

Diana fervour fuelled by public's own projections

HEIDI KINGSTONE

ON THE AGENDA



The life of Princess Diana in retrospect seems like an early pilot episode in reality TV. She lived most of her adult life in the glare of publicity even though the debate about how much she courted the camera continues.

Incredibly, 10 years after her death we still write about her with the same fervour and passion as if she were alive. Still, she remains as divisive, loved or loathed as she did in her short life.

Only now we speculate on what she might have become – a pastime as intensely irritating as the conspiracy theories that surrounded her early, tragic death on August 31 1997 in a Paris tunnel.

In some ways, and especially at these times, we don't have the ability to let go. The Princess of Wales seems as much with us as when she was alive.

Column centimetres over the months that have led up to this 10th anniversary have debated how she would have dealt with the future challenges that face us all.

As soon as she and Dodi al-Fayed flaunted their new relationship, as they sailed the Mediterranean on a yacht owned by Dodi's father, speculation began

about whether they would get engaged – 10 days after the affair began.

Who propagates these fairytales? The same people who catapulted Diana into the sphere of fairytale princess. She already had one whirlwind romance when she and Charles married. It would seem that she might have more sense second time round.

But that is the very point. Who knows? And the answer is: nobody. We don't know if she would have married Dodi. Speaking for myself, I expect not. We don't know whether in her last few days she had really come into her own and in so doing would have left behind the hurt and pain and misery that seemed to engulf her after her divorce and the end of the relationship with Hasnat Khan, the heart surgeon who apparently stole her heart.

These past few months, lots of arm-chair psychology has proliferated, a bit like forlorn tumbleweeds in old Western movies as they bounced through empty frontier towns. How much of our own thoughts, feelings, prejudices, wishes and clichés do we project onto her? Quite a lot.

We have certainly built up a comprehensive picture of Diana, someone who mysteriously captivated millions (big nose, wonky eyes, no/debatable dress sense).

Through pictures we saw her, through interviews and informed comment we learnt about her, and the puzzle was further enhanced with descriptions from people she knew, others she confided in,

advice she sought. We watched her develop over the decade-and-a-half she was in the public eye, but we still didn't know her.

It is impossible to look at pictures of Diana and Dodi, an unattractive playboy, and conclude that they were headed for the altar.

From the images taken of Diana as she left the Ritz in Paris with Dodi, body language experts claim she felt comfortable in his presence. Perhaps he was the answer to her prayers – or maybe she thought her heart surgeon would have a pang of remorse over their recently ended affair.

In the UK, speculation as to what the Princess of Wales would have become has gone on ad nauseam, with people like Germaine Greer and former *New Yorker* editor Tina Brown extrapolating: would she have turned into a modern-day Madonna, taken up gardening or joined an ashram?

Diana might have continued her important work on landmine elimination. Maybe she and Dodi would have got married and parted until the last moment of their lives.

This fairytale, as we know, did not have a happy ending, something no one could have predicted as a billion people watched Diana walk down the aisle as a young bride. Life has a funny way of working out, and rarely can the twists and turns be accurately predicted.

It's time would-be psychics put away their crystal balls for another decade.

Diana RIP.