



Keep calm and inspiring and carry on

Description

The British monarch Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her 94th birthday

By **Byron Toben**

Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom turned 94 last April 21.

Like some British monarchs before her, the State celebration of their birthdays occurs later, in June, with a colourful “Trooping of the Colours”. The second birthday was instituted so that the procession, horses and all, could take place in better weather. This year, it was abated with the COVID-19 scare.



Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip in 1950 – Image:
[Unknown author](#) / [CC BY](#)

Elizabeth, from an unlikely beginning, has now served as Queen for 67 years and is the oldest living head of state in the world (see the end of this article for the runners-up).

Funny how so many factors interacted to result in her regency.

When she was born, her father, **King George VI**, was the younger son of **King George V**. The older son became **King Edward VIII** upon the death of George V in 1936.

However, Edward, who had been a bit of a rake in his days as the popular Prince of Wales, became enamoured of a twice-divorced American-born socialite, **Wallis Warfield Simpson** and planned to marry her. This broke the rules of the Church of England of which the king is the nominal head of. After considerable negotiation, Edward decided to abdicate and did so in 1937.

This situation was presaged by **G. Bernard Shaw** in his 1928 play ***The Apple Cart*** and more specifically in his 1936 playlet ***The King, the Constitution, and the Lady*** published in Canadian born **Lord Beaverbrook's** London Evening Standard. (I am familiar with this as I arranged a dramatic reading of this rare piece several years ago at the Atwater Library.)

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and keeping calm and inspiring through successive governments... and through various family disagreements.

Ms. Simpson, condemned by all for causing this, may actually have done the world a favour as Edward became inclined toward the rising German dictator, one Mr. Hitler and as King, might have joined in, as did Italy and Vichy France.

Anyway, this turn of events elevated younger brother, George VI to the throne where he served during WW II. His daughter, Elizabeth served as a valued ambulance driver during those hostilities, becoming handy as a mechanic.



Visiting Birmingham in July 2012 as part of her Diamond Jubilee tour – Image: [West Midlands Police from West Midlands, United Kingdom / CC BY-SA](#)

Later, George VI, who had struggled with a stuttering problem as depicted in the 2010 Oscar-winning film *The King's Speech*, passed away in 1952 at age 57, thrusting Elizabeth onto the throne at age 27.

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Her husband **Prince Phillip** turned 99 this week and her mother, the Queen Mum, passed away at 101 in 2002. Her eldest son **Prince Charles**, at 71, is already the oldest heir apparent in British history. Life spans have decidedly increased since the first Queen Elizabeth I left this mortal coil in 1603 at age 70.

Since Queen Victoria, the royal family has been reputed to use holistic and homeopathic methods into their



wellness practices.

Oh yes, I promised to list the runner-up heads of state in age. They are:

- 92 – **Sheik Sabah Al-Asad Al-Jaber** of Kuwait
- 89 – **Raul Castro** of Cuba
- 87 – **Sir Colville Young** of Belize
- 87 – **Paul Biya** of Cameroon
- 85 – **Michael Aoun** of Lebanon

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Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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