



## Two women keep things in proper balance

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**G3** Jay Remer

Once again we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of both Queen Victoria and of Queen Elizabeth II this weekend. This tradition of honouring both sovereign leaders began in 1953 when, for four years, it was declared by proclamation of the Governor General of Canada. In 1957 Her Majesty approved this as an annual celebration in Canada. Prior to that, the birthday celebration of the sitting monarch, which began in 1837 when Victoria ascended the throne at the age of 18, has continued ever since.

It is a beautiful weekend here in the Maritimes when people can set out in earnest to begin toiling in their gardens to prepare for the bountiful summer and fall crops. Flowers are ablaze everywhere and the lush greens of the new tree foliage shimmers in the sun as if it were electric in its luminosity. The warmth of the longer days brings families together for first barbecues, the opening of summer camps and the dusting off of lawn mowers and rakes. Boats are launched and winter is really put to bed, finally.

But what are we really taking the time to celebrate? It is interesting how important these two women have been and continue to be throughout the world. We are all taught in school that the sun never set on the British Empire during Victoria's reign. What an amazing statement of fact that is. I doubt we will ever return to a day like that. I certainly hope we don't anyway. But in her day, she was perhaps the most powerful woman in the world and stood for a monarchy which has received both harsh criticism and great applause.

Queen Elizabeth II seems to play second fiddle to her predecessor on this weekend however, perhaps because her name isn't attached to the holiday. She doesn't seem to mind; this is her nature.

Queen Elizabeth II is also arguably one of the most powerful women in the world in today's much different global climate. She continues as be the emblem of the monarchy and still has weekly meeting with her prime minister. No doubt, these talks serve as a sounding board for some very important state and international affairs.

I think what these two incredible women share in common is a reputation for keeping things in proper balance. Being human, they have made some misjudgments in the eyes of many of their subjects.

That too is the nature of subjects. In the eyes of the world though, they held a reasonable perspective on what the right thing to do is, how to do it and why.

Both women were accomplished equestrians and hard workers. Rarely does a day go by without the daily correspondence being addressed.

Delicate international affairs are handled with style and aplomb. High standards are set which others aspire to.

Today's queen tries hard and does a fine job at being current with how all of her subjects feel and what they do. So too in Victoria's time she strove to be compassionate to her soldiers and their families in times of war and to try to understand as best she could the people over whom she ruled.

Granted, building an empire is quite a different matter than dissembling one. That, of course, is the key difference between these two women. Times have changed dramatically in the past 150-plus years.

Politicians are different; the world is smaller; empires do not exist as they once did. Yet the honour that these monarchs bring to their countries is undeniable. People all over the world respect them. This is true because they respect other people. I hear references to Her Majesty and how she would do things as if it were the gold standard.

Fairness, compassion and honesty are their hallmarks. It is because of their personalities and their devotion to their subjects that we celebrate their birthdays. We certainly can choose to do otherwise.

Proclamations doing away from such holidays could be enacted with great ease. But they aren't. We want to celebrate their greatness and their dignity. In some ways, we live vicariously through it all. We can associate with their values. We do put them on a pedestal. We like doing that sort of thing. We live our lives by examples we decide are important to us. I hope we can continue to value their lives and the way they chose to live them.

Jay Remer is certified by the Protocol School of Washington as a consultant for corporate etiquette and international protocol. He lives in St. Andrews. Email your etiquette questions to [jay@etiquetteguy.com](mailto:jay@etiquetteguy.com) and visit his website at [www.etiquetteguy.com](http://www.etiquetteguy.com).