

Steve Glines

How I met the Queen in a Canadian cornfield

In the summer of 1973 I hitched a series of rides from Boston through Maine and New Brunswick to my mother's house in Pictou County Nova Scotia. It's hard to describe the location any better than that because she originally lived in a hamlet called Poplar Hill ... until the Poplar Hill School, a one-room schoolhouse across the street from my mothers house, closed. From there her address wandered from RR2, Meadowville to RR2 Scotsburn and finally to RR2 in the unincorporated county of Pictou. Civilization had abandoned Poplar Hill. All my mother would say was that she was four miles up the Tony River road between Tatamagouche and Antigonish.

Since there wasn't a lot to do in Poplar Hill I decided to hitch a ride to the PEI ferry and to spend a couple of days at my favorite beach, Cavendish Beach on the northern shore of Prince Edward's Island. Cavendish Beach reminds me of the Cape Cod Seashore without tourists. Cavendish is a five-mile long expanse of brilliant white sand and (relatively) warm water. My plan was to hike in a couple of miles and camp for a couple of days before heading back to Boston.

The ferry ride to PEI was uneventful and a single hitched ride got me to Charlottetown. The road to Cavendish beach is a straight shot out of the city on a small two lane paved road known as provincial highway 15. Calling it a highway is generous. I once got a ride the last mile or so to the beach on a hay wagon. It's that kind of a road. It's not the kind of road where you are likely to encounter a traffic jam.

But a traffic jam is exactly what I ran into that summer morning. About 10 minutes out of the center of Charlottetown traffic stopped. We were about 15 cars back so I got out, threw my backpack over my shoulders and marched to the front of the line of cars where a single Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman in full red regalia had stopped traffic. I asked what was going on and with a flourish befitting his full-dress uniform pointed to the middle of a cornfield and said, "The Queen is arriving!"

There was a small road to the right that looked more like a farmers driveway than the entrance to the Charlottetown airport but that's what the sign announced so up the driveway and into the cornfield I went backpack and all. At the top of the small hill, about a ½ mile up was the terminal. It was a small cinder block building about the size of three garages. There was no one in sight but on the tarmac there was a small roped off area that looked like it had been set up for a reception. I walked over to the corner of the reception area, dropped my backpack and waited. Fifteen or twenty minutes later a caravan of limousines arrived and out popped a dozen or so little men in top hats and tails. I remember

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them all being extremely short because I could see over the tops of their top hats when they lined up next to me. No one said a word. *Alice, Alice are you listening?*

Another ten minutes had passed before a Canadian Forces helicopter set down about 30 yards from where we were standing. Pierre Eliot Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada and his wife Maggie hopped out and walked over in our direction. I had long hair, a long beard, was clearly out of place and grinning from ear to ear. Trudeau looked at me grinned, shook his head and walked off to greet the leader of the little men in top hats. Maggie stifled a big laugh. There were a few more minutes of milling about before an Air Canada jet buzzed the field. This was the signal, apparently, for things to happen.

A Canadian forces truck arrived and men in fatigues hopped out dragging rolls of red carpet. They quickly ran a length of carpet from where the aircraft was expected to stop back in our direction. It didn't quite reach so they moved the reception area forward 15 feet. No one said a word. When the Air Canada aircraft taxied in our direction the pilot opened the window and held out a British flag. I never knew until that moment that they could open the windows on those airplanes. The plane stopped precisely in front of the red carpet. The cabin door opened and a set of stairs emerged from the aircraft landing precisely on the edge of the red carpet. After what seemed an awfully long time a dozen or so women in black came tumbling out of the aircraft. I guess ladies in waiting wear black. After another very long spell Prince Phillip emerged from the aircraft saluted every uniform in sight and shook hands with Pierre and Maggie Trudeau.

After pleasantries all round the Prince, the Trudeaus and the collection of ladies in black formed a cordon leading in *my* direction along the red carpet. When all was set the Queen emerged from the aircraft and descended the stairs. She shook hands with the Trudeaus who bowed and curtsied then formed up behind the Queen who was followed by the Prince, the Trudeaus and the ladies in black last. She came straight towards *me!*

She kept it straight. She had the most faint outlines of a pleasant smile across her face but her eyes were focused at infinity. If she saw me she never let on. I bowed politely, she nodded her head, the little men in top hats and tails bowed politely, she nodded her head. Behind her Prince Phillip made a concerted effort not to notice me until he was well past when he finally turned his head, we made eye contact and he let out a quiet chortle then proceeded on nodding to the little men in top hats as he passed. The Trudeaus were beside themselves and were obviously having trouble keeping from having hysterical fits. Pierre Trudeau was so obviously not looking at me that he almost ran over the Prince. Soon everyone was nestled in their limousines and rushed off with RCMP escort. I walked back down the road and hitchhiked to the beach.