

A face that launched a thousand laughs.



I don't know how I sounded that night but I look as if I'm good... Anyway, I couldn't get the sack as I was one of the owners of the club!



A Royal Starlight Supper

attended by

His Royal Highness The Prince Edward C.T.C.

benefiting

Angels In The Outfield's

Joe DiMaggio's Children's Hospital

and

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Foundation

to be held at

The Grand Bay Hotel, Coconut Grove, Florida
on Saturday, April 22, 1995

Reception 7:45pm

Black Tie

Dinner 8:15pm

A Royal invitation to a starlight supper in 1995. It was quite an event. Guests included Petula Clark, Barry Gibb of the Bee Gees and his lovely wife Linda, Danny La Rue and David Cassidy. We all had a great time and raised money for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Foundation and Joe DiMaggio's Children's Hospital.

I woke up Chaney. She wanted to be there to choose the music – scared I would insist on all big band swing numbers that no one under fifty would know.

By eleven o'clock we were done. Gillian handled the floral arrangements, and Chaney dealt with the music, at least the contemporary stuff. When she and Hal the bandleader started talking about Hootie and the Blowfish and Pearl Jam I lost the plot.

Prince Edward, Brian and Ian Brill joined us for coffee in the lounge – Ian's wife Jackie was shopping in the Grove. Before I left, Trish called me to one side. 'I didn't want to say anything in front of anyone. You did ask me not to mention it in case we got a negative. Well, we got a positive.' She gave a silent cheer.

'Great! Let's keep it to ourselves. Make it a surprise.'

'OK, but I have told Walter. . . we have to make arrangements to pick them up at the theatre.'

'Right. I'll ask Walt to say nothing. It's good news, isn't it?' I said.

And it was good news. Having David Cassidy and Petula Clark make an appearance at the ball would be the icing on the cake. Too late, unfortunately, to help ticket sales, but it certainly would add glamour to the evening, and please HRH.

I hadn't had much opportunity to talk to the Prince, but like Prince Michael, he was interested in showbiz. After all, he did run a television production company.

During the limited time we spent together talking, I discovered he was far more accomplished than I had thought. While a student, he had achieved his glider wings, earned his private pilot's licence and gained a Royal Air Force pilot's preliminary flying badge. He and I were both former rugby union players, and both loved sporting activities, though not always the same sports. I was into football, boxing and swimming. He snow skied, played tennis and sailed. We both enjoyed horse riding, but he was far more skilled at it than I.

The Prince had a Bachelor of Arts degree, so it was logical he and my artist wife would discuss art. Cassie held strong views. I'm not sure they always agreed – their discussions looked pretty animated. But there was plenty of laughter, and no blows were exchanged!

On the drive back from the Grand Bay Hotel, Chaney was curious about my upbeat mood. She soon got out of me the news about David Cassidy and Petula Clark – Chaney had been a fan of David Cassidy ever since his *Partridge Family* TV show.

She wanted to know how I had managed to get them to attend the ball. It was simple, I explained. 'I knew Petula from the old days. She's a terrific lady. Well, I called her and invited her to be my guest at the gala this coming Saturday night. She mentioned her co-star David Cassidy. I said please invite him too. I told Petula we would lay on transport and have a meal and a bottle of French champagne waiting for them when they arrived.'

Chaney was thrilled. 'So I'll get to meet David Cassidy! I hope nothing goes wrong.'

'Don't worry, Walter will take care of everything. He'll most likely talk them into going to Gulf Shores for a holiday.'

'Right. And enjoy. . . what is it? Thirty . . .' Chaney said, laughing.

'Thirty-two miles of white sandy beach,' I said, also laughing as I helped her out.

Before we could go home for a rest, Chaney and I had to go to a meeting on Miami Beach with Michael Cambar, one of the organisers of the next day's luncheon for the Dominican Red Cross.

It had been a little hairy dealing with the sharp, Spanish-speaking young men from the island of Dominica. They were cool, immaculately dressed, and members of every hip nightspot on the Beach. Problem was, they weren't too eager to pay the up-front fee for the Prince's personal appearance.

They had kept putting off paying, and then offered me a cheque yesterday, which wouldn't have cleared until after the Sunday

luncheon. I told the bilingual Cambar, a schoolboy friend of my son, that unless I had the cash in my hand before Saturday afternoon Prince Edward would not, I repeat, not appear at their function.

Michael got the picture, but his partners didn't fully understand. They thought the fee was going into my pocket, and what was to prevent me from skipping off and screwing them and the Prince? Fair enough. I had similar thoughts about them. What was to prevent them skipping out after HRH's appearance without paying the Red Cross, La Voile Rouge, or more to the point, me? This was Miami!

I had explained the previous day to young Mr Cambar that the money went to the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards Foundation. Yeah? What did this Duke do with the money? I was no expert, but I tried to explain. 'It's a non-profit, non-competitive leisure programme for young people worldwide aged between fourteen and twenty-five. The programme helps them achieve their best in each of the programme's four sections – community service, expeditions, skills and physical recreation. It has a special relevance to those with disabilities, or kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as those in the workplace. It develops character, and it's open to boys and girls. Listen, Michael, the Red Cross will know about the programme. Remember, it develops self-worth in these youngsters, and makes them better human beings.'

My explanation must have worked, because when Chaney and I reached the magnificent home of his friend and fellow organiser, Michael handed me a large brown envelope containing the money I had asked for.

As we drove home, I asked Chaney if she would go with Mum to the gala tonight, as I wanted to get to the hotel early. I rested for a while thinking of how lucky I was. A loving wife, my beautiful daughter here helping me, and in a short time I'd see my son and his lovely wife Erin. Their flight from New York had probably landed, and they were settling in to their hotel room on the Beach.

They wanted to be on the ocean. Tomorrow morning they would be swimming in it. Who knows, I might join them. But first, let's get tonight over with.

The dining room looked spectacular, the floral arrangements superb. Gillian Donnerstein, who had done a great job, looked stunning in her evening gown. Trish too looked glamorous; in fact, the ladies had pulled out all the stops. Walter had risen to the occasion too, wearing an expensive hired tuxedo with a black silk shirt and matching bow tie. I wore my Harrods dress suit, the one I had used for stage appearances. As I dressed that night, I felt a pang of sadness; my suit reminded me of my brother, Bernie, my stage partner. But this was no time for sorrow.

At the top of the hotel stairway, Walt, Trish and I held a quick conference. Everything seemed under control. As we chatted, Brian came out of the elevator and joined us. I hardly recognised him in his smart tuxedo. 'You look nice,' Trish told him.

'I am nice, darlin'. But not as nice as you. You look smashin',' Brian replied in his inimitable London accent.

'You carrying?' I asked with a grin. He tapped the left side of his jacket, beneath which he wore his gun holster, and smiled knowingly.

We checked with the maitre d'. Special dinner arrangements had been made for Mr Cassidy and Miss Clark, who would be arriving late. No problem. And Cassie's original watercolour, one of the paintings she exhibited in top galleries in Miami Beach and Palm Beach and was being presented as a gift to HRH, was on display.

Walter and I took the elevator to the presidential suite to check that all was well with the Prince. We found Sean, who like HRH was wearing an expensive, hand-made traditional black tuxedo. The Prince asked if we'd like a drink. The toast was 'A happy and successful night'.

Let me tell you, the evening was, to use showbiz parlance, a smash hit. And what a cast! The London Palladium should be so lucky! Superstar Barry Gibb of the Bee Gees, the one and only Danny La Rue, the fabulous Petula Clark and our American guest star, David Cassidy. And, of course, there was the compère, Mr Wonderful, one half of Britain's favourite double act – at least, in his home! A legend in his own mind, Mike Winters!

After an excellent meal the stars mingled with guests and signed autographs. Earlier, I had introduced them from the stage, and they had stood up and taken a bow. The biggest laugh of the night came when I introduced Danny La Rue as the king of showbiz's most prestigious charitable society, the Grand Order of Water Rats. Danny stood up and shouted out, 'Not the bloody king, I was the queen!'

To my surprise and delight, Prince Edward, instead of having the microphone brought to the table for his speech, went up on to the stage. He thanked everyone for their support, and gave a short monologue about royal tennis. A strange choice, perhaps, but his natural charm carried it off, and I don't think anyone cared what he spoke about. The Americans were absolutely knocked out by his English public school accent.

The band finished at midnight, and hundreds of tired, but happy faces began the exodus. HRH left shortly thereafter, accompanied by Sean and Brian. After endless thank yous and goodbyes, I told Cassie I was going home. To say I was tired was inadequate – I was shattered. I gave Anthony and Erin hugs – they were exhausted too. Chaney gave my cheek a peck and wished me goodnight. It was time for bed. I had another exciting day ahead of me. This one would have a hot Latin beat to it!

I made the morning pot of tea and toasted the raisin muffins as usual, but instead of taking them to Cassie in bed, I talked her into having breakfast in our secluded garden.