

An evaporating sense of humanity?

by BROCK WEIR

My first real job in a newsroom began with something of a whirlwind.

Reasonably fresh out of university, the job came about in a somewhat unexpected way and unfolded in a similar manner. Little was asked of me beyond my ability to make deadlines and, from there, it was directly into the eye of what was painted to be a storm.

From the outset, I had no shortage of well-wishers and community members at large making contact to give me 'the real story' on the community and its so-called power-players, elected and otherwise.

Some of it was good, some of it? less so and unlikely, but as my first week wore on, I felt as though my eyes were growing wider and wider. Finding my feet, I was able to sift through the bulk of this detritus and forge ahead. But it soon became apparent that getting the 'scoop' cut both ways.

Before too long, a leading politician of the day, who I first met on the second day of the gig, came up to me in a flurry of concern to ask if I was okay.

As far as I could tell I was fine and asked them why they had asked.

Apparently, due to a minor limp I've had since elementary school due to arthritis that decided to settle in a bit earlier than most, a story was circulating that I had been in some sort of terrible accident. I think we were both relieved that was not the case ? I certainly know I was! ? but nonetheless the rumour persisted for a good long while, bubbling up to the surface without any rhyme or reason.

Thankfully, as far as rumours go, it was a reasonably inconsequential one; something that I was able to brush off pretty quickly, with no lasting harm to myself or my family.

The same, I fear, cannot be said by the Princess of Wales as she continues in the early days of her cancer journey.

On Friday, the Princess announced to the world that the serious abdominal surgery she underwent in mid-January sadly, and after the fact, resulted in a cancer diagnosis. In her moving statement, she thanked people for the well-wishes she had received since her surgery was first announced and during her subsequent recovery out of the public eye.

'At the time, it was thought my condition was non-cancerous,' she said. 'The surgery was successful. However, tests after the operation found cancer had been present. My medical team therefore advised that I should undergo a course of preventative chemotherapy and I am now in the early stages of that treatment. This, of course, came as a huge shock, and William and I have been doing everything we can to process and manage this privately for the sake of our young family.'

'As you can imagine, this has taken time. It has taken me time to recover from major surgery in order to start my treatment. But, most importantly, it has taken us time to explain everything to George, Charlotte and Louis in a way that is appropriate for them, and to reassure them that I am going to be okay?.'

'We hope that you will understand that, as a family, we now need some time, space, and privacy while I complete my treatment. My work has always brought me a deep sense of joy and I look forward to being back when I am able, but for now I must focus on making a full recovery. At this time, I am also thinking of all those whose lives have been affected by cancer. For everyone facing this disease, in whatever form, please do not lose faith or hope. You are not alone?.'

One can only hope they get as much time, space, and privacy as private individuals do during this difficult time ? as it was certainly

absent in the lead-up to Friday's announcement.

Since stepping back from the public eye shortly after the New Year for a then-undisclosed reason, Catherine and her family were subject to some of the most vile treatment on social media I've ever seen aimed at an apolitical public figure who, along with her family, have stived to be figures of unity more than anything else.

They were faced with countless alarming worst-case-scenario online rumours of her health, a particularly distressing turn of events for someone who has children growing up in the most tech-savvy generation we've yet seen; disheartening and outlandish claims about their personal lives; and even claims of things sinister and/or criminal afoot.

Each step they made was the subject of intense and off-the-charts scrutiny ? suddenly, everyone and their uncle appointed themselves among the ranks of the great Photoshop savants and foremost AI experts of our time ? all the while a very real family was going through an experience traumatic in itself, but trebled due to what I think can only be described as a lack of basic of consideration for one another ? and, when it comes down to it, a lack of humanity and compassion not just for her, but everyone going through a private battle.

Despite going public with her diagnosis ? an announcement some have argued she was coerced into by keyboard warriors in an effort to quell their increasingly unhinged ramblings ? those culprits are still working overtime to try to prove their theories; or, quite unbelievably, trying to turn the blame back on the Prince and Princess of Wales for being less than forthcoming and leaving them a vacuum to fill.

Intense scrutiny bordering, in my view, on the ludicrous is nothing new when it comes to the Royal Family.

Catherine's late mother-in-law, Diana, Princess of Wales, certainly experienced it with tragic consequences. Her father-in-law's wife, Queen Camilla, experienced it as well. Her sister-in-law, the Duchess of Sussex, continues to experience abuse of her own, burnished with inarguable racial undertones; and now this.

Yet, this was something else again.

Some argue that, in the United Kingdom, the privileges enjoyed by members of the Royal Family are funded by the taxpayer ? the intricacies of that claim can be the subject of a column all its own ? and therefore (at best) the public has the right to know and/or (at worst) these individuals are public property.

While they are, in my opinion, public servants, they are not public property. They, just like any other individual, regardless of who pays for or maintains their lifestyle, have the right to wage private health battles as they see fit, particularly where minors are concerned.

Those who say otherwise need to get some fresh air.

Holding our public figures accountable for the work they do is integral to any democracy. Relentless bullying of a public figure to lay bare what was always clear from the outset to be a significant health concern does not fit the bill.

I can only hope that following Friday's announcement that these ?concerned? parties, if only for a moment, put themselves in the Princess's shoes and consider their own life choices.