

# Man who was once king enchants audience

By Margaret Neubacher  
staff writer

He's tall, dark and handsome, speaks with an impeccable British accent and among other things plays polo regularly with Great Britain's Prince Charles. Those aren't surprising qualities for royalty, but a bit unexpected from someone who has the dubious distinction of being the exiled king of Tunisia, a small country in North Africa.

His Majesty King Rehad, 37, the guest speaker at the Livonia Town Hall season finale last week.

"I feel lucky to be here, considering some of the mountains I've just skied down," said Rehad. "But before the morning was out, it was the audience that felt lucky to have had a chance to hear the delightful tales of the king."

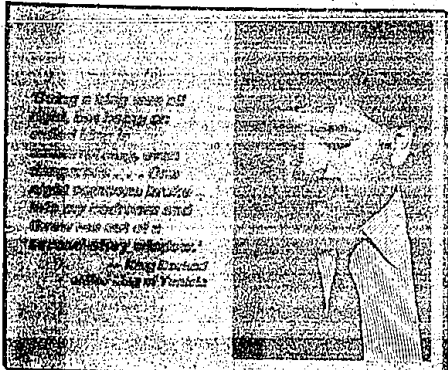
He recounted adventures that most of us believe can only happen in works of fiction.

KINGS OF Tunisia are considered direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Today King Rehad is considered Mohammed's nearest living descendant.

"My father, King Husayn En-Nasr terrified everyone in Tunisia, except women it seems," said Rehad. "He took 42 wives in his lifetime."

"I have 107 brothers and sisters. The oldest was born in 1910 and the youngest was born in 1970. I think that might be a record of some kind or other."

Rehad became King of Tunisia in July 1957. He was only 10 years old. Three months later, the country fell under the control of Prime Minister Habib Bourguiba, and the young king was exiled.



"Being a king was all right," recalls His Majesty, "but being an exiled king is embarrassing, even dangerous."

"My family first fled to the south of Tunisia. One night someone broke into my bedroom and threw me out of a second-story window," said Rehad.

"Luckily I landed in the only thorn bush in a sea of cactus and escaped with a few dozen deeply imbedded thorns in my legs."

"OUR FAMILY tightened security, and we left the country. A few months later I woke up to find a huge man with

a machete standing at the foot of my bed."

"He swung and made a long, deep gash down my arm. I turned when he swung again making another gash across my back. I ran to the window and was ready to jump, when I realized I was on the 14th floor."

"As I turned around to meet my fate, a guard burst into my room and shot the huge man."

The several hundred women gathered at the Mai Kai Theater in Livonia to hear the monarch breathe a collective sigh of relief.

Today Tunisia has a republican form of government. But if the monarchy were to be restored, Rehad would likely be king as he has never abdicated.

THE OXFORD-educated polo player said at first he didn't know what to do in exile. Living a normal life has not been easy.

"Imagine listing under previous duties on a job application, King of Tunisia," he said. "Once you're exiled, other royalty stop formal relationships with you. I am not even allowed into Tunisia. Because of that, I missed my father's funeral."

"When my father fell ill, the doctors gave him only a few days to live. Upon hearing the news the people of Tunisia gathered around the palace and chanted, 'Goodbye King, goodbye King.'"

"My father fell into a deep sleep and lived another three months. When he woke up one day, he heard the people chanting 'goodbye King' and turned to the doctors to ask, 'Where is everybody going?'"

Rehad, whose friends call him Sharif, lives in London and works as a consultant for Hoare Govett, one of England's leading stock brokerage firms. He is engaged to be married May 12 to Caroline MacKenzie, 23, of Scotland.

The wedding promises to be an international event of note, with Prince Charles and Lady Diana and the King of Jordan, topping the Who's-Who-Among-Royalty guest list.

DURING A celebrity luncheon at the Mayflower Meeting House, the former monarch answered a wide range of questions from the audience.

Does Lady Di wear the pants in the family? "I don't know for a fact, but rumor has it she does," said Rehad.

How did his father make the rounds of all his wives? Blushing profusely, Rehad said he used a bell system.

What about the situation in the Middle East? When answering this question, Rehad spoke with a seriousness not heard earlier in his voice.

"In the Middle East, it's a free nation to midnight. Something must be done, or there is going to be an awful blood-bath. I would like to see the United States broaden its foreign policy to seriously include countries other than Israel."

"The U.S. can help turn things around."

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