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### **Tea with the Princess**

**A former editor of *People* magazine recalls his meeting with "the people's princess"**

by Landon Y. Jones, Jr. '66

ONE OF THE REMARKABLE legacies of the Princess of Wales is that in the weeks following her death almost everyone felt as if they had known her. This was not surprising. Diana's image was the most reproduced in the world, and the most private details of her life had been rendered into a melodrama that stretched over a decade and a half.

As the managing editor of *People* magazine from 1989 until this April, I played a role in a process of mass fascination that excluded almost no one. When I interviewed President-elect Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton in Little Rock in December 1992, Mrs. Clinton, who at that time had never met the Princess, took a *People* cover about her troubled marriage from my hands and exclaimed, "Oh, she never should have married so young!"

The Clintons would later meet Diana, and so would I. Actually, I met her twice. The most public such occasion was a two-day symposium and benefit for cancer research that *People* cosponsored with Northwestern University in June 1996. The high point came when Henry Bienen, Northwestern's president (and a former dean of the Woodrow Wilson School), and I escorted her to a gala in Chicago, where we

shared an intimate dinner with the Princess and 1,500 guests who paid up to \$35,000 a table to join us. The Princess was charming, witty, charismatic, compassionate, and totally professional. We raised \$1.4 million for cancer treatment and research.

But the first time I met Princess Diana, the circumstances were more personal. In the fall of 1994 I received a phone call from Fred Hauptfuhrer, *People's* London bureau chief, who said that we had been invited to have an off-the-record tea with Diana at her home in Kensington Palace. Fred was delighted. He had been patiently negotiating with the Palace for years for such a meeting, where we hoped to raise for the first time the idea of Diana participating in a charity fund-raiser sponsored by *People*.

The sky was a pearly Ascot gray on the cool Tuesday morning in early October when Fred and I crammed into a red compact car, and he nonchalantly instructed the driver, "Kensington Palace." After one turn into the wrong driveway--the driver apparently did not think we were literally going to the Palace--we were waved past a gatehouse and into the grounds of the 300-year-old brick edifice where Queen Victoria was born. Fred pointed out the various apartments currently occupied by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, Princess Anne and her husband, and Princess Margaret. We proceeded to the north end of the Palace, parked in a circular driveway in front of a modest door, and after some nervous hesitation, rang the bell.

We were welcomed by a butler dressed in a coat and tie who ushered us into an anteroom with

chartreuse wallpaper. "The Princess has someone with her now, but will be with you shortly," he explained. We settled into uncomfortable wooden chairs and leafed through several large photo albums filled with pictures of the Princess on official engagements. The footman suddenly reappeared and escorted us up a wide carpeted stairway. On the landing was a full-length portrait of Diana wearing a gauzy white dress. At the top of the stairs, a wide hall led off to several rooms, decorated in warm yellows and greens. The feeling was suburban and homey, not heraldic--more East Hampton than Hampton Court. The butler gestured toward an open door and suddenly the Princess of Wales appeared, extending her hand with a laugh, almost a giggle. I greeted her with "How are you?", completely forgetting Fred's careful instruction that the only two proper ways to greet the Princess were as "Your Highness" or "Ma'am."

#### A RETURN TO PUBLIC LIFE

The three of us sat on facing green-and-white chintz sofas--Fred and I on one, Diana on another; embroidered scarlet throw pillows were scattered about. Between the sofas were large chintz-covered ottomans with stacks of art books balancing precariously on top. On the walls were several large paintings and smaller sketches of Diana's children, William and Harry, who were away at school. On the side tables were several framed black-and-white family photographs; one was of the Queen of England, but none were of Prince Charles. (At the time, she and Charles were separated but not

divorced.) Diana wore a black silk suit with a collarless fuchsia blouse, black sheer stockings, and black high heels. Her only jewelry was a double strand of pearls and her wedding ring.

I began our conversation by noting that a year earlier, in 1993, she had announced she intended to leave public life, but more recently seemed to be returning to it. Why? The Princess explained that she had indeed decided to return to her public role but would be "more selective" about her appearances and would only support those causes that mattered personally to her. She noted that in some instances she would leave it up to the charity to determine whether her role would be private or public. "It is a little like going to school again," she said of her return to the public eye. She joked about attending a recent event with the Duchess of Norfolk where the popping of flashbulbs had been so disconcerting while walking downstairs that "I had to cling to her arm to keep from falling!" One cause that I knew mattered to her was AIDS. I ask if she had met Elizabeth Glaser, the founder of the Pediatric AIDS Foundation in Los Angeles, which *People* had actively supported. Infected with HIV by a blood transfusion during childbirth, Glaser had lost her daughter Ariel and was gravely ill herself. Diana replied that she had met Elizabeth and her husband, the actor Paul Michael Glaser, just a few weeks earlier during a visit to Martha's Vineyard. "It is interesting that you would mention her," she remarked, "since I talked with Elizabeth last Saturday night." She said that Glaser seemed very sick and had trouble getting even a few words out. The Princess then went on to

discuss AIDS more generally, noting that the British had been slow to recognize the problem, "and blamed gay people for it." When we asked if she would contemplate working with *People* on a charitable activity, Diana said that she would be willing to do so when her schedule permitted and that we should discuss it further with her personal secretary.

#### THE PRINCESS AT EASE

That accomplished, the conversation then became more freewheeling. Diana was open, spontaneous, and not at all guarded. She laughed freely and gaily, usually at something she said--not surprisingly, since Fred and I were utterly focused, nervous, and humorless throughout. She had a habit of clapping her hands on her face, or crossing them on her chest if something amused her, or if she was laughing at herself. If it is possible to be both professional and flirtatious, she was. When there was a pause in the conversation--usually while Fred and I were either desperately trying to think of our next question, or interrupting one another--she would sit in the pose familiar from her photos: legs folded together at a sharp angle, hands in lap, eyes slightly downcast. Her visual appearance was of girlishness and shyness, but her personality was outgoing and confident.

The butler returned with coffee, and as I tried to balance my cup on the art books in front of me, we discussed a variety of topics, including an upcoming visit to the U.S., where she would meet with Elizabeth Dole and the American Red Cross in Washington; her love of Americans because "they take care of me"; and her friend Elizabeth Tilberis, the English-born editor

of *Harpers Bazaar*, who had been struggling with cancer. "But she has beaten it," Diana said, with obvious relief.

Then we turned to a delicate part of our conversation. Before and during the time of our visit, the Fleet Street tabloids had erupted in one of their periodic feeding frenzies over the dissolution of Diana's marriage to Prince Charles. Already that month they had printed accounts of her allegedly making dozens of nuisance phone calls to a married art dealer, Oliver Hoare. A few days before we arrived, Diana's supposed lover in the late 1980s, an ex-Life Guards officer named James Hewitt, had published *Princess in Love*, a tawdry memoir of their relationship. *People's* own cover story about the Hewitt flap had itself been published the day before our meeting in London. (Diana had mentioned that her friends in the U.S. regularly mailed *People* to her, but if she was aware of this cover, she did not mention it.)

Fred and I asked Princess Diana how she was coping with the onslaught of publicity. She said that she tried to ignore it but was concerned about "its impact on William and Harry." Her solution, she said, "is just to laugh at it. For instance, the boys joke with me about the idea I would make all those telephone calls [to Oliver Hoare]. They said, 'Mummy, you are too busy to make all those calls they said you did!' "

The Princess then said that she had concluded that one way to deal with her problems with the press was to get to know it better, so she was having small meetings with editors. (By implication, our tea was part of this strategy.) She said that she had recently

met with "Mr. Murdoch," whose tabloids had been among the most virulent in reporting on her private life. I mentioned to her that the Clintons also sought to have small dinners with the press, for a similar reason. "Did it help?" she asked intently. I said that perhaps it did, but that expectations could be raised too high on both sides by such meetings, and she would be wrong to expect instant results.

As the conversation began to lag, we gathered our coffee cups and rose to leave. She walked us downstairs, thanking me for taking time to see her during my visit to London. (Not an inconvenience at all, I assured her.) Outside we stood for a few minutes by the car, chatting about the weather, of all things. I would see Diana again, during the Chicago event two years later, but as we pulled out of the driveway, I turned to look back and saw what will remain my lasting image of her: the Princess of Wales standing by her doorway, alone, waving goodbye.

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