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Crown and Nation. Romania's Monarchy Reimagined

1990–2025. A Diary



*Translated from Romanian by
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CURTEA  VECHE

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After King Carol I and King Ferdinand, the Custodian of the Romanian Crown is the sovereign of the Royal House who has spent the longest uninterrupted time in the country. The subject of this volume is our sovereign's thirty years of service lived in a Romania where the Crown is not an item in the nation's Constitution.

Her Majesty Margareta often says that with her first steps on Romanian soil she felt like a whole person, for the first time. To understand this assertion more deeply and to begin this royal chronicle of the last three and a half decades in the most appropriate way, it will be helpful to look at the first part of the Custodian of the Crown's life and particularly at the way destiny prepared her for her admirable labour in service to the country.

As young parents of five girls, King Michael and Queen Anne treated all their children equally. They protected and surrounded them with heartfelt love, but never coddled them, and never missed a chance to discuss the children's future responsibilities. The family led a modest life. Work occupied a central position, and there was no room for pretention.

One thing made Princess Margareta's childhood different from her sisters'. She was firstborn, which – always and from her first steps – made her feel she bore added responsibility, even with Princess Helen, who was just a year younger. Close in age, Princess Helen spent all her time with her elder sister, and, from the very beginning, little Princess Margareta felt it was her duty to protect Helen, a sense of responsibility that would later extend to all her sisters.

The King pursued his firstborn's education with great attention. He sometimes demanded more concentration than one ordinarily asks of a child, particularly when it was a matter of Romanian history, continental history, values and principles, religious holidays, or issues of faith.

From a tender age, the royal children always had the "Our Father" in Romanian ready to hand on their night tables. The Custodian of the Crown remembers, even today, that lunch or suppertime questions about geography or history landed hard, like a sentence, and the child who was to answer could expect no leniency from her father. If she didn't know, she would have to come back later with a researched answer. The King was loving and good, but he commanded unwavering respect and had a certain severity.

Queen Helen played a decisive role in shaping the personality and defining the intellectual and spiritual horizon of today's Custodian of the Crown. The Queen was, first of all, a person of extraordinary beauty and inner delicacy. She would never betray a glimpse of preference for any of her granddaughters,

not for anything in this world. For her, having become a grandmother of five girls was a great joy that brightened four decades of exile, and this was not the first exile of her life. She dedicated herself to the perfection of Princess Margareta's education, however. The one thing that set her treatment of her first granddaughter apart from her treatment of the other girls was the endless loving care with which she helped the Princess form her principles and values.

When it came to etiquette, education, art, and society, Her Majesty Margareta was guided firmly but discretely by the best and most valuable examples, at exactly the age when she needed it. The Queen spoke to her granddaughter about the importance of exemplary conduct from the start, about the duty to be fair, patient and loyal, about the need to show no trace of subjectivity or weakness, and, above all, about the good example one must set society when representing the institution of the Crown.

It's well-known that grandparents treat their grandchildren with more patience, objectivity, and understanding than they were able to muster with their own children. Things were no different in the Royal Family. King Michael often marvelled at the kindness his mother showed the little princesses.

When it was time for Her Majesty to attend university, Queen Helen guided her surely and discretely toward the right choice. Whenever it seemed that adolescent Margareta leaned too far toward the fashion of the time, Queen Helen expressed her disapproval, clearly. Everything, but absolutely everything, however, was cushioned with an extraordinary sense of humour, with great affection and delicacy.

Her Majesty Margareta studied at the University of Edinburgh, one of the best in Europe. There she pursued political science, international relations, and sociology. She was always close to the British Royal Family, especially her cousins and uncles, whom she knew from the first days of her life. The Duke of Edinburgh was her baptismal godfather and contributed modestly but constantly to his goddaughter's financial maintenance at university.

The Custodian of the Crown remained in the UK during her first professional years. She worked in Edinburgh and Newcastle, and her professional projects focused on family health, social integration, and nutrition. There followed a five-year internship at the United Nations, in Rome, where she worked for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). The experience gained within this organization has been of great use to her in future public engagements, both on account of its multilateral diplomatic dimension and through her involvement with a network of projects that supported large categories of disadvantaged persons and populations around the world.

Family was always important to King Michael and Queen Anne, and it is also essential for today's Queen. Romania, however, never left the daily thoughts and feelings of the Royal Family in exile, and, in that context, years passed, children became adults, Queen Helen left this world, and the Cold War showed signs of coming to an end.

Born on the other side of the Iron Curtain, Margareta and her sisters had been raised in a spirit of freedom and democracy. Though far from a perfect world, the West endowed their consciousness with a number of principles and rules for public life. And, of course, the world they grew up in was in striking contrast to the communist world in which Romania seemed forever sunk. With all that, thanks to King Michael's sharp critical spirit, his extraordinary life and leadership experiences, and his infinite love, patience and understanding towards Romanians and their fate, King Michael's firstborn knew exactly how things stood in her country, even before she crossed its borders.

King Michael told his children about their country all his life. Some topics, like Săvârșin, or Sinaia, or the sovereign's various dynastic and state obligations were discussed, developed and explained in every detail. With the eyes of the mind, Queen Anne and her daughters knew every alley of Pelesh, every detail of King Carol I's office, each of the rules of conduct imposed by the first king, rules that King Michael I respected to the letter, in practice and in spirit.

Thus was formed the structure of the Custodian of the Crown's exemplary public conduct during the 35 years this book aims to illustrate. Her Majesty

has been noted in the Romanian public life for her loyalty, modesty, discretion, altruism, kindness, love, devotion, constancy, and fairness. And her specific traits – beauty, grace, charm and erudite intelligence – complete the picture of the leader Romanian society values so much today.

In recent years, surveys have placed the Royal Family at the forefront of Romanians' trust, appreciation and respect. Her Majesty is one of the most beloved Romanians and, of course, a role model of high degree.

Following the covenant made by her ancestor, King Carol I – “Everything for the country, nothing for me” –, Her Majesty has, in these decades, been characterized by complete devotion to her country, to the foundation that bears her name, and to her family. Whenever they have needed her, her parents and sisters have known that Margareta was there, at any moment, ready to take on any difficulty or responsibility. She never let down the people, projects, or institutions that needed her, bound as she was by honour and creed.

This book is a testimonial on the occasion of a beautiful moment: the 35th anniversary of the first Royal Family member's return to Romania. The volume also serves as a journal. Articles, facts, declarations, and data that follow the royal story of the last three and a half decades step by step gather between its covers.

The rest of the story is being told in the present and will carry on into the future.



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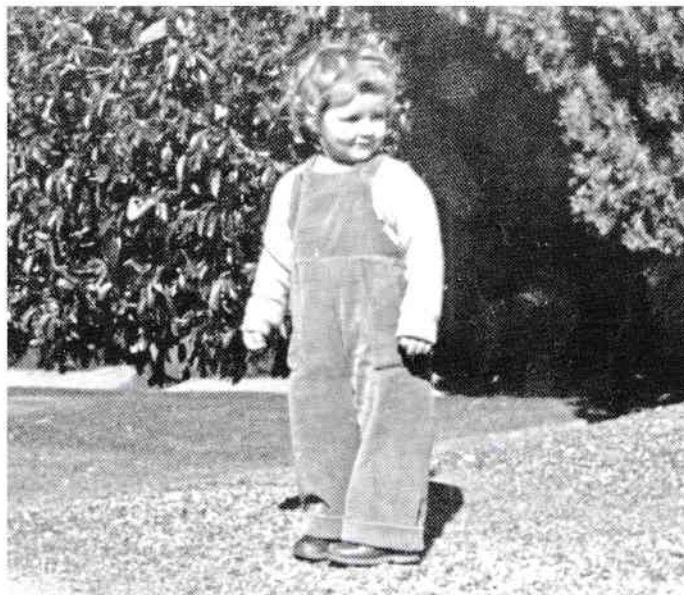




The Princess, a few months old



*With her paternal grandmother, Queen Helen, and her sisters,
Their Royal Highnesses Princess Helen and Princess Irina*



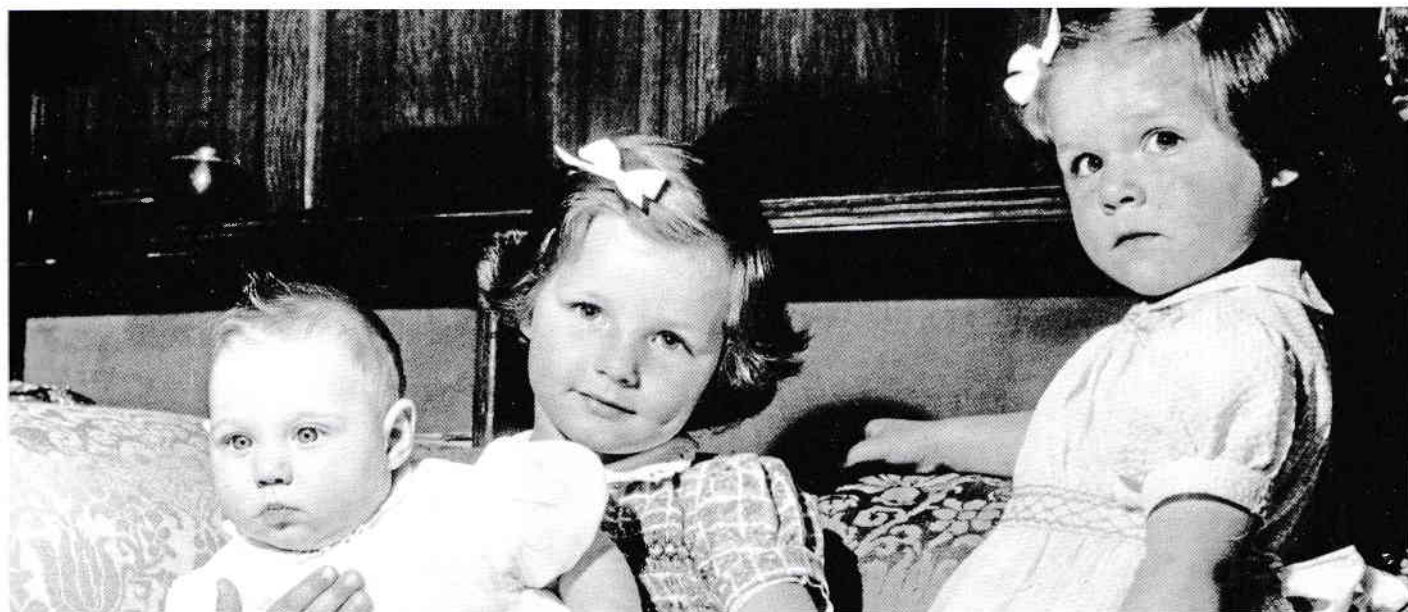
At Villa Sparta



With King Michael and Queen Anne



In the family garden



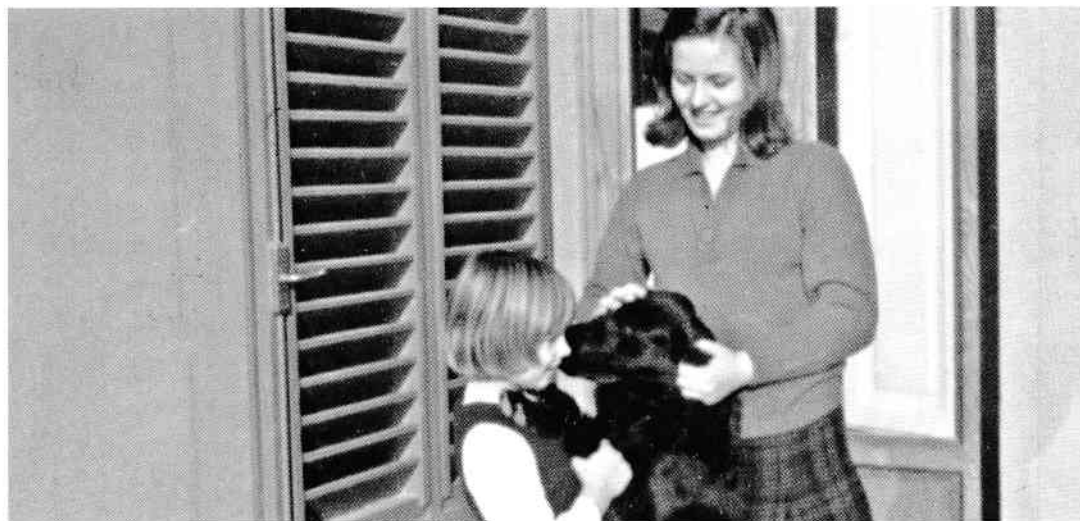
With Princess Irina and Princess Helen at Villa Sparta



With Princess Helen and Princess Irina at Villa Sparta



With King Michael and Queen Anne at Princess Helen's baptism



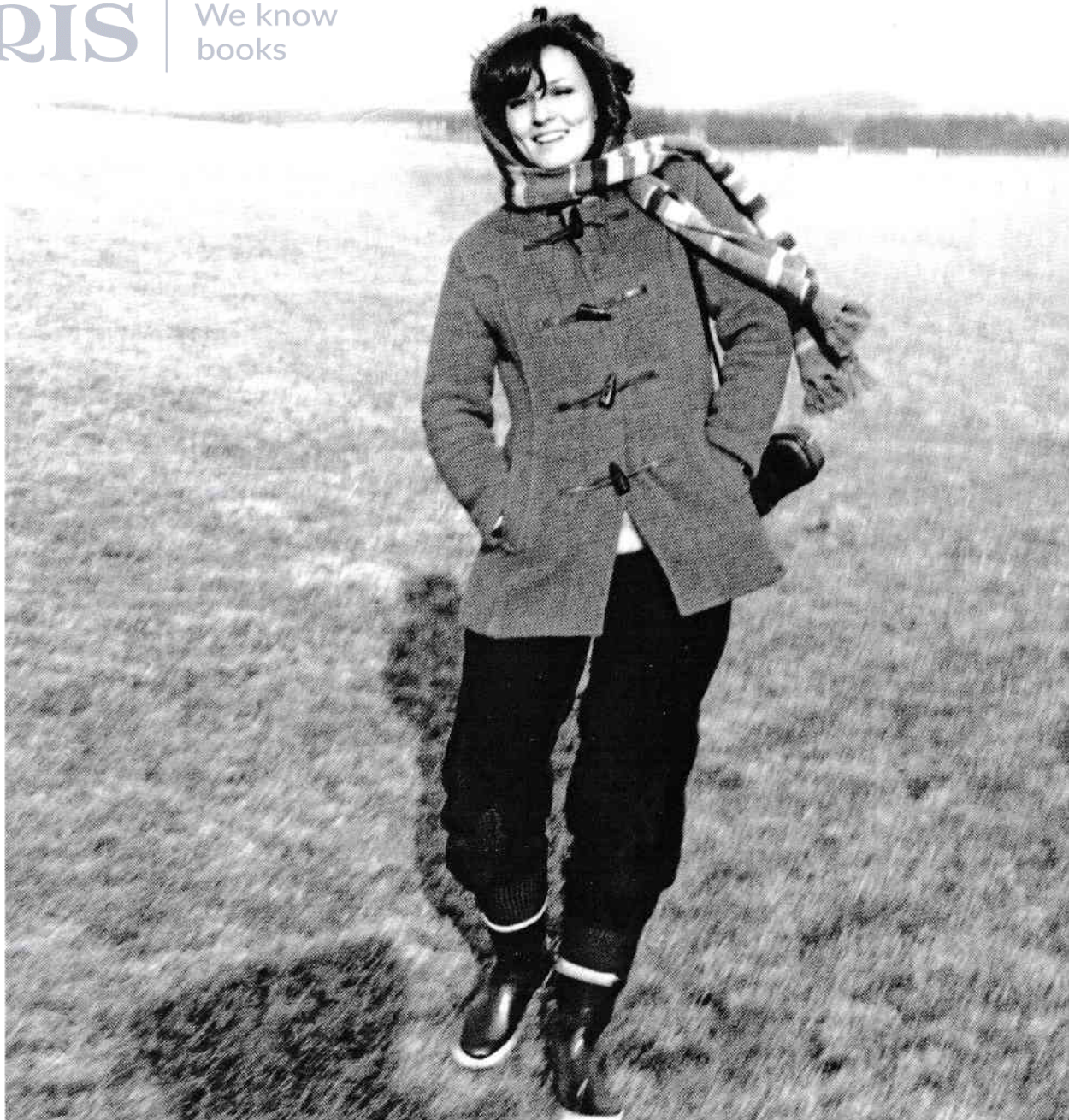
With Princess Sophie, playing with the family's Labrador



With King Michael, Queen Anne and her maternal grandmother, Princess Margaret of Denmark

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During her student years at Edinburgh