

COLUMBUS

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Alive

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Swingtime
what to read
while you're kickin back
THIS SUMMER

Royalties

by Rich Warren

I was reluctant, even frightened, to turn my head and see who was approaching me, but when I finally did, I too was rather astonished to see who was creating such a sensation. It was Queen Elizabeth. Wisely, she had elected not to venture into this neighborhood wearing her diamond tiara and was instead clothed in a blue-green paisley house dress she easily could have borrowed from my mother.

With the untimely demise of my employment with Conical Abstraction Syntheses, I was faced with the wolf at my door and two hungry felines to feed. Undaunted I decided to view my newly penniless state as an opportunity, not a setback, and gave my imagination free rein as to new employment possibilities—no slinging of hamburgers for me!

Sadly, the world did not embrace my first business venture—an exercise video by the Unabomber. OK, his hair is little unkempt, but the man clearly knows how to keep himself in tip-top shape. So I moved into the lucrative world of magazine publishing, a market one would think has been cornered by *Publishers' Clearinghouse*, but I assure you that is not the case. I found myself a comfortable little niche peddling magazine subscriptions. My angle, inspired because of, not in spite of, its very obviousness, was to buy five magazine subscriptions and get the sixth one free. You'd think someone would have thought of this by now, but apparently there are enough dentist offices, beauty shops, and muffler repair garages needing a supply of materials to grab out of their patrons' hands just before finishing an article that a modest financial success came my way. No, I wasn't on Easy Street, but I was certainly on Breathe-a-little-Easier Avenue.

One Friday evening I decided I might afford a little outing with my friends. A new eating establishment had opened I was anxious to try where all the trendy people of our metropolis might be seen savoring highly imaginative cuisine such as a pork chop lathered in yogurt and granola. Never mind that it was situated in a part of town that made Bosnia look like Disney World—the beautiful people found it all the more chic to jaunt into this urban war zone where their peers might admire their adventurousness.

The restaurant's theme screamed "Parisian Bistro" and the terraced effect of the dining room established a distinct pecking order. I was in such festive spirits I decided not to be bothered when my friends and I were seated at a table on the lowest level. Besides, we were all the closer to the floor show, a bevy of show girls a la Las Vegas whose rendition of *Let Me Entertain You* couldn't be faulted. And too, we couldn't have been situated in a better place for the full effect of what happened next to be viewed by our city's loftiest personages.

The floor show had ended, and I was languidly picking at the remains of my chocolate-covered chicken when I became aware a hush had fallen over the room, and everyone, including my companions, was staring, mouths agape, at a point directly behind my back. Obviously, someone had just entered, and I could perceive from the direction of the silent stares that this someone was moving in my direction. Good God, I thought, is it the Unabomber wanting his share of the royalties?

I was reluctant, even frightened, to turn my head and see who was approaching me, but when I finally did, I too was rather astonished to see who was creating such a sensation. It was Queen Elizabeth. Wisely, she had elected not to venture into this neighborhood wearing her diamond tiara and was instead clothed in a blue-green paisley house dress she easily could have borrowed from my mother. Indeed, I was struck by how much in person she really did resemble



my mother, standing there looking regal yet haggard all at one and the same time. I was surprised I had not heard she was in town since I usually keep up with visiting celebrities. Admittedly, however, just last week Joycelyn Elders managed to pass through without my finding out until later.

In the queen's hand, instead of that ratty purse she usually carries, was clutched a newspaper clipping of an advertisement I had placed to announce my new business venture. There, in type big enough to be read across the room, was my offer: "Buy 5 magazine subscriptions and get the Sixth one FREE!"

"I would very much like to learn more about this," said the queen. In that instant, I was filled with such a palpable happiness that I wanted to kiss her, despite the scene this would have created. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that all over the room people had pressed their heads together and their tongues were obviously wagging about the monarch's interest in my offer, yes MY offer. I knew then that the queen's interest was sufficient to catapult me into the very creme de la creme of our city's high society. Almost breathless with excitement, I assured the queen I would be all too happy to provide her with all the details she wanted. Clearly, however, she was loath to discuss business in front of the common people, so she pressed a little card into my hand and beseeched me to please stop by later and why not bring along my nice friends?

And so it was the very next day I found myself

with several of my friends traipsing the sidewalks of a neighborhood that had clearly once seen better days. I was surprised the British monarch had not established herself in one of our tonier suburbs, but suddenly I was struck with what an astute woman she was. By economizing in her living situation in some of her lesser-visited locales—and also by taking advantage of such money-saving schemes as getting a sixth magazine for the price of five, she could then afford more lavish accommodations at places like Windsor or East Anglia. Besides, this very business-smart woman had to know that by taking residence in this once genteel but now faded neighborhood would assure its gentrification *toute de suite*, as well as a hefty increase in her property value.

Still, I was surprised when we finally located the address on her card. It was a frame structure with peeling paint and hideous green and white awnings. There was no yard to speak of—the porch abutted almost directly onto the street itself. Where would her little Corgis romp? It was with much doubt that I knocked on the screen door. But no, it was opened by some sort of wait person—a valet, a footman, possibly even a butler (I can't pretend to distinguish among the various strata of domestic help of the British upper classes.) He informed us that Her Majesty was not quite ready for our call, and indeed we were able to verify this fact with our own eyes. In the distance across several empty rooms (the furniture was obviously still in transit), we caught a glimpse of a door opening, behind which stood her Highness herself, clad only in a slip. Her disdainful expression revealed her awareness that she was visible to us, but she silently yet clearly communicated her conviction that "It doesn't matter what I'm wearing. I AM THE QUEEN!!!!" She apparently carries this same attitude with her even in her public appearances.

As an embarrassed lady-in-waiting closed the door to block our view, the butler asked us if we would be so kind as to wait on the porch, which we did, a little discomfited since there were no lawn chairs or porch swings for us to rest on, but then perhaps the titular head of the British Commonwealth had not had time to learn our Midwestern ways. In due time, the butler returned and escorted us to a sitting room upstairs and in the rear of the house. The only furnishings were a couch in the style of Ethan Allen covered by a slimy green throw and several wingback chairs enshrouded by ill-fitting slipcovers.

The queen was not yet present, although we could hear her bustling around in an adjoining bathroom. When the door opened, we were relieved to see she'd put on a bathrobe and fluffy pink slippers. At least we wouldn't have to avert our eyes and pretend she wasn't properly dressed. Her haughtiness had for the moment evaporated, and she was hospitality itself, even serving us some little cucumber sandwiches, quite surprising in their tastiness considering the British abhorrence for anything resembling flavor in food.

The queen sat on the couch next to my friend Debbie, a large-boned, rather bovine redhead who smokes incessantly but who had the good sense not to light up at present. Debbie is rather loud, and her laugh—well, it's not so much a laugh as it is an explosion. In years past, she could be seen hanging out at the Greek-American clubs on the east side of Akron (near Goodyear), chain-smoking unfiltered Camels and knocking back shots of Ouzo. Then she would get up and languidly take part in that circular Greek dance, going through all the motions hoping to convince you it was her heritage (it's not). And now here she was chatting up the queen of England, who, amazingly, was eating it all up, not even appearing to mind when Debbie

Parallel past

Continued from page 13

invite complete strangers into your home? They'll steal your silverware! They'll break in during the night and kill you in your sleep!"

"You have to learn to trust people," I told my friends. "The world is too much filled with suspicion." But then I decided it might be prudent to also invite all those paranoid friends for use as human shields should any of the other Richard Warrens arrive packing a pistol.

I had fun planning the party. I thought about making all the other Richard Warrens wear name tags. I giggled about the photo IDs I'd make for my scrapbook: "From left to right: Richard Warren, Richard Warren and Richard Warren."

I prepared cutesypoo invitations. "It's a party OF Richard Warrens. BY Richard Warren. FOR Richard Warrens," my invitations trumpeted. I used color ink on a laser printer, adding fancy graphics. I said a quiet prayer, then gave away the potentially dangerous information of my phone number and the location of my home. And then I waited. And waited.

For nothing. The phone didn't ring. None of my namesakes troubled themselves to respond. Neither did my friends. People of Columbus, didn't your mothers teach you anything? When you get an invitation, it's rude not to RSVP! How are your hosts going

to know how much spinach dip to purchase at Big Bear?

Finally one of my friends told me that if he received such a strange invitation in the mail from someone bearing the same name he'd never consider going. "Maybe you should follow up with a phone call to let them know you're on the up and up," he said.

And so the day before my party I started dialing the phone numbers of the other Richard Warrens of Columbus. In four of the six calls, I thankfully got answering machines into which I left long rambling salutations. Boiled down to its essence, my messages were something like, "I am not a madman. Please come to my party."

On the fifth phone call, one of the Mrs. Warrens answered, much to my horror—and to hers. Her tense voice betrayed her belief that this was just too weird for words.

"We're not going to make it," she snapped, acting as though the telephone were burning a hole in her hand and she couldn't drop it fast enough.

On the sixth call, another Mrs. Warren answered, an elderly lady who was obviously thrilled anyone had taken the trouble to call her. "Well, I don't get around much anymore," she confided. "I walk with a walker." I thought of the 14 steep and slippery steps into my home, but did not offer to hand carry Mrs. Warren up them.

Finally I concluded there were no other Richard Warrens in the world with a sense of adventure, and that most likely I'd be the only one present

at my party. I thought maybe we could do role plays, acting out what other glamorous activities the other Richards were doing on this summer Saturday, perhaps sipping aperitifs on the Cote d'Azur or, more likely, plying a fishing boat across the placid waters of Buckeye Lake. Perhaps we'd all get a little tipsy and call up the other Richards and berate them for not coming, like giggly teenage girls at a slumber party calling up boys and hanging up.


The afternoon of my party I arrived home from the grocery to find a message saying, "Hello Iuka Richard. This is Granite Richard. We'd like to come to your party. What time does it start?" Before I could call back, Granite Richard called again, asking what he could bring. We talked as if it were the most natural thing in the world, like we were old friends. I felt confident he didn't plan to stab me in my sleep.

Appropriately, they were the first to arrive—Rick Warren and his very pregnant wife, Laura, both infectiously friendly and downright fun. They had been charmed by my earnest protestations on their answering machine that I was not a crackpot. I warmed to them at once, as did my friends when they started trickling in. We joked, we laughed, and Laura regaled us with stories of their unborn daughter who, when hungry, tends to yank on the umbilical cord like an uppercrust dowager calling the servants. The other Warrens didn't blink an eye when the conversation turned towards the truly tasteless, as it so often does when I'm around. They were just all around good

sports. There were 14 of us that evening, and we just sat in a circle and guffawed.

When they took their leave, there were no insincere insistences of "Let's do this again real soon," but I felt as though I could call them and make such an invitation. Little did they know how quickly that next call would come. Just a few days later, I left another long rambling message telling them of *Columbus Alive's* interest in this article, asking their permission and assuring them I'd give away no details about them.

When they didn't return the phone call, I panicked. I figured they were now seeing me as a lunatic who would never stop calling. They probably feared they would come home some day and find their pet rabbit boiling on the stove. I was so relieved when they did call back and said "Fine. Go ahead." See? I told you they were good sports.

When I was in college, there was a rock group in town—all lesbians and all named Betty. They were known as (what else?) the Bettys. Just a couple years ago there was a convention here in town entirely of women named Linda. I propose a national convention of the Richard Warrens of America, who I'm sure are just as much fun as me and Rick. Certainly it would be a far merrier gathering than, say, a meeting of Bob Smiths. It would be a national brotherhood of sorts, a bonding among any number of potential doppelgangers. And for the world, we could offer a far more comprehensive overview of what it's like to be Rich. 

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Dancer: David Bloor. Photo: George C. Anderson

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For Tickets & Schedule:
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