



Top L: Coronation – June 28, 1838;
Top R: Queen Victoria and Prince
Albert with their children in 1846

VICTORIA

the Queen Behind the Day

By Lorraine Payette

Marshmallows, hotdogs and fireworks. Dad firing up the grill while Mum marinates the steaks. Older siblings setting aside the phones and games to wrap early corn for roasting while the younger one's snitch gobs of potato salad, all waiting impatiently for the feast. It's the first outdoor event of the season, Victoria Day, and summer's almost here.

Who was Victoria, and why would we celebrate her every year?

Victoria was born on May 24, 1819, the only child of Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and Strathearn, and Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, and ascended the throne as Queen when she was only 18. As a young woman, she had trouble being taken seriously. She was forced to live with her mother until she married the true love of her life, her first cousin Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840. They had nine children and, when he died in 1861, she went into a deep state of mourning for 25 years before finally coming to strength as a powerful and wise ruler of the British Empire. She had the second longest reign of any

monarch in British history, and that 63 year period became known as the Victorian era.

"Under Queen Victoria's reign, Great Britain experienced unprecedented expansion in industry, building railways, bridges, underground sewers and power distribution networks throughout much of the empire," says biography.com. "There were advances in science ... and technology ..., vast numbers of inventions, tremendous wealth and poverty; growth of great cities ...; increased literacy; and great civic works.... During her reign, Britain expanded its imperial reach, doubling in size and encompassing Canada, Australia, India and various possessions in Africa and the South Pacific. The Queen was emblematic of the time – an enthusiastic supporter of the British Empire, which stretched across the globe and earned the adage: 'The sun never sets on the British Empire.'"1

We tend to think of her as being short, dowdy and no-nonsense, never smiling and never amused. As Queen, she became a standard for morality and correct behaviour. Ladies had neither legs nor breasts, but

instead "limbs" and "bosoms" if one must truly speak of such indelicacies. Even furniture wore skirts to make the pieces more modest in polite society.

However, records and family memories paint a cheerier picture.

According to her granddaughter, she had the most radiant, beautiful smile. Although not allowed the freedoms of modern children, it is apparent that she enjoyed life and wished to share her joy with her family. She could sketch, paint and write well. A true romantic, she wrote in her journal on her wedding night:

"I NEVER, NEVER spent such an evening!!! MY DEAREST, DEAREST DEAR Albert ... his excessive love & affection gave me feelings of heavenly love & happiness I never could have hoped to have felt before! He clasped me in his arms, & we kissed each other again & again! His beauty, his sweetness & gentleness – really how can I ever be thankful enough to have such a Husband! ... to be called by names of tenderness, I have never yet heard used to me before – was bliss beyond belief! Oh! This was the happiest day of my life!"2

Sadly, when she lost Albert, she lost her heart, and mourned him for the rest of her life.

It is time now, when we think of Queen Victoria, to remember that she wasn't just a political figure – she was a real woman with hopes and dreams just like us. When it comes to the celebration of her birthday on Victoria Day, rest assured, she would be very much amused. LH