

Bill Rea ? World got over Diana



Twenty years ago tonight (Thursday), I was with a group of friends spending Labour Day weekend at a B&B in eastern Ontario. The gang of us, which included my fiancée at the time (we have since wed), were seated around the table playing a board game when the operator of the establishment entered the room. Apart from meal time, she very seldom had any interaction with her tenants, but this was a time when she needed to talk, and we soon understood why. She told us she had just heard on the radio that Princess Diana had been in a bad car accident in Paris, and (I remember the pause as she gathered herself to break the news) that she had died.

The board game came to an abrupt end. The group of us, which included a couple who had been born and raised in England, just sat around and discussed the implications of the news. And we had not yet appreciated all the implications. The world reacted in a way I wouldn't have believed, had I not observed events in the days that followed. And much of what I saw and read in those days made me angry. To this day, I still do a burn when I think of much of it.

The Royal Family in general, and Prince Charles in particular, took a major trashing from the public and the media at the time. I believed then, and still do, that it was not deserved.

Diana died far too young. She was only 36, and she had much, much more to offer the world. She had already made her mark in tangible ways; embracing people with AIDS, speaking out against landmines, etc.

But I have done what I do for a living for a long time, and I understand things like car accidents happen, and people die as a result. These are not pleasant events, but they are part of the reality that is the world in which we live.

So I understood the universal grief that came in the days that followed. True, I thought some people went a little too far with their grief, but I had also lived long enough to know that it's not a good time to judge people when death is involved.

But people wanted to see the Queen, as if she had some obligation to appear on command, and when she was slow in stepping forward, anger was turned against her.

?Will someone please save these people from themselves!?

Those words were spoken by actor Michael Sheen in his show-stealing performance as then prime minister Tony Blair in the 2006 motion picture *The Queen*. He was reacting to the reaction (or lack thereof) of the Royals to the whole situation. I remember watching the movie, and thinking of what someone in a position of power should have said at the time.

?Will someone please remember these people are dealing with a death in the family!?

How much right did the public have to tell the Queen and her relations how to handle a death in their family?

Diana's death came about seven weeks before the fifth anniversary of my father's passing. As I heard accounts of people complaining about how the Queen was dealing with the matter, I reflected on how I would have responded five years earlier when I was dealing with my dad's death. Had someone dared tell me how I should be behaving at the time, that person would have been told to mind their own bloody business, pronto.

There are some who argue that the Royals serve the people, therefore the people have the right to issue directions to them. Would your boss have the right to tell you how to deal with a death on your family? My boss attended my dad's funeral, but he let my family and I deal with things as we saw fit.

The Royal Family deserved the same courtesy.

Diana died in France, yet her body somehow was returned to England. How did that happen? It happened because her former

husband, Prince Charles, went and got her.

Granted, Prince Charles is no Prince Charming, but when the situation required it, he stepped up.

What too many people seemed to have forgotten at the time was there were two boys, named William and Harry, who had lost their mother in most tragic circumstances. That meant the Queen and Prince Charles had other things on their respective plates at the time, although it seems they gave in a bit. They lowered the flag at Buckingham Palace, and the Queen made an address to her people. William and Harry also walked behind their mother's coffin as it made its way through the streets of London. Their father, grandfather and uncle were with them. How many of you would have enjoyed following your mother's funeral procession with the whole world watching? They did it, yet their family was criticized.

It seems to me that the whole family stepped up when it was required, and I think most people have spent the last 20 years coming to realize that.

The Queen still occupies her office, and she is still revered, as was demonstrated at her Diamond Jubilee celebrations five years ago. More important, William and Harry have grown into two fine men. Harry, while sometimes a little rough around the edges, has worn the uniform and stood on the field of battle, in the finest tradition of his ancestors. William has stood up too, befitting his role as future king. He has also fathered two beautiful children in the process. I believe that means the monarchy will likely continue, befitting the will of the people.

That might not have been expected 20 years ago. I remember listening to radio phone-in shows as we were driving home from that B&B, hearing the trashing the Royals were taking.

It has been said that people will sometimes get off on the wrong tangent, but they will come around in the end. Such was the case here.