

Maybe Fairy Tales Do Come True

It was right out of a storybook when Patch writer Donna Lynn Rhodes got her invitation to this month's Royal Wedding.

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Hearing a proper English accent on the other end of the phone is nothing out of the ordinary for me.

If you are a regular reader to my Off the Beaten Patch columns then you know about my ongoing love affair with England. I attended university and lived there on several occasions and go back every chance I get. Talking on the phone or Skyping with my English friends is a pretty much a weekly occurrence.

But when I answered the phone on Friday morning Feb. 4, and heard the man's voice ask to please speak with Ms. Donna Lynn Rhodes, I thought for a minute it was Pride and Prejudice's Mr. Darcy himself on the other end.

“Is this some kind of a joke?” I asked.

“No, this is Equerry Buckridge of Lord Chamberlain’s office ringing on behalf of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh to get some details from a Ms. Donna Lynn Rhodes.

Lord Chamberlain? Equerry? Her Majesty the Queen? “I’m sorry, who is this?” I asked.

“Yes, Madam. This is Equerry Buckridge,” he started to say and I interrupted him to ask if this was for real.

“Yes Madam, I assure you I am ringing you regarding an official correspondence.” I smoothed my hair, cleared my throat and very politely said, “This is she.”

That was pretty much the last thing I remembered.

First thing that following Monday morning, Fed Ex is at my door having me sign for an international package that I started opening before I even walked back into the house. “Oh my God – is this what I think it is?” I asked myself.

It was.

The outside envelope was an elegantly embossed Basildon Bond with a wax seal bearing the British Royal Family Coat of Arms.

First thing I thought was that someday this will be worth something on eBay, so I better open it very carefully.

Next thing I thought is, “What the hell am I going to wear.”

Then I thought, wait a minute. Do I have a big G on my forehead for gullible? This can’t be possible. So I did what any hot-on-the-trail journalist would do, I called the British Embassy.

After I explained why I was calling and very precisely giving them every detail, they put me on eternal hold. As "God Save the Queen" played in the background I was reminded of the absolute fear I had when in 1980 I had to be interviewed by the Home Office. The Home Office is in Croydon, a suburb just south of London and it’s everything you’ve seen in the movies Green Card or The Proposal. I wanted to stay in England longer than my visa would allow and I had to prove that I wasn’t trying to live there illegally. The movies are cute but this was truly terrifying. Anyway, this whole British Embassy thing was giving me a stomachache.

After what seemed like an eternity, a woman named Tessa got on the phone and addressed me formally, Ms. Rhodes. Tessa explained that this was in fact the truth and I was indeed invited to the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton – God forbid the Embassy should call her Kate.

With my stomach completely in knots and my knees shaking I asked, “Why?”

To paraphrase what she told me – I made her repeat it three times as I was taking copious notes -- apparently it all started very innocently with Kate doing a Google search on bridal registries, when she noticed a link to the Nov. 26, 2010 Off the Beaten Path story titled, “Maybe Kate and William Should Register in Walnut Creek.”

One click later Kate was reading about Walnut Creek, California and thought it sounded like a lovely place with brilliant shopping. Fast-forward to mid-January of this year; she and William were talking about how to make a wedding that is so stately, formal and orchestrated a tad more down-to-earth and contemporary. Kate suggested that they invite some "regular people" (I like her even more now knowing she detests the word

"commoners") to the ceremony and to the dinner hosted by William’s father Prince Charles, but not to the mid-day reception hosted by William’s grandmother, Queen Elizabeth.

One thing led to another and somehow, they thought it would be appropriate if the lady in the States who wrote the story about William and Kate’s bridal registry was on the list.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

The Embassy said I would be getting another packet delivered from the Office Residence Manager and Social Secretary at St. James’s Palace with a list of my travel and accommodation details and etiquette guidelines. Etiquette guidelines? And what did they call it? “Ye Old Guide to British Manners?”

Tessa asked me to write down two names and telephone numbers (one in Washington and one in London) that I could call (she said ring) with any questions or concerns.

This was the second week in February and all I could think about was who do I tell first and how am I ever going to sleep between now and the morning of April 29!

I’ve been to Westminster Abbey at least a dozen times – the most memorable was the spring following Princess Diana’s funeral. It was sad looking down at the black and white checkered marble floor and replaying the images of her young sons walking behind her casket. Now one of her sons, Prince William will be walking under the same Gothic arches to join Kate Middleton in holy matrimony.

Between Equerry Buckridge, Tessa at the Embassy and my new best friend Sophie – an assistant to the assistant of the Social Secretary – they took me through all the paces of what would happen from the time I land at Heathrow on Wednesday, April 27, until I leave the following week. Every detail it seems has been arranged like something out of *Upstairs Downstairs* -- but on a much grander scale. All I know is I’m going to the wedding and everything except for my dress, hat and shoes has all been arranged for me.

I just hope I can have my English friends Susie, Rosie and Sue come stay with me a night or two in my suite at The Dorchester.

I wonder whose pew I'll be sharing at the ceremony and more importantly, who will be at my table at the 7 p.m. soiree-which-I-hope-to-God-includes-a-receiving-line so I can actually say I have curtseyed to the Queen! OMG. I can't believe this whole thing.

And neither should you. April Fools.