

A GOOD ROYAL SHAKE: JENNY SHEEHAN

The green manicured lawn was unlike our suburban backyard with the mulberry bush against the hardwood fence and six chickens scratching out patches of dirt. The dress and high heels I borrowed from my best friend for the occasion, had me walking ungainly on the grass to the end of the line where others stood in all their finery.

In 1985 I accepted an invitation because, 'why not'.

I stood waiting for the guest of honour, dehydrating under a warm Australian sun. His entourage appeared. We were briefed.

'Physical contact prohibited. Men must bow, women curtsy'.

My palms started to leak sweat, I needed to practise my curtsies. It was too late, here he comes, phew, he's starting at the other end.

The modern woman of the monarchy wasn't by his side. I looked towards the splendid Victorian architecture, scanning windows over three levels. Did that curtain move? Was that her willowy frame gliding past?

If the rumours were true, then she's probably happy to have him out of the house for a while. I held my arms beside me like a soldier standing to attention and repeated a silent mantra inside my head.

Curtsy. Curtsy. Curtsy.

As he sidestepped along the congo line, men bent at the waist, presenting the top of their heads, strands of hair wispy in the breeze. Women crossed their legs and half squatted down and up again, performing for the guest like he's a new style, gym instructor.

He's closer now and I can hear his British accent. Oh, he's quite handsome, isn't he? I was infatuated straight away.

I no longer cared for Diana. I was happy to have him to myself, if only for a moment.

'And here are the participants from Operation Raleigh'. The aid whispered into his oversized ear.

My arms stretched forward, unhinging from their military position. I grabbed his smooth pale hand in both of my clammy palms and gave him an enthusiastic handshake with a pearly smile.

'Hi, I'm Jenny. Nice to meet you'.

He chuckled.

'So, what are you doing with yourself now, Jenny?'

'Oh, well, nothing. Can you give me a job?'

He smiled. 'What can you do?'

I shrugged. 'I could teach you to surf?'

His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was sincerely amused. My rosacea flared when I gushed in the presence of a real-life Prince Charming.