

Why Not Tell the Truth

by Michael Curtis



Princess Michael of Kent

It's easy to remember, but so hard to forget. Each little moment is clear before me, and though it brings me regret, it's easy to remember and so hard to forget. Lies are the cause of tears and sighs.

Before the Sussex duo, Meghan and Harry, there was and is the most controversial member of the Royal Family, the 76 year old Princess Michael of Kent, the Catholic divorcee who married the cousin of Queen Elizabeth in 1978, and is 51st in line to the succession to the British throne.

In a documentary released on October 9, 2021, Princess Michael of Kent, nee Baroness Marie Christine, denied knowledge of the activities of her father, Gunther von Reibnitz. He was a German cavalry officer in World War I. Reibnitz, influenced personally by Herman Goering joined the Nazi party in 1930 and became a member of the SS, number 66010, and member of the SS Cavalry Corps in 1934. He was part of the Lebensborn (Source of Life) program where Aryan men impregnated Aryan women to produce Aryan children for the Nazi empire.

In 1985 Reibnitz was revealed as a Nazi, but Princess Michael denied all knowledge of this.

Though her father was in the SS for 11 years, Princess Michael denied knowing anything about her father's link to the Nazi elite troops, and then later said a German tribunal declared he had never actually served with the SS but had the right to wear the uniform and hold the rank.

This is not the only instance on which the Princess has forgot

to remember. She always claimed to be Austrian but in fact was born in January 1945 in Bohemia, then the German populated Sudetenland. She is not without what British police call "form." In 2004, she was accused of telling patrons of color at a NYC restaurant to "go back to the colonies," and was also said to refer to two black sheep as Venus and Serena.

It is insufficient to accuse her only of cultural insensitivity. It is naïve and gullible to believe she knew nothing of the real past activities for 11 years of her father. She is also a reminder that other members of the Royal Family never expressed regrets or even acknowledged making cordial remarks about Nazism. The most notable was Edward VIII who said he admired Hitler, posed for photos with him, and said, "The Reich was the only thing to do."

By historical coincidence, in contrast with the misleading Princess Michael is the heroic martyr, the British nurse Edith Cavell who aged 49 was executed by a German firing squad in Brussels on October 12, 1915. She had saved the lives of more than 200 soldiers from both sides in World War I. She was charged by the Germans with treason and helping British and French soldiers escape from German occupied Belgium to Holland. Unlike the deceitful Princess Michael, the honest Edith Cavell admitted she was guilty of the charged offence and was killed. She is honored with a statue near Trafalgar Square in London which bears her last words, "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone."

Princess Michael typifies what psychologists call "paltering," misleading by using some truthful statements to convey a misleading impression or addressing the original question. To illustrate this behavior is the crucial incident on September 15, 1938, the moment of the deception of then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain by Adolf Hitler at a meeting in Berchtesgaden. Hitler told the naïve prime minister he planned to invade Czechoslovakia and ONLY Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain

was completely deceived by Hitler, failed to recognize Hitler's mendacity, and said had no objection to Sudeten Germans becoming part of the German Reich.

Another infamous meeting, paltering by its misuse of language, was that in January 1942 in the Villa Marlier in Wannsee, the outskirts of Berlin, of 15 men, most of whom were qualified lawyers, and eight of whom had academic doctorates, called to discuss the "Final Solution." The word "Holocaust" was avoided. Instead, among other proposals, Jews would be "dealt with accordingly," they would be "removed as quickly as possible," and that they would "disappear."

The memory of Wannsee is crucial in the trial taking place on October 2021 in Neuruppin, Germany, 40 miles north of Berlin. A person named "Josef S", a 100 year old former Nazi concentration camp at the Sachsenhausen death camp, 1942-1945, which detained more than 200,000 people, among whom were Stalin's oldest son, former French prime minister Paul Reynaud, and Francisco Caballero, opponent of Franco. He is charged with complicity in the murder of thousands of detainees, assisting in the murder of 3,518 people. Josef S who had been a SS paramilitary and a watchman was charged with aiding and abetting the execution by firing squad of Soviet prisoners and the murder of other prisoners using the gas Zyklon B. Josef S declared his innocence, "I did absolutely nothing. I know nothing about it." During trial he has hidden his face and said he would not speak about his time at the camp.

Another trial with similar denials, delayed because of the attempt of the person to flee, later captured, is of a 96 year-old woman, Irmgard Furchner, a secretary, stenographer and typist in the office of camp commander Paul Werner Hoppe at Stutthof between June 1943 and April Stutthof, 21 miles east of Danzig (Gdansk) was an internment camp, then "labor education" camp, then a concentration camp, the first to be established on Polish soil. Roughly 65.000 people, Jewish

prisoners, Polish partisans, Soviet prisoners of war, died in the camp, many by lethal injections directly to their hearts.

Furchner previously testified she was not aware of the killings in the camp while she worked there. She announced she did not want to come to court.

Interestingly, the case against Furchner rests on the legal precedent that people who helped Nazi death camps and concentration camps function can be prosecuted even if there is no evidence they had participated in any specific crime. This stems from the case in 2011 of John Demjanjuk, a guard at a number of death camps, that former Nazis could be held responsible for deaths in camps where they worked, even if they did not kill anyone.

A documentary just released sheds light on naivety and vanity rather than paltering or deliberate deception and willful forgetfulness. This is the unhappy and controversial story of Neville Chamberlain, British prime minister who thought that Adolf Hitler and to a lesser degree Mussolini could be appeased by "reasonable concessions and personal diplomacy." Those dictators, he wrote in January 1938, "are too often regarded as though they were entirely inhuman: it is indeed the human side of the dictators which makes them dangerous, but on the other hand, it is the side on which they can be approached with the greatest hope of successful issue." Rejecting the warnings of Winston Churchill of the dangers of the Nazis and his constant call for British rearmament, Chamberlain wrote in November 1936 that he did not believe the German threat was imminent: "By careful diplomacy I believe we can stave it off." His "careful diplomacy" was recognizing the Italian annexation of Abyssinia, Ethiopia, in 1935, achieved with use of mustard gas, and not opposing Hitler's aggression in Austria and the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. The painful fact is that Chamberlain refused to recognize the mendacity of Hitler, and believed that Hitler would keep his word. The fact that Hitler had shaken his hand,

a double-handed handshake, convinced Chamberlain that all was well.

The argument made on behalf of Chamberlain is that at Munich he bought time for Britain to rearm; the UK had only two flying Spitfires and few Hurricanes. This is correct, but by the same process the Nazis were given time to rearm even more, especially because they now had possession of the 1.5 million rifles, the 700 aircraft and 600 tanks of the Czechs and were able to complete the Siegfried Line fortifications.

Chamberlain believed that Hitler was telling the truth on the specific issue when he said the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand. Chamberlain's essential folly was that he did not recognize the mendacity and manipulative character of Hitler.

Chamberlain may have acted with perfect sincerity in his desire to avoid a war, but his judgement was bad. Winston Churchill, despite his other political flaws, was proved right about Hitler. The fundamental problem remains. One can understand why people refuse to admit to the truth, but why should they be believed?

Polonius may have been a manipulative bore, but he did advise "To thine own self be true...and then thou can't not be false to anyone."