

After a record 70-year reign, not all of it easy, Queen Elizabeth II renews her vow to keep calm and carry on

London — There is no user manual on how to be queen. There are of course set piece, choreographed, ceremonial events that give the role a framework, and the prancing horses, gilded carriages and lots of jewellery count for a lot.

But if Queen Elizabeth II — now officially the longest reigning British monarch in history — were to write her own instruction manual, it could be quite simple: Wear bright colours, a big hat, and a smile.

Sunday marked the 70th anniversary of the queen's ascension to the throne. She was called back from a foreign trip on February 6, 1952, when her father, King George VI, died. There could be no delay, as in a monarchy, there must always be a monarch. The actual coronation ceremony took place the following year.

Elizabeth's reign is not only the longest in a British royal line going back at least 1,000 years, it has also been an exercise in adapting to change — without really changing very much.

She committed at the age of 21, five years before her father died, to a life in service of Britain and what was then its empire.

"I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong," she said in 1947.

At 95, her life has been long — 14 U.S. presidents long, in fact. She met President D. Dwight Eisenhower in 1957, and then every American leader to come after him, with the exception of Lyndon Johnson.

The encounters were usually all smiles, but occasionally not.

In a celebrity age, other kinds of royalty have always wanted to be seen next to

the real thing. Icons including Frank Sinatra, Marilyn Monroe, Paul McCartney and Elton John have all bowed politely in the presence of her majesty. She's met at least three "James Bonds" over the years.

But Elizabeth II's 70-year reign hasn't been all glamor and glittering tiaras.

A destructive fire consumed parts of Windsor Castle in 1992 — the same year that three of her children's marriages were seen to break down.

Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson, Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips and, of course, Prince Charles and Diana all had their relationships hit the rocks — behind closed doors, of course, but in plain view of Britain's tabloid press.

Elizabeth was moved to admit that there could be bumps along the royal rocky road.

"1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure," the queen confessed. "In the words of one of my more sympathetic correspondents, 'it has turned out to be an annus horribilis.'"

But the "annus horribilis" — Latin for terrible year — was but a portend for the really terrible year to come. Diana died in a car crash in France in 1997, and Queen Elizabeth II was forced, after days of silence, to acknowledge the national outpouring of grief for her son's ex-wife.

While most of the milestones in her long reign may have been happy ones, there have been more recent setbacks, too.

Grandson Prince Harry and his wife Meghan are gone, living now in self-imposed royal exile in California.

Prince Andrew has been disappeared from view, tainted by accusations, which he denies, of sexual abuse.

Yet the queen — once half of a glamorous young couple, now a lonely widow — carries on.

In a statement released to mark her Platinum Jubilee over the weekend, Queen Elizabeth II renewed her commitment to continue doing what she always promised to do: her job.

With a smile.

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