’d like to tell you my important role was presenting Prince Phillip to the guests and that is me on his right, it could be couldn’t it? But remember the double doors I mentioned? If you look at those you can probably just make out a dark haired woman in front of the doors, yes that’s me! My important role was to open the door for HM the Queen when she was ready to leave the room. She nodded and thanked me, I had to bow and

do a bit of a 'bob'. But I was fortunate to hear her talking to our pensioners and she was utterly charming, with the most beautiful complexion.



As a post-script to this story, the event was mentioned on News At Ten that evening. It was the same day that Mohammed-Al-Fayed had spoken at the inquest into the crash that killed Princess Diana, claiming that Prince Phillip had ordered the British security services to murder Diana and Dodi. Mr Al-Fayed had not been invited to the royal reception....