31st August 2026

Impact

"None of us has yet begun to grasp the full impact."
Kofi Annan, *Watching the World*

On 1st September 1997, my wife and I were on holiday in Derbyshire, and we woke to the news that, in the early hours of the day before – 31st August 1997, twenty-nine years ago today – Diana, Princess of Wales, had been killed in a car crash in Paris. It doesn't need me to unfold the events surrounding the Princess's death here, nor to retell the story of the days leading up to her funeral on 7th September or the funeral itself. But, when I realised the significance of today's date, two things came to mind.

The first was a question: "Goodness! Is it *really* twenty-nine years since Princess Diana died?" It doesn't seem that long, for it all feels much more immediate that twenty-nine years. Indeed, there are elements of her death, images of those painful days, and details of the funeral, which are so vivid that they will remain etched in my mind for ever.

But is that a bad thing? I often say to folk around the events of a death and a funeral to make sure they "take things in". For in time, they will need to access these vivid memories, to keep a loved one close, and to make sure their remembrances don't fade over time. It's not maudlin to relive things, to talk about them, to keep them fresh. They will always be there, so it's better if they're clear and accessible, than fuzzy or fading.

And the second thing is the impact of that death all these years ago. It affected a nation, indeed a world, and many, many individuals in profound ways. I suspect that when we come to the thirtieth anniversary of Diana's death next year, we'll be seeing lots of TV footage of everything that went on. But let's remember those who're living with the loss of a loved one whose death *wasn't* in the public domain. There may be no newspaper headlines, rolling news programmes, or TV footage. But the impact of those deaths will be, and should be, as great for those who are bereaved as was the death of the Princess of Wales for all of us.

Let the impact of Diana's death highlight our need to care for those whose losses are enormous to them, and to remember them one, two, ten, twenty-nine years after a death. For if the impact is still as real as it ever was, should our awareness and support not be as real as it ever was too?

A prayer for today

Lord, if memories don't fade over time, help me make sure my support doesn't either. Amen

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