

# Princess at last: why I outed Albert as my father

In a rare interview, the love child of Belgium's former ruler tells of the pain of rejection and her fight to reveal the truth



Artist Delphine Boël, pictured with one of her works, says she is at last being taken seriously

REX

[Matthew Campbell](#)

Sunday August 23 2020, 2.00am BST, The Sunday Times

Some women might dream of becoming a princess, daughter of a king and heir to a royal fortune.

But that is not what drove Delphine Boël to take her father to court.

He was King Albert II of Belgium and Boël wanted him to recognise her officially as his daughter.

“But even if he had been a zookeeper or a criminal, I would have done exactly the same,” she said.

[Albert's grudging admission in January](#) that he was indeed Boël's biological father — after a court-ordered DNA test came back positive — capped not only a bitter paternity battle but years of emotional torment for Boël, 52, an artist.

Boël, whose blonde hair and blue eyes are family traits of the Belgian royal family, will return to court next month to be named as the legal daughter of Albert, who abdicated in 2013, the year she began proceedings.

"I just wanted the truth to be known," Boël told me last week. "It took quite a few years."

Vindication, Boël says, has changed her life but not because she has any desire to put on a tiara — she can now claim the title of princess — and pop round for tea with her half-brother, King Philippe, 60, and Queen Mathilde, 47.



Albert II and Queen Paola: the king abdicated in 2013  
VIRGINIE LEFOUR

"It's not like I feel I've suddenly been elevated; I've always roamed around with the same people as them," Boël said, adding that she was on friendly terms with British royals, having attended with her Belgian aristocrat mother some of the same English house parties as the Duke of Edinburgh.

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Nor does she expect her life to change in a material way even if, as the fourth child of the wealthy Albert, she can expect to inherit a slice of his fortune.

“That’s not why I went to court,” she said, adding that her mother’s former husband, Jacques Boël, 91, a Belgian steel magnate, is “far wealthier than the royal family”. Belgian reports put his family fortune at about £1.4bn and Albert’s at about half that.

Similarly, debate over whether she might ever be in line to succeed to the throne — it seems unlikely — leaves Boël cold. What she is savouring is the satisfaction of being believed, not only for herself, but for her children, aged 12 and 16, who have become used to being asked if their mother is “right in the head” for claiming to be one of the royals.

Her quest made Boël a cause célèbre in Belgium. “Some people thought I was a nuisance or ridiculous,” she said. “Now, at last, I’m being taken seriously.”

She was born in 1968 to Baroness Sybille de Selys Longchamps, who while married began a long affair with Albert, who was a prince at the time, the younger brother of King Baudouin. Albert and his wife, Paola Ruffo di Calabria, an Italian princess, already had three children.

While never having a close relationship with Jacques Boël, Delphine remembers Albert being a visitor when she was young. She nicknamed him Papillon, or “butterfly”. When she was eight, she moved with her mother to London, where the baroness got a divorce and married into a rich English family, the Cayzers. Boël went on to graduate from the Chelsea College of Art.

Albert carried on caring for her, being “absolutely present” in her life for many years, she said. “It’s not that I was always sitting on his knees going googoo gaga dada. But he was available. I could call him whenever I wanted.”

He had never expected to be king but inherited the throne when Baudouin died after a heart attack in 1993, leaving no children. Boël’s mother had by then told Delphine the secret of her birth.

She continued to enjoy sporadic contact with Albert, respecting his position that he could not acknowledge her in public. He would often telephone, and sent “little presents” on her birthdays.

She has never understood why he later cut off relations. Most commentators link it to the exposure of his “love child” in a book about Queen Paola published in 1999. Albert confessed publicly to what he called a former “crisis” in his marriage while giving no details. Boël and her mother were besieged by the press but refused to comment. Boël says she stayed in touch with Albert until 2001, when she wrote to him to say her mother was unwell but received no reply. She eventually got through to him on the telephone. “He said in a really horrible way, ‘You’re not my daughter.’”

She then began communicating through her art. One painting showed her looking out of a washing machine as the king’s “dirty laundry”. Another work mimicked the *Manneken Pis*, the iconic Belgian statue of a little boy urinating. She included a giant phallus in the colours of the national flag. More of her work was on display last week in the upmarket Belgian seaside resort of Knokke, where a gallery was exhibiting canvasses she had painted during the court battle. One of them, referring to her temerity in taking Albert to court, is daubed with the sentence: “In the old days I would be beheaded.”

Even though Albert, 86, has finally recognised her, Boël fears that she may never get a chance to ask him in person why he disowned her.

“I just can’t explain it,” she said. “Why? It wasn’t good for him, or for any of them. If he had told me and there was a good reason for it, everything would have been settled.”

Albert’s public statement accepting paternity denied that he had ever been involved with any “family, social or educative decision whatsoever regarding Madame Delphine Boël”, accusing her of wanting to “change families”.

It added that biological paternity did not make him legally her father but said he had decided “to put an end to this difficult procedure in honour and dignity”.

Boël was appalled by the tone. “It was horrible,” she said. “The next day I had to go to the osteopath who asked me, ‘Did someone kick you in the back?’”

She went on: “I always had protected my parents — I knew I had to be quiet about who my real father was. I felt betrayed by that comment. I still can’t believe he would say something like that. I can’t believe it came out of his mouth. It must have been written by his lawyers.”

Boël would still like to meet Albert — but is not holding out much hope of a joyful reunion any time soon. “I’m not a masochist,” she said.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/princess-at-last-why-i-outed-albert-as-my-father-gvqzmlgc2>

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Monday, 12 October 2020

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**Pammy Berwick**  
23 AUGUST

Who’d want to be related to the family of Bloody Leopold?

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**C B**  
24 AUGUST  
Pammy Berwick

As per almost every other European monarch..

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**Hin Lee**

23 AUGUST

This drama smacks of living in the nineteenth century.

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**Hertslady**

23 AUGUST *Edited*

I'm sympathetic but it's not black and white. Most people would side with the right of the child to be recognised by her father over the father's other children's and wife's right to think of their father as having loved them enough to behave himself. But is that just our society's culture at this point in time?

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**Egalitarian**

23 AUGUST *Edited*

I love it when a court forces a nasty coward like Albert to look in the mirror and admit what he sees.

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**JMS13**

23 AUGUST

Does the headline writer not know that only legitimate children inherit titles?

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**David Owens**

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What a p\*\*\*k the ex king is.

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**Daniel Reilly**

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23 AUGUST

Blond hair and blue eyes are family traits of the Belgian royals?

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**KS**

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Daniel Reilly

That makes me Belgian and royal, then? Who would have thought it ?!!

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**Mrs R in Canada**

23 AUGUST

Daniel Reilly

Judging from the photo, I would have thought that her hair was darkish brown with superimposed blond highlights.

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**Mrs M**

23 AUGUST *Edited*

If he is king of the Congo, can he take his subject back from Britain?.

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**Mrs M**

23 AUGUST

In EUland shouldnt they just replace these old aristos by the new EU elite.

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**World Traveler**

23 AUGUST

Mrs M

...or by the Lords! Europe's ultimate meritocracy!

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**Ian Green**

23 AUGUST *Edited*

The royal family think they can silence me forever, but they can't. One day my dad will acknowledge me, my half-brother William will attend my coronation, and you'll all wish you'd been nicer to me.

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**Hobbes**

24 AUGUST

Ian Green

Listen up Harry, how about you stop commenting in the Times under a false name and stand up for yourself.

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**Nigel Brown**

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It looks like she resembles him rather in appearance . I hope she didn't get his personality or brains.

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**SARAH**

23 AUGUST

De Selys Longchamp family is far superior in every way...heros in war as opposed to Congo looters.

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**Lady Kaaskop**

23 AUGUST



I feel sorry for her but hope she will have peace of mind from now on, although being treated by her real father like this, must be cruelly painful.

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**Maui Pete**

23 AUGUST

These self labeling titles of 'aristocracy' are arcane, irrelevant and frankly, a joke.

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**Mrs M**

23 AUGUST

Maui Pete

Yep, let's give the EU elite the top spots in the pecking order.

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**Sunshinesdad**

23 AUGUST

Maui Pete

You would have been leading the storming of the Bastille were you in France in the late 1780's I suspect! Singing La Marseillaise at the top of your voice!

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**Star Anise**

23 AUGUST

In the bad old days she would have been given to the gypsies

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**Beatrice**

23 AUGUST

Star Anise

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Or he would have been introduced as her Uncle. She has completely left out mention of her mother in this drama. Is she entirely blameless? She should have just kept quiet.

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**BSC**

23 AUGUST

I admire her stamina and bravery to keep going to prove that King Albert II is her father. Even with all her family money, dealing with royal families is not easy. Isn't there a similar case where Albert of Monaco tried to deny he was the father of a young woman whose mother he had an affair with? Royalty have a propensity to be able to slither out of these type of claims against them. Years of experience, no centuries of experience I suppose.

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**Beatrice**

23 AUGUST

BSC

Not anymore! We now have cameras in every corner of the earth, DNA, and "social media". Nothing can happen that cannot be discovered later. You might think that these modern techniques would induce people to behave themselves.

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**Jillie Gardiner**

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She may not need money, but she has just got a lot of free publicity for the exhibition of her art work that would not have happened if this story had not been published.

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**Smoky Ashton**

23 AUGUST *Edited*

One has every sympathy for Delphine but one does rather think that proving your biological father to be a tuppence halfpenny King and not from a Crown of substance and history is something better kept private.

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**Mrs M**

23 AUGUST

Smoky Ashton

Is not all royalty above criticism by right of god?

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**Lone Voice**

23 AUGUST

Smoky Ashton

One crown is a lot like another -Each one transform citizens into subjects.

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**Ruth Stewart**

23 AUGUST

Another deadbeat dad. Very sad.

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**Pauline Osborn**

23 AUGUST

Rich or poor, many children adopted or otherwise have a poor reception by natural parents in adult life. Very sad all around.

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**mark mark**

23 AUGUST

as for her father: what can you expect from a relative of Leopold II? or Leopold I, known in his time as the stallion of Europe?

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**Picador**

23 AUGUST

mark mark

While I don't condone Albert's strange response, something seems to have triggered it, for it is clear from this article that there was a 'before', when there was an affectionate relationship and an 'after', when there was a cold shoulder. We will never hear the other side of the story, and we must continue to assume he is a nasty piece of work because that is clearly her intent, and revenge is sweet, and clearly repetitive. As to her motives - well..... she sure would not be getting this publicity if she were the daughter of a 'zookeeper or a criminal'.

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**Bear**

23 AUGUST

There was an overload of references to money and titles in this article...

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**Calypto**

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What a cruel response by her father, despicable human being.

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**artapp57**

23 AUGUST

'Blonde hair and blue eyes' are a trait of.....

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**Bakehouseboy**

23 AUGUST

Kerching!

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**SARAH**

23 AUGUST

Bakehouseboy

Don't think it was money motivated

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**Montagu**

23 AUGUST

Well done . She is much to be admired

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**Camboy**

23 AUGUST

What a brave woman. What awful treatment. She deserves so much better from her estranged father's family even if the former king doesn't have the dignity himself.

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**Norma Carter**

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The remaining European Royal families should clean up their acts or they will become an extinct breed in the future. Gone are the days the public who fund them have to put up with their shenanigans and pathetic life styles. They are all skating on very thin ice right now, especially our own.

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**John Atkins**

23 AUGUST

Norma Carter

You are right the cracks in our ice get wider year on year.

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**Standing alone**

23 AUGUST

A heartwarming read. Thank you MC

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**Jerry Parks**

23 AUGUST

Harsh on zookeepers...

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**Kay Thomas**

23 AUGUST

Good for her but what a good job she was from a very rich and well-connected family otherwise she would've been seen as a MoneyGrabber. I hope this illustrates for people who want to be acknowledged by their parents that they need simply to be acknowledged rather than anything more sinister.

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**WillP**

23 AUGUST

Kay Thomas

That doesn't stop some people from peddling the trope. As the money-grabbing angle is implausible, they switch to the free-publicity accusation.

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**Auslawyer**

23 AUGUST

Probably had to be seen to be loyal to his wife and family in order to minimise impact. Tragic for all concerned.

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**Peter Morrow**

23 AUGUST

Auslawyer

On the other hand, he could have avoided all of this by keeping his trousers on. Offspring do not just happen out of the blue...

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**Mabelino**

23 AUGUST

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Good for her. I'm sure there'll be more coming out of the aristocratic woodwork before long.