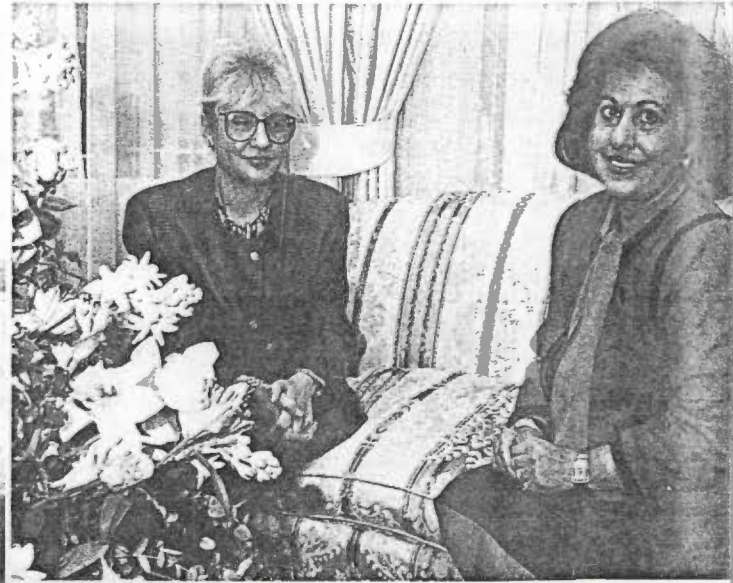




*conversations  
with a*  
**Crown Princess**

Catherine of  
Yugoslavia  
talks to Royalty



While the world watches — bewildered and horrified — the civil war in Yugoslavia, the exiled Crown Prince Alexander and his wife Princess Catherine seem stranded in their London home while events in the country his father, King Peter, once ruled, have set Serb and Croat at each other's throats. Crown Princess Catherine talks to (above) **Mira Adanja Polak** in this exclusive Royalty interview about her husband's hopes for his beleaguered homeland which the family visited for the first time last year. ➤

**T**HE FIRST TIME I visited Crown Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia and his charming wife, Catherine, it immediately struck me that there is much truth in the old adage: "Behind every successful man there's a good woman".

That was some time ago when it still seemed inconceivable that the couple would one day return to Yugoslavia although it was already starting to experience the horrors of civil war.

Since my first meeting, His Royal Highness, his wife and his three children from his first marriage, have paid a short two-day visit to Belgrade, Serbia, in Yugoslavia. It was an emotional return — the first time that Alexander Karadjordjevic and his family had visited his native country.

When hearing that I wanted to interview her, Princess Catherine was somewhat diffident to talk to a journalist who comes from the same country as her husband. She revealed that he speaks frequently of his homeland — the trouble-torn country which is not yet ready to accept him back despite his strong and obvious ties.

When Catherine agreed to marry Prince Alexander her life changed completely and she had to adjust to a new way of life. It was her second marriage and her new husband was a divorced man with three children. She has never regretted her decision and instead has dedicated herself to Prince Alexander, becoming his companion, adviser and confidante as well as a second mother to his three little princes.

"I was born in Athens on 13 November, 1943. My parents Robert and Ana Batis have two children; my sister and myself. We were brought up in a very traditional family who paid great attention to family life. I was educated in Athens and Switzerland and got married as soon as I could to an American engineer who was — and is — a very good man. I have two children by him: my son David, who is about to complete his studies in America and my daughter, Alison, who is married and as devoted to her family as I am.

"As I was only a teenager when I first got married my children are now mature adults. I can honestly say nothing bad

about my first marriage — I simply reached the stage where I felt I had to change something in my life. When one gets married so young it seems that one has spent one's whole life as a married person.

"While I tried to re-appraise my life, my friends helped cheer me up and encouraged me to go out and accept invitations to parties and dinners. In a way, I was never really alone. In fact, when I look back, I was actually divorced for only three days. I glided from one marriage into another . . .

"I remember telling him: 'I like you so much that I should never meet you again' . . . that is how I felt at that moment. I was aware my emotions were a little strange for a woman of my age but my feelings were strong and real. I kept warning myself not to rush from one relationship to another — but it was just fate.

"At that time I discussed my feelings with my daughter with whom I have a very close relationship. She talked about love with the enthusiasm of a young girl while I, who had just ended a long relationship, felt totally drained of any emotion. I remember though, that my daughter said the signs of love are the same regardless of age.

"I felt shivery, my knees buckled, I felt a pain in my stomach and couldn't even touch my favourite food. It was clear to me that I had met the man of my life.

"We did not see each other for a month and during that time I was obsessed, always thinking about him. I realised there was nothing I could do to help myself and that my sleepless nights, my total lack of appetite and my anxieties were beginning to worry both my mother and my daughter. They persuaded me to meet Alexander one more time in order to check my feelings. I remember warning them: 'Should I meet him once again, it would be for ever'. That is exactly what happened — we met in 1984 and were married in 1985".

Princess Catherine recalls how initially she was a bit afraid of meeting Prince Alexander's family, worrying whether they would accept her. "When Alexander learned of my fears he immediately made me feel at ease, telling me all about himself and how, after his father's death, he did not want

to be referred to as a king because he wished to find his own way. He told me as much as possible about his native country. He could not speak Serbo-Croat because he grew up surrounded by people who taught him a foreign language. I am, as are many

**When people ask me about the situation in Yugoslavia, I never speak about Croats or Serbs or Slovenians. War as such is disastrous. I believe in God and I think that religion can help where politics have failed.**

"I first met Prince Alexander at a lunch in the Washington home of mutual friends. I now believe our first meeting was fated. We were seated next to each other and although the usual chatter went on around us — no one else existed for us.

others are, fascinated by my husband because he is an outgoing and realistic person. He never lets his royal background carry him away."

Princess Catherine is still surprised at the speed in which the face of Eastern Europe has changed and recalls their two-day trip to Belgrade with great clarity.

"My husband could have stayed longer, but he did not want to. People loved him and wanted him to stay longer, they expected him to solve the problems, and he represented hope for their coun-

try. On my part, I experienced both positive and negative feelings after witnessing the very serious problems that face Yugoslavia. But, I am pleased our mutual efforts to help the situation in Yugoslavia have certainly yielded results."

For Princess Catherine the visit was an emotional one — full of stress and mixed emotions. It was a visit which forced her to confront the great responsibility that faces both her husband and herself.

"I sympathised with Alexander, I was honoured that I could share the joy and

excitement of his first visit to his country and it gave me the opportunity to meet his distant relatives."

Prince Alexander is Catherine's favourite topic. She talked about him at every opportunity, singing his praises and always trying to steer the conversation away from herself. She is clearly devoted to her husband.

"When a woman loves a man and lives with him, he makes her feel a complete person. I still love my husband as I loved him the first day. When we started our married life I was lucky I not only had my own two children, but I gained three little sons. I call them *my babies* — they are *my children*. The twins Alexander and Philip were babies in diapers when Alexander introduced me to them and his eldest son Peter was only four years old.



**A**lexander's first wife was Princess Maria de Gloria of Brazil. We have maintained a very good and warm relationship with her for the sake of our children. When the two of us first met she did not know anything about me but I asked her if we could be close and encourage warmth and understanding between us so that the children would be happy. I remember that she was so touched by my frankness that tears rolled down her face.

"As I see it the two of us are *both* mothers of three boys whose father is Alexander

Karadjordjevic. I knew that I was fated to meet Alexander and I was aware that things would not always be easy and that the responsibilities I had to undertake were beyond the emotional capacities of a woman. ➤

**The Crown Princess enjoys an evening at home with her stepchildren and husband Alexander. "When we started our married life I was lucky I not only had my own two children, but I gained three little sons," she says. "I call them my babies — they are my children. The twins Alexander and Philip were babies in diapers when Alexander introduced me to them and his eldest son Peter was only four years old."**

► “I vividly remember the moment I became mother to the boys. From the very beginning I did my best to show them how much I loved them but at the same time I made it clear that I was not their real mother; that I did not give birth to them. As time went by they started to call me ‘Mother’ which confused me at the time. I would run and ask Alexander what to do and he would immediately reassure me that the children should be allowed to address those they love according to their own feelings. Anyway, as I see it, there’s no harm in getting a bit of extra love and affection and our boys are lucky that they get love from two mothers.”

Just as Catherine was discussing the boys the telephone rang. It was a call that clearly upset her. It turned out to be Alexander’s school who had called to say he had a stomach-ache and she asked that he be sent home at once. A little later, the young prince rushed into the living room. Despite his sore tummy he decided that he was well enough to eat tea. His appetite did not pacify Catherine who

was especially worried because later that day she had to travel to New York as her mother’s twin sister, her aunt, had died.

Her mother had been in Athens when Catherine received the sad news so she had to send her two grown up children to break the news to their grandmother. She asked them to do it according to Greek custom — very gently with a glass of water and a lump of sugar.

It was the children’s nanny who managed to allay Catherine’s motherly fears. She cautiously suggested that the young prince might not be genuinely ill. It turned out he had a class in Latin that day. . .

Princess Catherine has introduced her extended family to the traditions of a typical orthodox Greek family. She believes the whole family, including all children, should be present at big family gatherings and the elder ones must take care of the smaller ones. A great deal of attention is paid to their up-bringing and education. Apart from their English edu-



cation, the children are learning Serbo-Croat — the language of their homeland. Catherine studies with them hoping that the knowledge of this language will help her to get acquainted with the history of her husband’s country and one day understand the awaiting Yugoslavia.

**W**hen her time is not taken up by the demands of her family, Princess Catherine dedicates herself to her work with humanitarian organisations and is presently working to raise money for medicines and other needs of the thousands of refugees in Yugoslavia.

“Above all, I am concerned about innocent children whose mothers I consider to be heroes. I also worry about the fate of mixed marriages in a country

which is steadily falling apart.

“These are the issues which motivate me to work hard to help provide Yugoslavia with drugs, blankets and food. The work of humanitarian organisations has only been introduced in my country fairly recently and I am now conveying to them the British experience of helping people in need.

“My wish is to unite all humane people through this work and my aim is to help the devastated families who have lost everything during the war. I would like to be able to provide safe shelters for the homeless and I am constantly looking for long-term solutions. I always remember my mother telling me that although sometimes temporary solutions seem all right, one should always insist on more permanent arrangements. So, what I am trying to do now is to provide permanent and safe homes for all those refugees in Yugoslavia”.

Another of her concerns is with ►



Memories of a Greek childhood from Crown Princess Catherine's family album: (right) traditional Greek dancing for the teenage Catherine. A happy pose with her mother and sister and (bottom) she was obviously Daddy's girl while she was growing up in Athens.



raising funds for St. Sava's Cathedral which is being built in the centre of Belgrade. She has her own strong religious convictions and hopes that when St. Sava's Cathedral is finished it will provide people with a sanctuary where they can regain their hope and faith in God. Catherine is no newcomer to fund-raising, having also raised money for St Sava's Cathedral in New York. "It was very successful and it gave me enthusiasm to go on. Mrs. Estée Lauder and Ivana Trump were present, the Queen of Spain even accepted my invitation", she recalls.

She is also raising money for the renovation of the children's hospital in Belgrade where she claims conditions are "medieval" despite having so many highly qualified staff and so many little patients.

Princess Catherine stresses that her concern for Yugoslavia is with its people rather than politics. "As the wife of Alexander Karadjordjevic I cannot get involved in politics and so I have adopted an humanitarian approach to solving problems. I am only concerned with justice and justice is on the side of those who have lost their parents, who have been bereft, lost everything and whose homes have been devastated. Those people no longer think in terms of politics, they only think how to survive. I am on their side and I do my best to help them.

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Will she return to Yugoslavia? Catherine replied: "Yes, we want to come back, but not under the present conditions. My husband wants to bring





democracy and a better economy to his people." She regrets however that their last visit to Yugoslavia ended so quickly. "My husband just came and left. He returned to London because he wanted to continue his work. We are completely free to return to Yugoslavia whenever we want but we do not want to return for our own sake — but for the sake of the people we can help.

"I am prepared to return alone. I have been planning a trip to Belgrade and I have already contacted a great number of companies who have provided their products, food etc, everything that the refugees need. Many European countries, including Greece and Italy, have offered help.

**P**rincess Catherine does not seem daunted by the possibility of one day becoming a Queen within the so-called "Yugoslavia". "I think, that my husband would make a good king and I would be a good queen. I think the country needs us. We would not interfere with politics, we would improve the image of the country, explain who we are and what we have done for humanitarian causes.

"The British Court has always helped us, and has given us support because we are relatives and very closely linked. We have acquaintances at other European Courts. We might live in our country one day. We may, one day, be in a situation

to devote all our abilities to the country which is now going through such difficult times and consequently does not have much time to think about us".



**Catherine in her London home. "The British Court has always helped us," she explained, "and has given us support because we are relatives and very closely linked. We have acquaintances at other European Courts. We might live in our country one day . . ." Princess Catherine stresses that her concern for Yugoslavia is with its people rather than politics.**