

PRINCESS MICHAEL: ROYAL FAMILY'S BLACK SHEEP

by PAUL KORING
Southam News
LONDON — She's convinced the British hate foreigners and freely admits she finds baby kissing loathsome.

Princess Michael of Kent, the foreign-born, once-divorced Catholic who married the Queen's cousin in a Vienna registry office and who has been derided as a "rent-a-royal" is in an ideal position to know.

But her latest outburst won't endear her to the British public, nor the rest of the Royal Family.

The striking, six-foot princess sparked the latest blistering blaze of negative publicity by telling a U.S. magazine: "I was not made to cut ribbons and kiss babies."

Controversy crowns Princess Michael like the tiaras she wears with greater frequency than the Queen.

The latest brouhaha — following frank interviews aimed at promoting her just-published book about eight foreign 18th- and 19th-century princesses — follows years of hard-ly royal revelations.

The book, *Crowned in a Far Country*, manages to delve into lingerie preferences and bedroom antics which may be its biggest selling points as Princess Michael tries to hawk it as the basis of a mini-series to television networks on both sides of the Atlantic.

Reviewers have accused her of plagiarism. Large sections of the book — 220 lines in the first two pages alone — were lifted from earlier works.

"Good heavens, we're talking about a few lines, technically it isn't nearly enough to be sued on," said the princess last week as she cheerfully signed "Marie-Christine" in hundreds of copies at a London bookstore.

"There's not a historian in the country who hasn't done it," added the Czech-born princess who once studied to be a hairdresser in Australia before rediscovering her blue-blood lineage.

Explaining that she simply forgot to add "a few quotation marks," Britain's first self-employed princess laughed off the charges.

It wasn't the first time she has been embroiled in controversy.

Last year, the princess insisted it came as a "total shock" that her father had been a major in the revived Nazi SS.

Yet, Marie-Christine spent a year with her father when she was 16 and he attended the civil ceremony in 1978 in Vienna when she married Prince Michael.

The Prince, once 16th in line to the throne, had to renounce his place in succession when he married her, although their two young children, Lord Frederick and Lady Gabriella, remain distant, but potential monarchs.

Ever since she walked out on her first husband, a British businessman, and the romance blossomed with Prince Michael, then a British army major, there have been no soft spots in British hearts for the woman widely regarded as a scheming commoner.

The tabloid press, always hunting for scandal, counted down the days between their marriage and the birth of Frederick (nine months, 10 days).

The couple's financial straits have been fodder for gossip, as was the princess' close relationship with a Texas oil tycoon.

Neither the prince or princess is on the royal list — that group of senior royals which receive money from the state — nor have they independent wealth.

They live in Kensington Palace (next door to Prince Charles and Princess Diana) and the Queen is widely believed to top up their 60,000-pound annual income to defray an estimated 120,000 pounds worth of expenses.

To make ends meet, Prince Michael holds a series of corporate directorships. Meanwhile, the princess has been accused of taking fees for opening shopping malls and new factories. Hence the rent-a-royal tag.

None of which has improved her standing with Britons who expect royalty to be, well, regal.

Yet the princess has apparently made enemies in the palace for being too "regal".

Other members of the Royal Family reportedly refer to her as "Princess Pushy". Behind her back, her staff call her "Your Graciousness" and Prince Andrew, in his swashbuckling days of romancing soft-porn actress Koo Stark, allowed that the worst thing in the world would be having "dinner with Princess Michael."

Still, the 41-year-old princess has made as many enemies by being brutally honest as for what she says.

"The British love failures," she

said, adding that she would "never become British even if I live here for the rest of my life."

The British "distrust foreigners." They think "the wogs begin in Calais," she added as she explained her preference for the United States.

"I feel content when I am in America because anyone can make

it there with just normal intelligence and lots of hard work. In England you have to fight against prejudice."

The princess claims she isn't about to decamp to the United States but it seems few in Britain would be sad to see her go.

She has struggled to the top. Her parents divorced when Marie-

Christine von Reibnitz was a child and she grew up distanced from her noble lineage.

When she returned to Austria as a young woman and "discovered she was related to Tom, Dick and Duke Harry," says her biographer Peter Lane, "it gave her ideas above her station and the resentment that she hadn't been able to

lord it over others."

But the impulse to succeed has long been central to Marie-Christine's turbulent life.

And despite the widely held view that her marriage was nothing more than a way to snare a royal husband, those close to the couple insist it was a love match.

Marie-Christine had already

started a successful business as an interior decorator before she married Prince Michael.

Whether she is now simply cashing in on her royalty to flog her book or, as she claims, is struggling to do more with her life than "kiss babies," Princess Michael's undoubted position as Britain's most-disliked royal seems assured.

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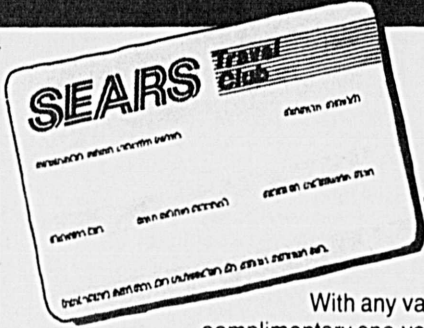
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