

"ONCE UPON A TIME there was a beautiful princess". She was not a character in a fairy tale but a very human, vulnerable and at times unsure young woman. After 17 years in our constantly appraising public eye during which she beguiled and bemused us in turn, Diana, Princess of Wales is suddenly gone. Our grief is palpable. We weep; we travel miles to lay flowers; we write cheques to her favourite charities and we stand confused, bereft.

What was it about this young woman that touched us so deeply? We often disapproved of her, didn't we? The press helped us to articulate our own disapprobation; "Immature", "Lacking in self discipline", "Manipulative", "Loose cannon". And yet we mourn her collectively with an intensity previously unknown in this country. Why?

She was young, beautiful, stylish, elegant. We were proud that the world acknowledged this and envied us. The international press worshipped her with their cameras. We accepted the adulation and sometimes bought the resulting papers and magazines ourselves. Heaven forbid that we are so shallow as to mourn the loss of vicariously enjoyed publicity.

No. It was something far deeper that touched the people of Great Britain and the world across a wide spectrum of society. Diana connected with us if we allowed her to do so. We felt her concern whether we were young, old, sick, homeless, unemployed, mentally handicapped or survivors of a broken marriage. We had the feeling that she understood the bittersweet extremes of the human condition and cared whether or not we survived them.

Several years ago I discovered the inscription on William and Kate Bartlett's tombstone in Shipton churchyard and used it in my Christmas letter to friends in America. It had been a particularly difficult year for us with health problems which seemed insurmountable at times. The simple lines I copied encapsulated my feelings and seemed a better expression of them than any lengthy elaboration of the particulars. I was astonished when listening to coverage of the Princess's death on the BBC suddenly to see her quoting these same lines on an occasion of particular concern to her. My own personal bond with Diana was forged in that moment.

The following day Libby Purves quoted the same poem in her excellent Times tribute to Diana. Ms. Purves said "She once quoted some lines by the Australian poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, lines which she had chosen herself and which were sneered at by some commentators as 'greeting card stuff'.

Life is mostly froth and bubble
Two things stand in stone,
Kindness in another's trouble
Courage in your own.

And that's it, really; the froth and bubble will subside and we shall remember the kindness and some moments of courage".

The article concluded "When the very worst things happen, the simple hearts have it right, kindness in another's trouble, courage in your own. The rest should be silence"

Indeed.

Trudy Yates.