Princess Diana Essay, Research Paper

English princess, former wife of Charles, Prince of Wales. Born July 1, 1961, in Norfolk, England. Her father, Lord Althorp, became the eighth Earl Spencer in 1975; he had served as a personal equerry to both King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II. Lady Diana Spencer grew up on her family mansion near the British royal family?s estate in Sandringham, England. When she was only six years old, her mother, Frances, left her father for Peter Shand Kydd, a wealthy businessman. Though her two sisters, Sarah and Jane, were by then in boarding school, Diana and her younger brother Charles unhappily divided their time during the next several years between their parents? homes.

Diana attended the exclusive West Heath boarding school in Kent for four years, but dropped out when she was 16. After a term at a Swiss finishing school, she ended her formal education and got a job in London working as a nursery school teacher?s aide. Though she had known the Prince of Wales, heir to the throne of the United Kingdom, for most of her life (his younger brother Andrew had been her childhood playmate and Charles had dated her older sister, Sarah), their relationship began to intensify during a visit with her sister Jane, who was married to the queen?s assistant secretary, as a guest of the royal family at Balmoral Castle in Scotland. When the press noticed the prince?s growing interest in the young Lady Spencer, they began to follow Diana?s movements and photograph her at every opportunity. At the age of 19, Lady Diana Spencer had become an object of fixation for the national media, and she soon cultivated a bashful but charming smile for the cameras that earned her the nickname ?Shy Di.?

In February 1981, Charles proposed to Diana, and the couple appeared together in public for the first time at the official engagement announcement. They were married on July 29, 1981, at St. Paul?s Cathedral, before a congregation of 2,500. In addition, an estimated 750 million people worldwide watched the televised ceremony.

William (nicknamed Wills), the first of the royal couple?s two sons and second in line to the throne, was born in 1982; Harry followed in 1984. From the beginning, Diana devoted herself to her sons and resolved to give them as normal a life as possible and to shield them from the unrelenting glare of the media spotlight. Her emotional parenting style was in sharp contrast to the hands-off approach of her husband, who was often portrayed in the press as cold and relatively uninvolved in the lives of his sons and wife, preferring to spend his personal time on such favorite pursuits as hunting and polo.

In the late 1980s, Diana began increasingly to involve herself in charity work, taking on a number of causes including such sensitive issues as HIV/AIDS, domestic abuse, and drug addiction. She traveled thousands of miles a year in support of her favorite causes, often taking along her beloved sons?especially William, who many expect will become king someday?to hospitals and homeless shelters so that they would understand the world outside the palace walls.

From the beginning, the public adored the photogenic princess, and the media followed her every move. But even as her growing dedication to charity work built her reputation as the ?people?s princess,? her marriage to the imperious and less-camera ready Prince Charles was steadily unraveling. Reports that the marriage was in trouble began to appear in the early 1980s, and the press speculated (correctly, as it turned out) that both Charles and Diana were having extramarital affairs. Specifically, rumors arose about Charles? relationship with his longtime friend, Camilla Parker Bowles, and Diana?s alleged dalliance with a cavalry officer, James Hewitt, who later collaborated in a book about their romance. As the decade wore on, the tension between the two began to creep into even their public appearances, as it became ever more difficult for them to live up to the front of the perfect royal marriage.

In 1992, three biographies of Diana were published, each making the disturbing claim that the princess suffered from an eating disorder. The most sympathetic among them (at least to Diana), was Diana: Her True Story, by Andrew Morton. Morton painted a brutal picture of Charles as a cold, remote husband and father and alleged that Diana had suffered from extreme depression, even attempting suicide several times during the early 1980s. His book was given a good deal of credence because of the specificity of its details, especially when rumors surfaced that Diana herself had collaborated with Morton or at least given her close friends and relatives permission to be interviewed.

On December 9, 1992, a Buckingham Palace spokesperson announced that Charles and Diana were separating. A few months later, a stressed and tired Diana stated that she was withdrawing from public life, although she would continue with her charity work. The princess was drawn out of her relative seclusion after Charles appeared in a television interview in June 1994, during which he claimed that he had never loved Diana and admitted to an adulterous relationship with Parker Bowles.

Diana responded in November 1995 with a televised interview of her own on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) program Panorama. In the interview, Diana dispelled any illusion that the royal marriage had a chance of survival, questioning Charles? fitness to rule and giving her view on his relationship with Parker Bowles, whom she obviously disliked. She also admitted to having committed adultery herself and to suffering from bulimia. Finally, Diana expressed her desire to be known as a ?queen of people?s hearts,? despite her tarnished royal marriage, a goal that, judging from the show?s audience?21.1 million viewers out of a total British population of 57 million, and the largest viewing audience in the program?s history?she had already achieved.

Shortly after Diana?s appearance on Panorama, Queen Elizabeth II made an unprecedented decision, asking the couple to consider a divorce. Diana gave her consent on February 29, 1996, violating official protocol by not informing the queen of her decision first. Under the terms of an agreement reached between Diana and the royal family, Diana was barred from ever succeeding to the throne and forced to drop the prefix HRH (or Her Royal Highness) from her name, becoming known simply as Diana, Princess of Wales. She shared custody of William and Harry with Charles and was to be involved in all decisions regarding them, was able to continue living in Kensington Palace, and received a lump-sum alimony payment of $20 million.

After her separation and divorce, Diana cut back the number of charities she actively supported?which had at one time been as high as 110?to a modest six, including AIDS, breast cancer, and the banning of land mines. She continued to work tirelessly in support of these causes, however, keeping up a hectic schedule of travel and public appearances. In June 1997, Diana auctioned off 79 of her evening gowns at Christie?s in New York, an event that made a total of more than $5.7 million for AIDS and cancer funds. As part of her crusade to increase public awareness about the dangers of land mines, Diana traveled to such conflict-ridden areas as Angola and the former Yugoslavia on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (the recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize).

By the summer of 1997, Diana had begun a much-talked about relationship with Emad (Dodi) al-Fayed, the debonair son of the owner of the famous Harrod?s department store in London as well as the Ritz Hotel in Paris. Though she was rumored to have been involved with a number of men in the years since her marriage to Charles disintegrated, her romance with Fayed was widely believed to have been her first serious attachment.

In the early morning of August 31, 1997, after leaving the Ritz in Paris, Diana and Fayed were involved in a fatal car accident. Fayed and the driver, Henri Paul, were killed instantly, while a bodyguard, Trevor Rees-Jones, sustained critical injuries but survived. Though Diana was still alive when doctors reached the scene, their frantic work could not save her; a few hours later, she was pronounced dead of cardiac arrest at the age of 37.

News of Diana?s death shocked the world and precipitated an international outpouring of sadness and disbelief. Many in Britain directed their anger at the royal family, who was characteristically tight-lipped about their grief. Others blamed the paparazzi, as photographers had been pursuing the couple (as photographers invariably pursued Diana) on their fatal drive. (In September 1999, a French court officially ruled that the crash was caused by the fact that Paul, the driver, had been drunk and on prescription drugs at the time. The report also stated that both Fayed and Diana would have survived the crash, had they been wearing seatbelts. The ruling did little to discourage Fayed?s father, Mohamad al-Fayed, who angrily claimed possible British Intelligence involvement.)

Even before Diana?s funeral, people from around the world began bringing flowers to Buckingham Palace, Kensington Palace, St. James Palace (where her body lay in state), and the Spencer family estate at Althorp. Donations totaling nearly $150 million flooded the newly established Diana, Princess of Wales Fund; many were designated specifically for her favorite charities. On September 6, 1997, more than a million people lined up along the three-mile funeral route to Westminster Abbey to pay their last respects to the princess they had all taken to their hearts.