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DIANA'S *real*
TRAGEDY?

She married too young

As Diana's biographer, chat-show host and media moguette extraordinaire, Tina Brown became America's British First Lady. In this candid interview, bestselling historian and author Amanda Foreman talks to her about Lady Di, the Duchess of Cambridge – and whether success and a family can EVER mix

IN THE SUMMER OF 2000, I went to the offices of *Talk* magazine to discuss ideas with its founder and editor, Tina Brown. *Talk* was under the media spotlight for all the wrong reasons, and would fold shortly after the 9/11 attacks the following year, but there was no hint of a crisis when I was there. However, I do remember being amazed – shocked even – by the frenzied atmosphere of the place. Tina was never alone for one minute. Somehow, we managed to have a conversation while she multi-tasked through three different assistants. As a display of sheer force and hard work, nothing I've witnessed since will ever match that breathless half an hour.

Tina has been editor of *Newsweek* for only three months, when I visit her in her lower Manhattan headquarters. The first thing I notice is the different atmosphere: it's humming rather than buzzing. Once I am shown into her office, the door is closed and no one interrupts. Tina greets with me a friendly smile and waves me to a chair next to her desk. She is dressed casually in a black top and trousers. The office is equally workmanlike: papers spill all over the desk, books and magazines are piled on every surface.

No conditions have been placed on the interview. No one has even asked what it's about, which is probably a good thing, because I haven't come to discuss politics, or to elicit her views on the new global media, or to learn about her plans for *Newsweek*. I am here to talk about my guilt.

The feeling started after I returned to work following the birth of my first child. Since then, the guilt has grown so powerful that it has become my sixth sense. It is the portal through which all my other emotions and experiences are filtered.

The guilt is so isolating. But surely I am not alone in feeling like this. What about women like Tina Brown? As a wife, mother, daughter and full-time professional, was she ever caught in the death-grip of competing demands? Did she defeat the death-grip or invite it home for an extended visit?

'Are we interviewing, now?' Tina asks politely. I nod my head (guiltily) and press the record button.

In addition to her current editorship of *Newsweek*, Tina was

invited by ABC's premier morning show, *Good Morning America*, to report on the Royal Wedding. I ask her whether the experience makes her think of the day she married Harold Evans.

'My wedding was so utterly different,' she replies. Harry suddenly said, "Let's get married." And I said, "Yes, let's do it." My parents never forgave me because they couldn't get there in time.'

It was August 1981, and the couple were on holiday in New York, staying with Ben Bradlee, the former editor of *The Washington Post*, and his journalist wife Sally Quinn, at their famous beach house, Grey Gardens, in East Hampton. 'We'd been talking about it for a couple of years,' Tina explains. 'It was just a question of when. I knew I would never marry anybody else.'

There were only five guests at the impromptu ceremony. Tina wore a suit – acquired that day from Saks Fifth Avenue – and a pearl necklace bought by Harry from the jeweller's next door. Music was provided by a cassette player propped up in a tree, and the wedding breakfast was a takeaway salad from the local gourmet food shop. The spontaneity of the occasion still makes her smile: 'It was immense fun,' she insists, 'and very romantic!'

Tina was just 28, while Harry was 53 with three adult children from his first marriage. Both were aware that the difference in age and experiences would inevitably impinge on the trajectory of their life together. Their vows reflected the serious commitment that lay behind the hasty decision: 'When we got married we said "he for the second, she for the only". That's how we felt about it.'

'Actually,' confesses Tina, 'on our way back we had a slight panic – wondering whether we had done the right thing. Plus we had done it so quickly, so we stopped the car and we each wrote a note, saying if this was a mistake we absolved one other. Every so often Harry takes it out of his wallet because he kept it – and says "are you sure you haven't changed your mind?" – 27 years later!'

'But I would like my daughter to have a big wedding – because I didn't. I came from that generation that said – oh, big weddings – who does it. But the cycle comes around – I'll madly plan a big frothy thing, I'm sure.'

Fortunately, Tina's daughter Izzy says that a large wedding would be great fun. But she is only 20... the same age that Diana was when she married Prince Charles. Looking at her daughter, Tina is haunted by the obvious fact that Diana – about whom she wrote a bestselling biography, *The Diana Chronicles* – was incredibly young to marry at all, let alone wed the heir to the throne.

'What was everybody thinking! It seems barbaric. She was a

TINA BROWN: A LIFE IN PRINT

In January 2008, Tina Brown was inducted into the Magazine Editor's Hall of Fame, the US magazine equivalent of an Oscar for lifetime achievement. The ceremony took place in New York's Gotham Hall before a roomful of magazine executives. A trouser suit would have been fine. But Tina was dressed for the occasion as though it was indeed her Oscar moment.

On stage she pulled off a bravura performance. After listening demurely to the fulsome introduction, which listed each

of her achievements: a CBE, 19 journalism awards, bestselling books and the editorship of four national magazines – *Tatler*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker* and *Talk* – Tina brought the house down with the hilariously self-deprecating line: 'I think of my career in magazines as three weddings and a funeral.'

Over the past couple of decades, Tina has inspired many feelings: awe, fear, jealousy, resentment, disapproval and, over the demise of *Talk*, *Schadenfreude*. On



child – a teenage girl. It is actually very sad when I think about it. If my daughter had done that, she wouldn't have had a clue what she was getting into. She would have just thought she was madly in love with this fabulous man who said wonderful things to her.'

Tina's bestselling book rather brutally lays bare the true complexity of Diana's character behind the image of martyrdom. But recently Tina has come to believe that Diana's real tragedy was marrying too early, before she had grown into herself. Diana's final years provide only a glimpse of what she could have achieved.

'Royal women have to jettison the idea of being a working mother, but they do work very hard within the job of royalty. Diana, when she finally got it together, had the right idea about it. You take that bully pulpit and really work it to death.

'Nowadays, a modern royal woman can do an enormous amount – become a spokesman for all kinds of things – leverage your celebrity, if you like, into all kinds of global roles. Diana was doing that at the end. In fact she was an impressive precursor to the Clinton Global Initiative Model. Land mines, let's face it, had hardly any publicity until she brought her spotlight to it. You can imagine what Diana would have been able to do with disasters like the tsunami or Haiti.'

Tina suspects the Duchess of Cambridge is more instinctively domestic than Diana, but that the demands of the role will change her in unforeseen ways. One thing that won't change, however, is the pain she will feel when duty and family life clash.

'I was talking about just this dilemma with a female photographer only recently,' muses Tina. 'She told me of her agony at being asked to shoot a major advertising campaign on the same day that she was going to take her nine-year-old to look at her summer camp.'

I haven't said a word, but I can sense what's coming next, and the hairs on the back of my neck have started to prickle.

'I remember so well – being so utterly burned by those kind of moments, when you really do feel on a spit, cooking with pain. You've made a commitment, you are a professional person, it is your livelihood or your profession – and yet it's this agonising

conflict. And each time it happens it is a new soul-searching. What do I do? It's very painful and there isn't an answer. It's the price you pay. I think it's very hard for all women, but it really breaks my heart for those who face being fired if they take half a day off – yet it happens all the time.'

The fact Tina paid the price without a fuss, and never shied away from her professional commitments, makes her sensitive to the kind of casual sexism that affects women in business. 'If you scratch a woman with any kind of longevity in her career – it always surprises me how – underneath, they are profoundly irritated [by it]. If you ask women who are at the top they will immediately tell you some anecdote that has really grated on them.'

One female business executive recently complained to Tina that she ran the most profitable division of a large entertainment

company and yet, when the media 'writes about the people who are in line to get the top job, I am never on the list'.

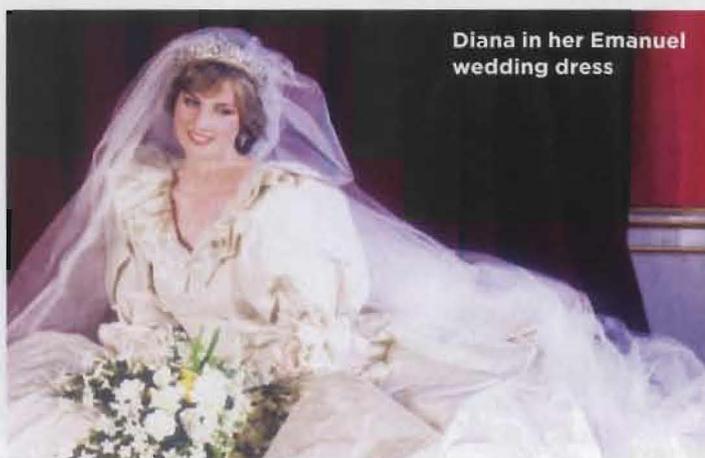
Even Tina gets it on occasion. A recent magazine article claimed, 'Tina Brown has spent her entire life flattering old Jewish men.'

'I thought how extraordinary to sum up my publishing career that way. I just don't believe that a man would have that sentence written about him. It was incredibly offensive.' Tina has been getting

angrier about the affront, but now she starts to laugh: 'I mean, what do you have to do to get respect in this town? I showed up for work every day – this is ridiculous.' She bursts into laughter.

No longer faced with the daily choice of 'what do I do', Tina can reflect on those that she made, and those that were forced upon her. 'I would have liked to have been able to pick up my son and daughter from school more. I would always drop them there – but the coming out of school is so much nicer than the dropping off. "Mummy, you are never around" – yes, it's the worst thing they can say. You just feel so awful and it doesn't get any less as they get older. They need you more, because they still want you to be available when they are ready to see you, which is another arrow in the breast. And yet I'm very driven with my work.'

I ask her why. 'I love working on magazines. I love writing. I



that day forgiveness was added to the list. But the guests departed from the event with one important question still unanswered. Was this a fancy kiss-off to a fallen legend, or a declaration by the former 'Stalin in high heels' to watch out, she was coming back?

Despite the 'funeral' that was *Talk*, Tina Brown's record as the saviour of three national magazines remains unmatched. She came to prominence in 1979 at the age of 25 when she took the helm of *Tatler*. The once popular society magazine was down to 12,000 readers and in danger of closing. Fleet Street was already aware of this young dynamo but the rest of the country was amazed that a young slip of a girl had the chutzpah to get, let alone do, the job. After a few issues packed with some of the biggest names in photography and journalism, the country realised that Tina was no 'slip of a girl' and never had been.

Tina's parents were the film producer

George Hambley Brown and Bettina Kohr, a press agent for Laurence Olivier. 'I didn't rebel against her in my teenage years,' Tina wrote in adulthood, 'because she was more subversive than any of my peers.' But she did rebel against conformity at various schools. Oxford, on the other hand, was perfect for the young Turk-ette. Here she learned how to put into practise the wisdom she had learned at home: that celebrity and culture belong together like sugar and spice. As Tina recently put it to *The New York Times*, aiming for the 'great kind of high-low, newsy, sexy thing that European news magazines have' became her journalistic mission. She transformed *Tatler* into an irreverent, saucy, must-read magazine for the upper classes even before Lady Diana Spencer arrived on the scene in 1981. But after that, the magazine had its own pin-up girl and circulation soared.

When Condé Nast bought *Tatler* in 1982, Tina resigned to go freelance again. A year

later she was invited by the company to revive its ailing society/culture magazine *Vanity Fair*. The timing was propitious: she had married Harold Evans two years earlier when he was editor of *The Sunday Times*. In the intervening years, however, he had moved to *The Times*, quarrelled with its proprietor Rupert Murdoch and been fired in spectacular fashion. The invitation was an opportunity for both to start afresh.

The Brown-Evans team decamped to New York in 1983, and within three years had the city at their feet. Harry became the founding editor of *Condé Nast Traveler*, while Tina brought her reinvigorating magic to the moribund *Vanity Fair*.

Once again Princess Diana unwittingly played a vital role in Tina's fortunes. Using her contacts at *Tatler* to ferret out the truth, Tina wrote an article about the royal marriage that demolished the happy myths surrounding Charles and Diana. It was published in October 1985 and became the

love being with writers. I love being in an office and seeing projects come to fruition. If I wasn't able to do my work I'd get depressed. I think you either have that passion or you don't – but those of us who do, are very lucky in a way, because in the end our children do grow up, so actually I'm glad I have it.'

'But why?' I ask again. 'Is it to feel successful?'

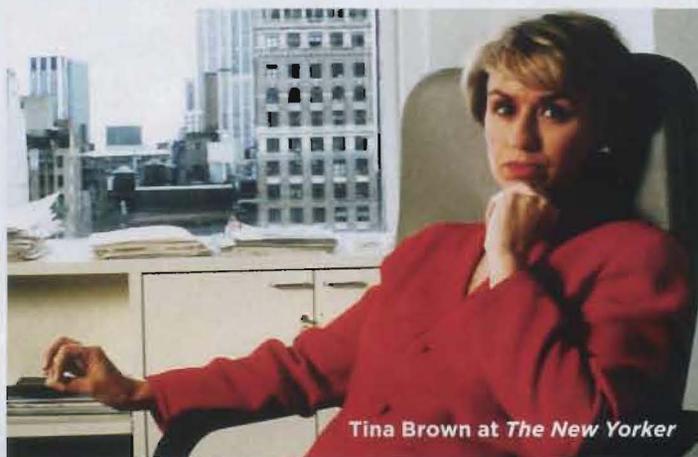
'I never felt I had successes. I was always so in the granular weeds of the event. I was always so intense about the work itself that I very rarely felt "I am successful".'

I think back to *Talk* – the one 'funeral' in her career of many 'weddings'. She enjoyed massive success at *Tutler*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*, but the media had turned on *Talk* in an unprecedented way. Times were tough and the atmospheric crackle in her office in 2000 makes a little more sense to me.

That period must have been among the worst of the guilt years. There were seismic changes taking place at home: both her parents, who lived in the flat next door, passed away; her son George, who has Asperger's, entered adolescence; and Harry, who had been running his own publishing empire, decided to concentrate on his writing. *Talk* was lurching from one crisis to another.

Tina insists that she never allowed herself to be brought down by the public criticism, but the loss of *Talk* is a different matter. 'It was very painful when it closed,' she says. 'I loved what it was. We had gone through hell – and then, just when it was getting really good, it was closed. I felt for the first time cut off from my life source. It had never happened before, and to have this process suddenly vaporised, was painful.'

The shock was so profound that for 18 months Tina did no work at all. She potted around the house, keeping herself occupied with such simple tasks as taking the children to and from school. But in losing her rudder she had rediscovered her anchor. At some point, she says, 'I realised I had become very happy. For the first time in my entire working life as a mother I wasn't conflicted any more. The conflict gets very tiring. Just suddenly to be free of that – to be able to come to the school – to



be there when you're supposed to be there – or if plans change that you weren't immediately thinking how to do this or juggle that. All those conversations with yourself had stopped.

'I was able to pick up my children from school and gain proper insights into their day. It was really lovely. I was immensely rejuvenated. I looked about five years younger. People said I looked so relaxed – and I was! I realise the split that women have is immensely, psychically draining. Actually, I would really advise every woman to somehow take a holiday from that conflict – somehow – for a while.'

The week I interview her, newsstand sales of *Newsweek* are up by 57 per cent over last year. But Tina is neither haunted by a sense of a failure nor by the need to prove herself after *Talk*. She is happy to be doing what she likes best in a place that feels like

home. 'Although I love Britain,' she says, 'I love British hymns, British newspapers, and British writing. When I first came here, I found it very difficult and missed England tremendously. I would go back for vacations; Harry and I would rent a house in the country. We would smell the grass and listen to the sound of cricket – and all of that still resonates with me – but I also know that Britain has changed.'

'I love my life in New York. It suits me. The other day I

was driving in from Long Island and I saw the lights of Manhattan as I came over the bridge. This town is so amazing, I thought. It is huge and exciting, and yet I feel cosy here.'

Ambition is not wrong in itself, she adds, as if reading my mind. 'I think the question is – can you keep your drive in check. You must ask yourself – when you make your choices – is this something I really need to do?'

As for her own choices, Tina refers to the judgement of the jury: 'My son would have liked me to have been around more, but my daughter insists she wouldn't have wanted it any different.'

I think she has found the only cure for guilt: absolution. ♦

♦ *A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided*, by Amanda Foreman, is published by Penguin, price £12.99.

biggest exposé of the season. The story was one of several outrageous and highly-publicised scoops that convinced Condé Nast of the magazine's worth, despite the fact it was still losing money. From then on, *Vanity Fair* towered over its rivals.

When Tina moved to *The New Yorker* in 1992, critics complained that a precious literary institution was going to be prostituted on the altar of celebrity journalism. But the revamped magazine was an undeniable success. Although profitability remained an issue, *The New Yorker* once again became the crown jewel of American cultural life. Tina raised the circulation by 28 per cent overall.

Then came the opportunity to start up a new magazine. *Talk* began in 1999 with the biggest launch party ever held in Manhattan. Over 800 people were taken by boat to Liberty Island, where even the statue itself seemed small and insignificant compared with the mass spectacle of

fireworks and excess. Tina wanted the magazine to become a media powerhouse, generating ideas for movies and books, and several *Talk* books made the bestseller list, such as *Leadership* by Rudy Giuliani. But from the outset, the magazine appeared to have been hobbled by its celebrity. The media turned on it with a ferocity that was almost unprecedented. It was the advertising recession that followed the attack on New York's Twin Towers in September 2001 that officially killed the venture. But the media had already killed *Talk* many times over.

Tina went on to confound the doomsayers by hosting her own talk show for two years on CNBC; in 2007 she published her No1 bestseller, *The Diana Chronicles* (Diana, had she lived, would be 50 this week). In October 2008 she returned to editing with the launch of the online news magazine *The Daily Beast*. Funded by Barry Diller, *The Beast* is a

combination of news stories, reviews and interviews, and media articles generated elsewhere on the web. It now attracts more than 1.5 million unique visitors a month.

Last year, Tina put the entire muscle of *The Daily Beast* behind an ambitious initiative to hold an annual summit dedicated to women's issues. A host of distinguished women took part, from Hillary Clinton to Meryl Streep, and for three days in March, women dominated the news headlines. This year's *Women in the World* summit enjoyed similar success.

But there is something intrinsically different between a webzine and a magazine. The latter is far more the reflection of a single vision, and clearly Tina was hankering for the opportunity to have one more 'wedding'. In March this year she relaunched the dying weekly *Newsweek*, in a direct challenge to all those who claim that print media cannot survive in the age of the internet. **Amanda Foreman**