

#329: KING OLAV V

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King Olav V (1903-1991) of Norway was born Alexander Edward Christian Frederik on July 2, 1903 in Norfolk, England to parents Prince Carl of Denmark and Maud of Wales. When Norway gained its independence from Sweden in 1905 Prince Carl was elected king. Upon accepting the crown, Prince Carl changed his name to King Haakon VII and immediately gave his son the name Olav. Crown Prince Olav was the first heir to the throne to grow up in Norway.

As future king, Olav's upbringing was unusually normal. King Haakon VII and Queen Maud raised Olav in a liberal manner compared to most royal families of the time. He was sent to public schools and encouraged to make friends with the local children. Albeit having royal blood, the tradition of being a "normal family" has continued with each generation of Norway's royal family. Olav graduated from Halling School (high school) with a focus in math and physics. He then decided to carry out his military education in the army instead of following his father's footsteps in the Navy. Following his graduation from the Norwegian Military Academy three years later, Olav studied political science, history and economics at Balliol College in Oxford.

Olav had a love and passion for the outdoors and he excelled in sailing and ski jumping even into his old age. His competitive nature even earned him a gold medal in sailing at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam. During Norway's energy crisis in the early 1970's Olav (King Olav V at that time) was spotted carrying his skis and riding Oslo's public train headed for the slopes, leading by example. His egalitarian geniality undoubtedly won him the hearts of the Norwegians as they nicknamed him, the "People's King" (folke konge).

Olav married his first cousin, Princess Martha of Sweden (1901-1954) in 1929 and the royal couple had three children: Ragnhild (1930-2012), Astrid (1932), and Harald (1937), the future king of Norway. Their family was severely tested when Norway became occupied by German forces in 1940. Olav was then a colonel in the army and with his father he fled to England in exile. King Haakon VII and Crown Prince Olav did all they could to protect their country. Crown Prince Olav assisted his father closely and made major contributions to Norway's defense both militarily and diplomatically. Princess Martha and the children were living safely in America as the guests of President Roosevelt. The family received a momentous welcome upon their return to Oslo in 1945. His wife, Princess Martha passed away in 1954, before she was to become queen. This was a terrible loss for not only the royal family but for the Norwegian people as well.

Crown Prince Olav became King of Norway on September 21, 1957 following his father's death. Norwegian politician and first Secretary-General of the UN, Trygve Lie commented on Olav taking the throne, "King Olav is very knowledgeable in many fields, and his excellent memory has impressed experts in many areas. His wide knowledge of American history, industry, agriculture and economy was greater than that of any Norwegian I met during the war." When King Olav V was consecrated in Nidaros Cathedral he promised to carry on his father's motto, "Alt for Norge" (Everything for Norway).

King Olav V kept busy with official visits both home and away. He was very personable and had the amazing ability to connect with people. He was a beloved monarch. After a 33-year reign King Olav V passed away on January 17, 1991 in Oslo. His son, Crown Prince Harald soon became King Harald V. King Olav V is buried in the Royal Mausoleum at Akershus Castle in Oslo, Norway.

