

The Master of the Household Receives a Command

by Dave Doroghy

One thing so often leads to another. It's the small link that leads to another link, that leads to another link, that just keeps on linking life's events together. The links lead to somewhere but you never know where, and that's what makes the chain so fascinating.

The day I stood in Buckingham Palace speaking to Queen Elizabeth, how I got there all made sense to me. I could trace each link back, and understand perfectly well how it all came to be. Although it was a completely magical and surreal experience, just the same I knew how a chain of events linked me there. Was it merely coincidental? No. Was it cleverly orchestrated? No. It was somewhere in between. I'll explain the links at the end of the story but it was such a hoot meeting the Queen, I want to get straight into that now.

Thousands of people meet the Queen every year. She is very good at meeting people and that essentially is her job. That's the way I see it; she is a professional meeter-greeter. And she's good at it. She's probably one of the world's best small talkers , the "Hostess with the Mostest". And once you've met her, you can sense how she has spent a lifetime offering small talk and pleasantries to people from every corner of the world. Doing it all day, every day, she has carefully honed her skill. And she is so sweet and sincere in the way she meets you. She's like your grandmother, but I wouldn't say she has the "common touch" like your grandmother, because that would defeat the purpose of meeting her. She makes you feel so special. But then, how do you expect to feel after meeting the Queen?

And it is special , really special. Even if she meets tens of thousands of people every year, there are six billion of us in the world. I don't even know anybody else who has met her. I'm not boasting, just stating a fact. And I got to meet her at Buckingham Palace , her house. That makes it just that much more special. Even if you don't think it's that special, it made me feel really special at the time and that's worth a lot to me.

First of all, to meet her at Buckingham Palace you have to be invited. The invitation I received was in a big, thick envelope. The kind you get when you are invited to a wedding. You know it is important just by its feel. If you had a pile of envelopes waiting for you at home on the floor under the mail slot, it would

definitely be the first one you would open. On the outside it was addressed to Dave Doroghy, Esquire. That got my interest right off the bat and I carefully opened the envelope. The invitation card itself was on thick, cream-coloured textured card stock. It featured raised, embossed golden letters with the EIRR coat of arms, with my name hand-written in fancy calligraphy. I received the invitation a month before the reception, so I had lots of time to look at it in amazement and amusement. Although you could sense it was a special invitation just by the stationery, card stock and graphics, it was the wording that made an impression on me.

It read:

The Master of the Household has received Her Majesty's command to invite Mr. Dave Doroghy to a reception to be given at Buckingham Palace by The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games Bid on Wednesday, 23rd June 2004 at 6:30 p.m.

In small print below, it read: A reply is requested to: The Master of the Household, Buckingham Palace, London SW1A 1AA, Dress: Lounge Suit / Day Dress, Guests are asked to arrive between 6:00 p.m. and 6:20 p.m.

I read it in disbelief. I put it down, picked it up again and then asked myself: just what the hell is a lounge suit? Surely she doesn't mean a leisure suit? Remember those funny-looking pastel-coloured suits popular in the early eighties, with the big pockets and funny wide lapels? The Queen couldn't want us to dress like that. The weekend before, I had received an invitation from one of the women at the office, who had organized a Starsky and Hutch party for her thirtieth birthday, and we were instructed to dress in disco get-ups. No, there must be some kind of mistake; this couldn't be a theme party. I soon found out that "Lounge Suit" simply meant business attire. In other words, a plain old everyday suit for the men.

Next practical question: how do I reply to the Master of the Household? The envelope contained the fancy invitation, a sheet of paper with security and joining instructions, and a small red numbered card to identify me. There was no stamped reply envelope with a card that had a box you tick to let the Master of the Household know that you would be coming. I asked around the office, and was told that only a specially worded reply would do and that one of the administrative staff in our office would issue an email with the suggested text. This was a reception at Buckingham Palace, you couldn't just email the Master of the Household and say, "Got the invite and I'll be there."

The next day at work an elaborate, awkwardly worded and overly polite response had been drafted and circulated to those invited. I asked Sally, the woman who sat next to me and worked with the London 2012 Board, now that I had the proper wording, how should I respond? Should I buy a greeting card and mail it to the Master of the Household with my response? Oh no, she said, you must reply to the Master of the Household on your personal stationery. "But Sally, I don't have any personal stationery." She suggested in that case London 2012 Olympic Bid stationery would suffice.

Since this was such a special occasion for me, I carefully and very neatly hand-wrote my response onto company letterhead. Then I took the letter to the Royal Mail post office down the street and mailed it to the Master of the Household at Buckingham Palace. I checked the address I wrote onto the front of the envelope three times. I just wanted to make sure it didn't go to the wrong Buckingham Palace in London.

When I got back from posting it I proudly explained to Sally how I had completed this important Royal RSVP task. She looked at me incredulously with a smirk of condescending shock. She said, "You didn't hand-write it, did you? Oh no, Dave, you shouldn't have done that. That would be considered extremely improper etiquette." A typewritten response would have been expected, she explained. Then she paused and looked at me with a smile and said, "Oh well, coming from a colonial like you, I suppose the Master of the Household might consider it a bit of a novelty."

So go figure, the Queen commanded the Master of the Household to invite me over to her place. I mean her Palace. I still couldn't get over it. Was she sitting at home one day playing with the corgis in her living room when she called the Master of the Household and told him, "I command you to invite Dave Doroghy to come to the Palace." Of course I knew I was just a name on a list, but it was fun to imagine. I wondered if I would get to meet the corgis too.

The day before we were scheduled to go the reception, an email was issued to those staff members invited that addressed how to act when we got there. For a hick colonial like me, who couldn't even RSVP properly, it came as a welcome bit of advice. Here it is word for word: Some people have asked how to address members of the Royal Family. Lots of people ask about this and there are no obligatory codes of behaviour, just be polite. The traditional form for men is a neck bow (from the head only) whilst women do a small curtsy or a bob. If you meet the Queen or

other members of the Royal Family, it is best to follow their leads as to whether to shake hands. All in all, the best policy is to be yourself but to recognize that their world is a little more formal than ours!

Their world is a bit more formal than ours? That's for sure. And just what is a "bob"?

So finally the big day arrived, and I attempted to "formalize" my world a little bit more to lift it to their standards. I even considered buying a new suit and shoes for the occasion, but everything in the U.K. was so damned expensive and the suit I had was just fine. It was a plain, single-breasted, dark-blue suit, and even if I had bought a new one, I would have still bought a plain, single-breasted, dark-blue suit. It just seemed like the right thing to wear to job interviews, weddings and Buckingham Palace. I did get the shoes freshly shined, which made them look brand-new. But that morning as I dressed, I found myself acting in an extraordinary manner. A more formal manner. I replaced my underwear after putting them on. Although they were a freshly washed pair, they weren't brand-new. I had a new pair that I had purchased recently from Marks and Spencer and I thought they would be more appropriate for the occasion, more regal. As I slipped them on, I chuckled to myself "My Royal Gaunch". Oh, and my socks. I had to go way back into the sock drawer to find a pair of long, black, old-fashioned knee socks, the kind wealthy investment bankers at Canary Wharf wear. I carefully rolled them all the way up to my knees, thinking I have to be a picture of sartorial splendour to meet the Queen.

Come to think of it, I took special pains with everything I did that morning. I took my Royal Shower, followed by my Royal Shave. I very carefully, and with a great deal of pride, took care of all the rest of my hygiene as I started my day in preparation to meet Her Majesty. This was important stuff; you can't have a nostril hair sticking out at that all-important moment when you "bob". I chose a special tie. Her Majesty would never know that it was one of my favourite ties, which I had purchased at a yard sale in Canada last year for twenty-five cents. But I was sure that she would take special note of the intricate grey-and-charcoal hippopotamus-head motif on it, which offset the blue of my suit. As I left my apartment, looking like a million dollars, I could justify my vanity in the realization that this was going to be my debut appearance at Buckingham Palace. I just wanted to make a good first impression so that I would be invited back.

When I got to the office that morning all the men were dressed impeccably. In my capacity with the London 2012 Olympic Bid, I always wore a suit. But it was fun to see some of the other fellows who worked in jobs that didn't require business attire dressed up in their lounge suits. The reception was to begin at 6:30 in the evening, which meant an entire day of work with a big treat at the end. It's tough to concentrate on mundane office tasks when you have a date to meet the Queen in a few short hours. I was hoping a client would phone and ask to see me that afternoon so I could answer, "No, I'm sorry, I am seeing the Queen at that time, and she won't reschedule." It was difficult to dive into a project knowing that soon you would have to interrupt your work to go to Buckingham Palace.

At around 4:00 p.m. the women in the office started to disappear into empty offices and washrooms to change for the big occasion. By 5:00 p.m. the office looked as if Vogue magazine had commissioned us all for a double-page spread on the best-dressed office in London. Seventy-five commoners, all looking their best. Perfection in Royal style achieved. Finely manicured fingernails, wonderful hairdos, smashing outfits, and that was just the men. The women looked elegant too. A quick snapshot was taken of the group and we descended in the elevator to our coach waiting below.

When we arrived at Buckingham Palace, we pulled up to one of the gates and we all got off the bus. The place was crawling with tourists, and proudly, with our heads held high, we walked right by them. We went past the changing of the guard, guards or the Royal Grenadiers, as they are called, and on to the other guards who mean business, the guards who let you in; they looked more like regular policemen. Naturally I got a bit anxious. Not gaining entrance to the Palace at this point would be extremely disappointing and embarrassing. The bobby who scrutinized my birth certificate and photo ID couldn't stop exclaiming how beautiful Vancouver was, and he gave me a friendly nod to enter the Palace. I later learned that the real security check had been made at Scotland Yard weeks prior to our arrival, based on the guest list.

Buckingham Palace was built in 1705 for the Duke of Buckingham. In 1837, when St. James Palace was judged too old-fashioned, the Royal Family moved in. Queen Victoria was the first monarch to take up residence there. Queen Elizabeth II, of course, lives there now, and it is where she receives visiting heads of state, bestows knighthoods, and meets sponsorship sales guys like me who somehow followed a long chain of small links to get there.

I just can't properly describe how palatial it was. It was everything you would expect times a thousand. It was Buckingham Palace. Comparisons mean nothing, because it was so much more spectacular than anything I have ever seen. I've been to the Louvre in Paris, the Taj Mahal in India and the Schonbrunn estate in Vienna. It made them all look like split-level starter bungalows. I mean, it was really something. Long, winding staircases, velvet and silk everywhere. Thick carpets, rich wood, elaborate tapestries and paintings, paintings and more paintings. Fancy curtains, gargoyles, brass rails and stained glass. Huge crystal chandeliers, each as big as a Volkswagen and brighter than a searchlight. Servants dressed in smart outfits all over the place. And it was all for real. This was the Queen's house. It wasn't a tourist attraction. You didn't pay or line up to get in. You were her guest. I thought of the memo we had received the day before that directed, Recognize that their world is a little more formal than ours. No kidding!

We were ushered past the Blue reception room and the Red reception room and ended up in the Queen's Dining Room. I was hoping that we would go through the Royal Kitchen where I might get to see Polaroids of the Windsors plastered over the fridge doors, but no such luck.

The reception itself was really in two rooms, the Dining Room and the Red room. I would run out of superlatives trying to describe them. It was like a movie set. There were about a hundred people mingling in each room. I found two guys I liked from the office and walked up to them. We chatted for a few minutes and the butlers? waiters? servants? , I don't know what to call them , were all over us. But not in an aggressive or negative way. They knew just when to offer you a drink or a little round cucumber sandwichy thingy. They'd bring these big trays by with a wide assortment of glasses of red and white wines, scotches and Pimms. Being a professional schmoozer (fifteen years in sports marketing), I have been to a lot of dos in my time. But I couldn't get over the level of service here. They were all nicely dressed young men and women, with clear complexions and no tattoos or facial piercings. They wore bright-red outfits that looked like something off the cover of the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club album. They were polite and friendly, but very reserved and very British at the same time. And above all they were ubiquitous. If you closely check the wording on the silver badge of a London bobby's hat, you'll see it has the Latin word ubiquitous on it. It means "everywhere at all times." These servants seemed to be never more than an arm's reach

away.

So here I am at Buckingham Palace, and I've been here less than ten minutes. I am talking to Chris and Justin from the office, and the Duke of Edinburgh, otherwise known as Prince Philip, otherwise known as the Queen's husband, just walks into the room and comes straight over to us. And as naturally as can be he says hello and starts talking. I didn't have time to figure out if I should bob, curtsy, head bow or kneel. Next thing I know, he is asking us all what we do at the Bid. We explain our roles and he takes a bit of extra interest in me because I am a Canadian. We talk briefly about Vancouver and how I worked on sponsorship sales on the bid for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. Just as abruptly as he arrived, he leaves our small conversation pod and moves on to the next one. I eavesdrop on the conversation he's having there and can hear him asking each member of that pod the same questions about what they do at the Bid. The guy seemed just like a regular old man. He was spry, slim and quite debonair-looking. He had lots of hair growing out of his ears. He looked like what I expected, only older. Come to think of it, it has been ten years since I have seen his picture or seen him on television, so he probably looked like he should look in 2004. He's 83. I hope when I'm 83 I look as good as he did. My first Royal encounter was a positive one.

Then a member of the Royal Staff at Buckingham Palace came up to talk to us. He was so smooth and so, so British. He had worked at the Palace for ten years and prior to that was a lieutenant in the army. His name was Lamont Bingley. What a plum assignment, to be plucked from the army and placed in the Palace. He must have won the assignment based on his charm, manners, looks and elocution. He spoke the Queen's English so eloquently, it was as if he worked directly for her. Hey, wait a minute, he did. He was very, very good with people and so smooth. He made you feel extremely comfortable, and I suppose that's the hallmark of a competent host. The best I could figure out was that he was in charge of the logistics for Palace parties, and part of his job was making sure all the guests were happy. We spoke to him for about twenty minutes and he explained the significance of the room we were in. He talked about the Queen's busy schedule that day, and he gave us some insight to her typical week. Then he made a very interesting comment. He said that the ratio of Royals to guests, at this function, was particularly high. He pointed out that it is rare to have five Royals at a reception this small. I knew that we had the Queen and Prince Philip, but I had no idea there were more.

Here's the star-studded Royal line-up for our little function:

Queen Elizabeth

Her husband , Prince Philip

Her daughter , Princess Anne

Her grandson , Prince William

Her cousin , The Duke of Gloucester

It must have been a slow day in the Royal world. Otherwise how did a lowly group like ours get to have so many of them in attendance?

So with two hundred people at the reception and five Royals there, the ratio was forty commoners to one Royal. Those were the best Royal odds I had ever had. When Prince Charles and Lady Diana opened Vancouver's Expo in 1986, I was at the ceremony at BC Place Stadium with sixty thousand other people. That day, those odds were thirty thousand to one. Not good. Then in 1994 Queen Elizabeth opened the Commonwealth Games in Victoria. I had worked on that project selling sponsorships to the event for three years and was proud to attend the opening ceremony. But again, with twenty-five thousand people at the stadium at the University of Victoria cheering her on, I somehow doubted we would get any quality time together. More recently, in September of 2003, Queen Elizabeth dropped the puck at a Vancouver Canucks hockey game at General Motors Place in Vancouver. Twenty thousand people were there and only one Queen. Not good Royal-meeting odds at all.

On June 23, 2004, in the two reception rooms at Buckingham Palace there were five members of the Royal Family , a Royal flush. So I had better get busy and play my cards right if I wanted to meet more of them. I had excellent odds , but really the one I wanted to meet the most, of course, was the Queen.

I walked into the Red room, where I heard I would find Her Royal Majesty. I joined a conversation pod and next thing I knew Prince Philip joined us , again. What should I do? I had just met him twenty-five minutes ago. Should I gracefully excuse myself from the pod, not wanting to take more than my fair share of his limited Royal greeting time? Since I had already met him, and therefore sort of knew him, should I introduce him to everyone else in the pod, or should I just hang in there and meet him a second time? I went for the hang-in-there option.

Again, as in my previous Princely encounter, he asked us all what we did at the Bid and this time he came to me last. I was pretty certain that he would not remember me from our first meeting and I would just pretend we hadn't met and introduce myself freshly. When it was my turn to respond to him I told him I worked on the sponsorship program for the London 2012 Bid and that I was from Vancouver. He looked at me with a slight bit of surprise and said, "You're the third person tonight that I have met from Vancouver." I knew I was the only one there from Vancouver and realized that he was getting a bit confused. He's a man of 83, so you have to cut him a bit of slack. I politely explained that there were a few of us there tonight and graciously kept quiet for the rest of the conversation, allowing others in the pod some air time. As they were speaking to him I glanced over my shoulder at a group of women from the office flocking around Prince William. He was tall and good-looking and I am sure all the women found him totally irresistible. It was novel to watch them swoon in full flirting mode, but I had very little interest in meeting the young Prince. I wanted to get onto his grandma's dance card.

At the beginning of the story, when I talked all about those small links in life leading somewhere, I forgot to mention that in order for them to link together properly, you have to be smart. And I'm not. But I have learned in life that if you hang out with smart people, good things usually happen. Earlier in the story I mentioned Sally. She was one of my workmates and she was smart. She'd lived in London her whole life and was a big fan of the monarchy. She was very proper and very British and had a good sense of humour to boot. I knew that if I hung out with her at the reception, she would probably be smart enough to bag the Queen for both of us. Besides, I liked her and hadn't seen her for a while. So after meeting Prince Philip for the second time, I joined Sally.

I was spot on; she had brilliant strategy in place. When I got to her she was standing about ten feet away from Queen Elizabeth. And she was actually discreetly recruiting people to join her campaign to meet the Queen. You see, the Queen, like Prince Philip, was bouncing from conversation pod to conversation pod. She would spend about five minutes with each one. And most of the pods consisted of four or five people from the London 2012 Bid. Her job, or her goal, was to meet as many people as possible within the limited two hours of the reception. Once she decided it was time to move on from one pod, she just casually left and joined another group. She never talked to individuals. To maximize her effectiveness she stuck to groups of four or five.

Sally's strategy was to make it as easy as possible for the Queen to join our pod.

She had three sound tactics. First, you must form a four-person horseshoe-shaped encasement to make it easy for the Queen to fall into the pod once she is moving. Sally called it the Golden Welcoming Ring. Second, you must stand up straight and look intelligent and interesting. And most important, you must try and make eye contact with the Queen as she approaches. Eye contact at precisely the right time is very important. You see, I told you Sally was smart.

After I had talked to Sally for a few minutes, Penny and Sarah joined our conversation pod. Penny worked in the Communications Department of London 2012, and Sarah was a lawyer with the British Olympic Association. We now had the makings of a sophisticated Queen's dragnet and could put our plan into action. After the reception, I spoke with many of my fellow workmates who did not get to meet the Queen. They didn't have a strategy in place. The link was there but it passed them by.

It was interesting just how civilized the party was, which allowed us all the opportunity for a casual meeting with some very important people. It's a British thing. The reception was understated and a bit "hoity-toity". Everyone was acting extremely politely and even overly considerately. By comparison, years earlier, I was invited to a wedding reception in New York, where Hillary Clinton was a guest. The First Lady was someone else I would love to have met, but for the entire evening, she was surrounded by a thick wall of selfish people engaging her in long, uninterruptible conversations. The only way to meet her would have been to rudely interrupt a conversation pod in progress. And that is just what the majority of the Americans there were doing. I waited for the appropriate moment to interrupt, but it never came. Everybody else was so aggressive and in your face at that reception. I was so Canadian that night and, alas, poor Mrs. Clinton never had the opportunity to meet Dave Doroghy. My point is that the Brits are so proper, and that allows the Queen to circulate in a dignified, non-pushy manner. I would wager that a third of the people there that night actually met her. No butting in, no line-ups, no crowding. All very proper, all very British.

Later I also realized that, although the reserved British demeanour had a lot to do with the success of the evening, I shouldn't overlook the contribution of Lieutenant Lamont Bingley and his staff. As the evening went on we met more and more

people who worked for the Queen in one capacity or another. I learned she had a staff of over three hundred at Buckingham Palace. In the shadows of the reception there were dozens of them discreetly ensuring that everything was pulled off in a relaxed, organized and regal manner. As is the case with so many things, it's what you don't notice that makes a big difference.

Penny, Sarah and I continued our Queen dragnet with Sally at the helm. We would position ourselves as close as possible to the pod the Queen was engaged with, and form the Golden Welcoming Half-Circle. We repeated this three or four times unsuccessfully. Invariably she would break from a pod and walk in the wrong direction. She had an assistant, whom we would later meet, helping to guide her through the labyrinth of London 2012 Bidsters. The direction she chose to go after wrapping up a conversation, though, seemed to be of her own doing. It looked as though her navigational pod assistant, as I will call him, scouted out the immediate vicinity of conversation pods around where she was and gave her a nod as to which group to join. He was her "advance man". Observing this phenomenon for half an hour contributed to our eventual success. Sally made a bold suggestion that we had to completely reposition ourselves. After we had followed the Queen's pod-jumping trail for half an hour, it became apparent that she was moving from one end of the Red room to the Dining Room. At the far end of the Red room, which she was getting closer to, was a short hallway that led to the Dining Room. Sally suggested that if we positioned our four-person pod at the other end of the short hallway, in the Dining Room, the Queen would be forced to walk right by us. So we reconfigured ourselves and reformed our Golden Welcoming Ring in this new highly strategic zone.

We weren't there for more than a few moments when James Duckworth-Chad came up and began chatting with us. Now I have to pause for a second to have you consider this young man's name. Does it get any more British than a name like James Duckworth-Chad? This guy was destined to work at Buckingham Palace. He was the Queen's navigational pod assistant. Things were really looking good now.

James Duckworth-Chad was charming and asked all the right questions. We chatted about our roles at the Bid and our backgrounds. To the untrained ear it may have seemed like idle chatter, but we knew that Mr. Duckworth-Chad was assessing if we were suitable candidates to meet Her Royal Majesty.

Then it happened. I looked over to my left and Queen Elizabeth was walking down the hall from the Red room into the Dining Room. Without skipping a beat, Duckworth-Chad immediately excused himself from our pod and took three steps toward the Queen. He discreetly nodded at her and then stretched his hand out towards us as a directional cue for his Royal boss. Our pod had bagged the Queen!

I suppose I will never know what type of first impression, if any, I made on her. I doubt she even noticed my impeccable grooming, the cut of my single-breasted suit, or the intricate interlocking grey hippopotami on my necktie. She will never know the extent of the pains to which I went to prepare for this meeting, including putting on a brand-new pair of underpants. I will, however, remember forever the first impression that she made on me. She seemed smaller than I would have expected. She was a sweet little older lady. She had bright, inquisitive eyes, and for most of the time we spoke she seemed to have a slightly mischievous glint of a smile on her face. Her hair was snow-white; she had nice teeth. She wore a turquoise outfit with silver trim and didn't carry a handbag. Her jewelry looked very, very expensive. It was nothing short of a dream-like experience, one of those special moments in life where you just want to press the slow-motion button so that you can savour every moment. Relax, enjoy, soak it all up and take it all in. You are in Buckingham Palace talking to the Queen. Casting all exaggerations aside (because sometimes I tend to embellish here and there), we collectively spoke to her for about five minutes. I have since verified this with my three other conversation pod-mates.

The small talk began with her asking each of us what we did at the Bid. I had been through the same drill twice now with her husband. She began with me, standing on her far right. I told her that I had come over from Canada, where I worked with the team that won the 2010 Winter Olympic Games bid. I then went on to explain how I worked with the London Bid's corporate sponsors. She stood in one spot and made her way left, asking the rest of the group what they did. When she reached the fourth and last member of our group, and had wrapped up with her, she went back to me and said in her high-pitched sweet little older lady voice: "It is good to see that we have fortified the London Bid with expertise from the colonies, where exactly in Canada are you from?"

Now, I had had a lot of time to think about what I was going to say to the Queen, if and when the opportunity presented itself. Prior to joining the Vancouver 2010 Bid I had worked for the company that owned the NHL Vancouver Canucks. I left

Vancouver to work in the U.K. in October of 2003. Just before I left, in September, Queen Elizabeth had attended a Vancouver Canucks hockey game and dropped the puck in a ceremonial drop with the two team captains. Although I had no longer been with the team, it was a huge publicity event that made the front page of most newspapers across the country. In Canada hockey is almost a religion, and the Queen had never dropped the puck at a game. Wayne Gretzky, our country's version of David Beckham, even attended the game. Walking onto the ice on a red carpet, she received a lengthy standing ovation and the event was an overwhelming success.

So when she asked me where I was from, I told her, and along with it threw her back what I call a slow lob, a conversational nugget that would be really easy for her to return. "I am from Vancouver, your Royal Majesty, and I understand that you were there recently and dropped the puck at a hockey game."

I was rather proud of myself. I had come up with something relevant and of enough interest to engage the Queen in conversation. And I did it with all the naturalness and ease you would expect in just talking to some older lady sitting next to you on the bus. We simply began chatting. The puck drop conversation centred on three points that she brought up. First of all she told us that it was a "terrifying experience." We all laughed politely. Here's this cute little granny explaining to us how huge these hockey players are when you are up so close to them. Then she asked me if I realized that the captain of the Vancouver team was "not even a Canadian." We chatted about how the league is very international now and how the percentage of Canadians in the NHL has been declining for years. Finally she confirmed that she had never before, in her long and distinguished career, dropped a puck at a hockey game.

From there the conversation took off on several different tangents and my colleagues all jumped in. One of them segued into the fact that many of the soccer players in the Euro Cup, which was on that week, were from different European countries, but were playing in England's Premier division. We talked about the phenomenal success England's Wayne Rooney was having in the tournament. Sarah asked the Queen if she was going to be attending the 2004 Olympics in Athens. When the Queen replied that she wouldn't be, Sarah asked her if she planned to watch it on the telly (British for television). Her Majesty explained that she would be up in Scotland at Balmoral Castle, vacationing, and that the reception on the telly is "very snowy" there. She actually said that. We laughed out loud. I thought to myself, why can't you just have one of your servants adjust the Royal rabbit

ears? Wait a minute, we live in an age of satellite transmission and digital cable. On the £200 million a year budget the U.K. government spends running the monarchy, can't someone just go down to Harrods and buy her a modern television set?

We chatted about a few other small things that I can't remember and then, at an appropriate moment in the conversation, she just left. She politely excused herself and went on to spread some more of that Royal magic over the room. James Duckworth-Chad led her away to the next conversation pod and she was gone.

So that was my Royal meeting with the Queen. I sensed that it was something that would have been more important a hundred years ago, and will be less important a hundred years from now. But on that day, June 23rd, 2004, it was all very significant to me.

And it made sense to me that I was there. I was in England on a year-long contract working as the Director of Sponsorship for the London 2012 Bid for the Olympics. Winning the Games was important for the entire U.K. They had bid unsuccessfully three times before for the Olympics and were putting a tremendous amount of effort into this bid. So the idea of the Queen hosting a reception for us was perfectly reasonable. Since I was a Director of the Bid, naturally I was invited. I was invited to London to work on the Bid, because I had worked, in a small role, on the winning Canadian Bid. My sponsorship work with the Canucks and Grizzlies and the '94 Commonwealth Games led me to the work I did on the Canadian Bid. Other jobs and experiences that I had throughout the eighties, and a wonderful mentor and friend named Linda, led me to the '94 Commonwealth Games. It was a path of links, each leading to the next, that made sense to me.

When you stop and think about it, the Royal Family is the ultimate series of links. The crown is passed on from generation to generation and has been for over twelve hundred years. Who would have ever thought the links in my life would have intersected, if only for a brief moment, with the links in their lives? God save the Queen!