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NOBBUT LAIKING: a Cumbrian view on topics near and far

ROSS BREWSTER'S WEEKLY COLUMN

ISN'T it time we all, media and public, cut Prince Harry and Meghan a bit of slack?

It's so easy to criticise people who are privileged, but it's evident that the Duke of Sussex is struggling mentally to cope, and it has nothing to do with money or duty.

I will never forget the image of that young boy in his ill-fitting suit and black tie, walking alongside his father and grandfather to his mother's funeral. It was quite outrageous that a child should be put through that ordeal.

Harry has never forgotten either. In his recent TV interview, he admitted that the fate of Princess Diana is "a wound that still festers". When asked by Tom Bradby, of ITV News, if he has yet found peace, he said that the grief remains.

His words were revealing. Here is a man who has no place to hide. He was born into royal life and he has no way of escaping. Like Diana, the more he tries, the tougher it becomes to find respite from the media and public attention.

He told Bradby: "I think being part of this family, in this role, in this job, every

single time I hear a click, every time I see a flash, it takes me straight back. So

confessing that he is not managing very well. It was significant that his elder brother, Prince William, expressed his worry. The brothers, once inseparable, seemingly don't see each other as often as before. Each has their own family now. But that is sad.

Harry quite naturally wants to guard his wife against undue intrusion. Whether it was wise to launch an attack on the press, comparing recent media coverage of Meghan to that given to his mother, is doubtful.

The royals get more good publicity than bad and they know how to work the media. Without newspapers and TV covering their visits no-one would know anything about their role and the excitement a royal appearance in a local community can generate. But, at the same time, some of the papers go too far with their prurient fascination and need to, as Harry himself put it, "commoditise" to the point where they are no longer treated as a real person.

As Harry treads in his mother's steps he will never entirely get over his loss. We

don't talk comfortably about our feelings. We are still too reluctant to speak out

on the basis of my answers. You have a right to be concerned.

FLAWED STATISTICS

BOFFINS from Warwick University say people were happiest in the 1920s and the most miserable times in the past 200 years were the 1970s, with 1978 particularly depressing.

They looked at Google for positive and negative words to determine their research. Hardly scientific if you ask me. My memories of the 70s are good ones — I was fit and healthy, on the fells every possible minute, and Carlisle United got into the First Division. Those men in white coats should have asked me, they'd have had a totally different outcome to their research.

But that's the point about statistics. Fifty years from now my answers to the Office of National Statistics may appear quite strange and at odds with the way in which life, especially with climate change and artificial intelligence in mind, will be unrecognisable compared to today. They will, though, still be trying to decide Brexit.

DEHUMANISING DESPERATE PEOPLE
ANYONE willing to travel halfway round

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see a lion, it takes the sunlight back. In that respect it's the worst reminder of her life as opposed to the best."

During their 10-day African visit, Harry and Meghan took an emotional pilgrimage to Angola where his late mother launched an anti-landmine campaign in what turned out to be her last major advocacy before she died. Clearly Harry wants to continue her legacy; to feel she would be proud of him.

I've heard people complain that Harry and Meghan should put up and shut up. When Meghan admits she's having difficulty coping as a new mum they point to thousands of ordinary parents who have to get by without royal flunkies on hand to help them. I believe the Duchess of Sussex is finding royal life much harder to adjust to than she thought would be the case. Friends apparently warned her that, while Harry is a great chap, she should think twice before marrying into this unique family and goldfish bowl life.

Once over, mental health was something people whispered about, the same way 50 years ago cancer was treated like some guilty taboo, not to be mentioned even in private company. Well now it's different. But, for all the recent publicity about mental health and the need to talk, I suspect we're still only just dragging ourselves out of the Dark Ages.

A handful of sportsmen have spoken about their personal battles with mental health issues. But when Harry donned protective body armour and a visor, just like his mother 22 years earlier, to detonate a device in a partially-cleared minefield, there was something symbolic about a man who needs protection, help and empathy as he fights his own mental demons.

There should be no sense of shame in

when it comes to mental health. William's worry should be a warning about the mental health and marriage of his younger brother. We should sympathise, not rush to judgement.

THE GREATEST GIFT THAT I POSSESS
SO how do we define happiness. "Cheerful and carefree" says my dictionary.

Is that me then? I was once described in a book about fell running as "cheerful". Damned with faint praise you could say. Not, "talented, a brilliant athlete, a wonderful human being". Just cheerful.

Which brings me to this week and an interview I had with a lady from the Office of National Statistics. I was chosen randomly by postcode to take part in a quiz about life, the universe and everything as preparation for the next census.

I was asked about work, standard of living, religious orientation if any, and about my state of happiness. How happy was I yesterday? Am I happy today on a scale of 0-10. As happy as Ken Dodd's *Happiness*? Most of my answers flummoxed the computer on which they were being recorded. Job? *Herald* columnist. "I'm afraid we don't have that on our list," said the lady. "What shall I put down?" Shelf-stacker I suggested. I think in the end she decided something with media in it.

You'll be pleased to know it was one of my happy days. Ten out of ten. She looked a bit surprised. Maybe, when she saw I was an OAP, she expected a Victor Meldrew type.

I once met a famous fell runner of yesteryear called Eric Beard at the start of an event. "Great day for the race, pal," he said. "The human race." I think that's what I had in mind when I said my happiness quotient was touching peak level that day. And now I'm a national statistic. Future government policy may be formed

the world then to paddle their wife and kids across the oceans in a rubber dinghy, or end up frozen to death or choking in the back of a lorry, must be desperate.

We live in a world that condemns immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers as barely human. We put up walls. We have "hostile environment" policies, we have racists. And yet these people are so desperate to escape from wars and poverty they still come. Thirty-nine people were found frozen to death in the back of a refrigerated lorry in an industrial estate near London.

What incredible risks people take, or are coerced into, by people smugglers. I sometimes wonder if we have a conscience any more.

STANDING ROOM ONLY

I CAN'T envisage any self-respecting doctor standing for the ludicrous idea of standing consultations, which is part of a pilot study by Loughborough University aimed at getting GPs and patients on their feet.

Strewth, a visit to the surgery is going to be more like a drive through McDonalds, taking away any vestige of personal contact between doctor and patient. One Cumbrian GP put it succinctly when he said it's another blow to general practice where a doctor knows his patients. It's part of an agenda to dehumanise, stripping consultations of dignity and respect.

A selection of GPs will be given convertible standing desks to make them "role models" for patients, helping both to become more active. It's madness. Ditch this crazy idea right now. It's hard enough recruiting GPs without asking them to be Mr Motivator, and treating patients on a treadmill — why not, it could follow — is no way to establish the relationships which are so vital.

