

Sept. 11, 1997

Dear Ms. Lamb,

On Monday, September 8th at approximately 1pm I decided to watch C-Span in order to give myself a break from the sad news regarding Princess Diana. The logical side of my brain was saying "get on with your life".

It surprised me to find that on re-play (taped earlier in the day) of Washington Journal you and the two guest columnists (Lars-Erik Nelson of The Daily News and Andrew Ferguson, of The Weekly Standard) were discussing Princess Diana and her funeral and The Royal Family.

At 1:20pm a teacher from Binghamton U. called and she proved to be the most articulate person on the program. She expressed deep feelings about Diana and her life as well as her death. At about the same time someone faxed-in a message; "Just Don't Get It!" and I totally agree.

The next day I attempted to write a letter expressing my views on the subject. It was an
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extremely difficult task. Then I found the enclosed item in our local paper The Middlesex News. The writer expresses herself better than I am able to so I'm sending it along. However, I will say that I feel people who came to be aware of and admire Princess Diana did so for a number of reasons.

When I first saw Diana I was simply impressed with her good looks. The camera caught her shyness and she photographed well. As time went by I began to enjoy seeing her develop into a rather elegant, regal young woman. It was fun to watch her with her children. Later on it was difficult to do anything but feel sad for her situation and admire her for how she worked thru her problems. When I learned of her death I felt sadness for her sons and a great sense of loss. I will miss her smiles and her beautiful presence. But, most of all I will miss the love she conveyed with her hugs and touches. She certainly had charisma but, more importantly, she had compassion.

I enjoy your program very much. It makes me think.

Sincerely yours,

A new model of feminine strength

When Prince Charles of Wales introduced young Diana Spencer to the world 16 years ago, who could have imagined the powerful force that this shy and awkward girl would become?



Sara Eckel

Sara Eckel writes a weekly column for Scripps-Howard Newspapers.

As we watch the flowers pile up in front of Kensington Palace and British consulates around the world, it is truly amazing to think that one person could inspire so much adoration in her lifetime and so much grief in her death.

Many people I know were taken aback by the outpouring of emotion Diana's death has caused. "I had no idea the cult of Diana was so strong," said one friend. Another said he was surprised to realize that he too was touched by the princess's untimely demise. "I never really thought about her before, but when I heard the news I definitely felt a loss," he said.

How did this woman get such a strong hold on the public imagination? By now many theories have been proffered — it was her beauty, her grace, her common touch. Of course, all of these things were important elements in the creation of Saint Diana, but the main reason I think we feel such loss is that she held such a completely unique place in our culture. She was so much more than just a pretty woman who wore fashionable clothes and did good works. She was, I believe, a model of feminine strength.

When the nervous kindergarten

teacher married Prince Charles in 1981, she was the very essence of traditional femininity. Eyes lowered, she was quiet and obedient — exactly the kind of woman we can presume the royal family wanted. But Diana soon realized that this role did not suit her, that she could not tolerate a life spent meekly obeying orders and silently enduring her husband's infidelities. So she did something that the House of Windsor was wholly unprepared for: She told the world the princess was unhappy.

Diana has been called a hypocrite for using the press as much as she criticized it. But the princess's manipulation of the media was actually a healthy and realistic response to her circumstances. The relentless intrusion of cameras was an unflinching fact of her life. Therefore, she had a choice. She could allow this problem to make her angry and bitter, or she could turn it into an opportunity.

As Vanity Fair executive editor Elise O'Shaughnessy said recently, Diana successfully provided us with the next chapter to the fairy tale: "It's all very well, you go out and marry the prince, but what happens when the prince turns out to be a louse? (Diana's) is a very 20th century story of someone who took the reins and made a very difficult situation work for her in the end."

As Diana emerged from the wreckage of her marriage, we watched the shy girl metamorphose into a diva. Thus she became a model of a differ-

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ent — and I think far superior — breed of femininity. Again, it wasn't just the beauty and the charm — though that was a big part of it. It was the intensity with which she threw herself into her good works. It was the way that she took such humble qualities as kindness and compassion and made them larger than life. When she cuddled a sick child or hugged an AIDS patient, we knew we were witnessing something much more than public relations. We knew that she meant it, because we knew how much she needed it. She was not just giving, she was receiving. And in the end, this vulnerability is what made her so powerful.

"Someone's got to go out there and love people," Diana said in her famous 1995 television interview. It sounded corny when she said it, and it actually sounds corny now. And yet, who else was saying it? That was the amazing thing about Diana — nothing she did or said was terribly original and yet she filled a void in the public consciousness. A void, I fear, that will remain empty for many years to come.

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