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Was Diana really the queen of people's hearts?

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Some people say Princess Diana (1961-1997) was self-centred and media-hungry. Some cluck their tongues at Diana's struggles with depression and eating disorders. And some wag their fingers at her extramarital relationships and other indiscretions. Was she perfect? No. Was she trying to be? Heck no. What Diana wanted to be was, first, a ballerina, but she grew too tall for the part and, second, "the queen of people's hearts." Was she successful at winning people over? You decide...

Diana believed so strongly in the importance of children – all children – that she put her health, relationships and even her life on the line for them. She was a very hands-on mother with her own two boys, William and Harry, and even caused intense friction in the royal family because she wanted to take care of her children her way, not the customary royal way. She did what was right for her children, rather than right for royalty.

The Princess stayed too long in her unhappy marriage with Prince Charles, even though she knew deep down he loved someone else, just so she would not have to put her own children through what she herself went through as a child – divorce. In the end, though, Diana had to divorce the man she loved and believed she would always be with.

While the media liked to focus on Diana's boyfriends and lifestyle choices, what deserves our attention is her participation in so many events, charities and organizations that involved helping or saving children. Even her interest in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which won a Nobel prize, was rooted in her understanding and appreciation of children, who are naturally drawn to and want to play with landmines.

The Princess's love was not limited to the world's children. She also supported and advocated on behalf of other people in the world who were being mistreated, neglected, abused or killed. Diana knew how tough life could be, even for wealthy children and adults in high social circles. She herself often felt like she was a nuisance to her parents when she was a child. When married, she was talked down to by her husband and others, shaking her comfort with being in her own skin and eroding her confidence in her ability to make good choices.

Did Diana succeed at being the queen of people's hearts? Who knows? But one thing is for sure – she was the queen of the hearts of the many children she saved and of the people she championed for and loved.

