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## The princes' final farewell

by Bryan Appleyard

**A** sound like a distant shower of rain penetrated the walls of Westminster Abbey shortly before noon yesterday. It rolled towards us. Then it was inside the church. It rolled up the nave, like a great wave.

It was people clapping, first the crowds outside and then the 2,000 inside. People don't clap at funerals; and they don't clap because people outside are clapping. But yesterday they did. It was dense, serious applause and it marked the moment at which the meaning of what was happening on this incredible day was made plain.

It was the end of Earl Spencer's tribute to his sister, Diana, Princess of Wales, that had raised the emotional tension to this breaking point.

He had launched another savage attack on the press, saying Diana had been the "most hunted person of the modern age". What brought gasps from the nave of the abbey, however, was the fact that he had also flung down a challenge to the royal family over the upbringing of William and Harry, pledging to Diana that "we, your blood family, will do all we can to continue the imaginative and loving way in which you were steering these two exceptional young men so that their souls are not simply immersed by duty and tradition, but can sing openly as you planned".

His voice stumbled and broke as he finished; and then the masses listening outside, who had been claiming their own place in this very public realm, broke into the abbey. The people wanted to make their feelings felt. It wasn't enough to be one of the millions on the streets of London. It certainly wasn't enough to be one of the 1 billion watching on television. They wanted to be in the abbey and the wave of applause was their way of getting in.

The Queen sat immobile as the sound of clapping reached her. Her young granddaughters, Beatrice and Eugenie, joined in with the congregation. But the adults in the royal family froze as Spencer's words sank in. Had he hijacked the funeral?

Of course, I had expected this service to be emotional. It came at the end of a week of wonders in which some force of popular magic, some ancient religious impulse, had broken through royal reticence and protocol and demanded a voice. But I had not expected the sheer pressure and intensity of the occasion. At one point I felt frozen in place, the air seemed to have solidified around me.

Yet, at seven in the morning when the privileged few journalists had started queuing to make sure of the best places in the north transept, it had felt like a party. The crowd pressing against the barriers in Par-



Pain of parting: Prince William, Prince Harry and Prince Charles, their faces filled with emotion, watch as the body of Princess Diana is driven from Westminster Abbey after the highly charged funeral

liament Square had been jolly, good-natured. They applauded and cheered two lorryloads of workmen who had feverishly been chopping down traffic lights to open up the approach to the abbey. They clapped the Westminster council workman who, fag dangling from his lips, had hovered up the mess left by the men. And they watched the celebrities joining our queue

to enter the north transept. Ralph Lauren, Lord Gower, the Emanuels, designers of Diana's wedding dress, and Esther Rantzen who performed her own quasi-regal walkabout. But, as the tenor bell sounded at 9.08 to signal the departure of the cortege from Kensington Palace, the atmosphere darkened. A silence started to spread. We all lowered our

voices and the occasional ringing of a mobile phone started to sound like a gross intrusion. At 9.30, they let us in. The first shock was that it was warmer inside than out — a reversal of the usual experience of walking into great churches. I looked up and realised that the air had been heated by the racks of television lights suspended above the arches of the sanc-

tuary and choir. The lights glared almost blasphemously. But who could complain? We were only there as surrogates for the billions in the world outside. After finding our places we waited for the nearby, significant seats to fill — the royal family facing the Spencers, and those seats just marked Mr al-Fayed, Mrs al-Fayed. It was strange seeing these big players

in the week's news represented by plain printed signs among the massive clutter of colonial monuments.

A key element in the layout of continued on page 2

