

The Obituary Project

What the Deceased Tell Us About Living Meaningful Lives

By Dr. Met Whitehurst

Psychologist

Time is a finger snap and eye blink, and you should not let a moment pass without taking joyous, ecstatic note of it, not wasting a moment of its swift breakneck circuit.

Pat Conroy, Novelist

Purpose

Most people want to live a meaningful life. Some know how but many struggle. To gain more understanding of this struggle, I completed the Obituary Project to find out what the deceased did to live meaningful lives. I read over 2,100 obituaries from two newspapers over a six-month period and collected information from 477 obituaries.

I read each obituary meticulously and selected those passages that I thought made a statement about achievement(s) in the lives of the deceased. My assumption is that achievements make lives meaningful. Obituaries without mention of an achievement were excluded. I classified and labeled each achievement statement based on what I considered to be the type of achievement, then grouped the statements with similar achievements, and ultimately synthesized each set of achievements according to purpose. The final results was six examples exhibited by those living a meaningful lives. Every deceased person in this project demonstrated at least one or more the examples. As you will see, the phenomenal lives lived by these remarkable

people provided numerous insights into what it means to live a meaningful life.

The obituaries were written by either family members, friends or professional writers at funeral homes in conjunction with someone that knew the deceased. Those writing the obituaries to concentrate on the most meaningful idealized aspects of their loved ones lives with a propensity to find those things about loved ones lives that show their life on earth counted, that the loved one made a difference, and the world was a better place because of them. While angled toward honoring and admiring the deceased, obituaries are, in my opinion, likely to be an accurate syntheses of loved ones lives.

I believe it is correct to say the obituary writers selectively oriented their thoughts toward the deceased based on their own personal values as to what they supposed to be important to live meaningful lives. Since the obituary writers projected some of their own values into the selection of the specific aspects of deceased lives in writing obituaries, the intermixed values of the writers and the deceased accomplishments makes the six examples powerful statements about how to live a meaningful life.

When I started the Obituary Project I thought it would be a “downer” to read about people who recently passed on. Instead, the opposite occurred. It was inspiring. Every day when I read the obituaries for six months, I felt uplifted.

I learned the deceased found meaning through personal accomplishments, relationships with others and by connecting with something of larger significance such as religion or a cause. They found meaning in negative life

experiences which subsequently propelled them forward to greater levels of achievements.

I discovered that the deceased did all kinds of things to live meaningful lives. They did not do just one thing that stood out. Having a purpose seemed to give their lives meaning. A small seemingly trivial activity that touched others' hearts in big ways defined some lives. Selfless acts of kindness for children, the sick, the lonely and the needy. A sparkling smile that always lit up the room. Always willing to lend a hand when needed. Loving wife, mother and grandmother. Sharp wit and great sense of humor. An indomitable spirit. An avid jigsaw and crossword puzzle fan. A warm and gentle smile, and unconditional compassion for others. These are only a few of the enormous number of things they did to live meaningful lives.

You will see how these things played out in their extraordinary lives when you read the six examples.

Meaning and Purpose

We all seek meaning in our lives, a reason to live. For each of us, meaning varies and plays out uniquely. When we find and pursue our meaning in life we are happier and the world is a better place as a result. Conversely, when we do not, our lives become disheartened and adrift.

Dr. Viktor Frankl, Swiss psychiatrist, demonstrated in his life that we can find meaning regardless of our circumstances. Dr. Frankl spent almost three years during World War II in a Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz. During that time his wife, daughter, mother and father perished. Dr. Frankl subsequently became one of the most prominent psychiatrists of the 20th century. After being freed from the concentration camp he wrote his account of the

experience in a now classic book titled, *Man's Search for Meaning*. It was voted by Readers Choice, a national reading group, as one of the top five most influential books written in the 20th century. The book is an account of his horrifying experience. Dr. Frankl observed that the people who survived the concentration camps had a reason to live. Dr. Frankl had his a vision of getting out of the concentration camp and going around the world to make speeches about the atrocities of the camp, so that he could do his part to discourage man from ever again committing such cruelty. He imagined walking into a well-lit and warm auditorium, sitting at a table with a lamp, and making his speech to an attentive audience. That purpose kept him struggling to survive the concentration camp.

An interesting experience happened to me several years ago with regard to Dr. Frankl. A minister I had never met invited me to go with him to a local university to hear Dr. Frankl speak. A friend had given him my name and he had two tickets. So, I went. I walked into the auditorium full of attentive people. On the stage were a table and a lamp. Dr. Frankl walked out, spoke to a spellbound audience for more than two hours, and when he left the audience remained silent for several minutes before anyone left. It was the most powerful speech that I had ever witnessed. Incidentally, it was reported in the paper the next day that Dr. Frankl had made this speech on four hundred times world-wide.

Is meaning important? I say, "Definitely yes!" Dr. Frankl's experience let me know we all need to find and pursue our own unique meaning in life. When it's absent or disappears, we have nothing left.

Without a doubt the amazing people in these obituaries found and pursued their meaning in life.

Grieving

Loss of a loved one to death is one of life's most distressing experiences that regrettably nearly every one of us have to experience in our lifetime. Shocking disbelief, sadness, and sorrow may occupy our hearts for months and even years after our loss. And many of us will often think about our deceased loved one, never forgetting them

Most of the time we come to understand the changes created by our loss and eventually adapt and return to our new life without the loved one. We remember our loved one frequently, however. Sometimes a few of us are so debilitated by the loss we need professional help or some means of assistance to move through our grief.

The Obituary Project helps in the grieving process to learn from meaningful and well-lived lives so that we may use the information to live our lives more fully.

Example 1

The deceased living meaningful lives told us to live our lives uplifting others with positivity.

She had a twinkle in her eye and a smile that would make anyone smile back. She was young at heart and always fun to be with. Rare ability to make you feel as if you were the only one in the room. (From obituary of a remarkable woman.)

Livers of meaningful lives had a mind-set and lifestyle centered in positivity. It was a way of life for them. They had the special ability to make others feel good when they were around with their upbeat and sparkling personality, and were frequently deemed incapable of being unkind to anyone. They communicated an incessant love of life and believed it should be lived to the fullest; were engaging, kind-hearted, friendly and talkative; and compassionate with a gentle spirit. Over and over again their actions demonstrated the importance of forgiveness, and the necessity of loving one another.

Strong, perpetually positive character, a mentor, disciplinarian and friend who brought out the best in those around her.

Always had a kind word to say about everyone.

Special ability of making people feel good.

Always wanted to be certain that those around him were happy, with his quick wit and need to make others laugh.

Incapable of being unkind to anyone.”

Passionate believer in living life to its fullest.

Had a big smile and laugh, and even bigger heart.

A lover of life.

Strong, perpetually positive character, a mentor, disciplinarian and friend who brought out the best in those around her.

They demonstrated an unselfish devotion to helping others make better lives through countless acts of kindness from forming support groups to helping those facing debilitating illnesses to working passionately for fairness and equality for all. There was a consistent effort to champion the “underdog” by standing up for the homeless and those less able to fend for themselves; a heart for children the sick, lonely and needy; continuously sympathetic

towards the well-being of others; a generosity that knew no bounds; a personal mission in life to help people; to bring joy to everyone they met.

A life of significance is about serving those who need your gifts.

Known for his generosity, loyalty, honesty and famous big hugs.

A man clipped and mailed comics and editorial cartoons to friends to bring enjoyment to their lives. Another man listened carefully to find out what was important to his friends and then would send news articles to support those interests. A woman visited sick friends in the hospital to bring her trademark “apple and flower” to cheer them. A man kept a pocketful of teabags to give to those he met. He often mailed tea bags with a note to “Join me for a cup of tea.” He was known as the “Tea Man. I thought it was a wonderful project when a man became a pen pal with a first grade reading class. Four or five times each year, for ten years, the kids would each write a note to him. He would then write each student a personal response, sent with candy and small toys.

She developed friendships beginning in elementary school and continued developing them until the end of her life at age 94.

Known for his generosity, loyalty, honesty and famous big hugs.

The deceased living meaningful lives showed us that it was important to develop an extensive network of affirmative friendships. I only found a few that failed to mention the deceased ability to establish and keep good relationships. They developed amazing circles of friends whom they loved and were loved back. Even strangers were often treated as old friends. When you became their friend you were a friend for life. One common quality of the positive was summarized in this beautiful woman’s obituary: *“One of the kindest people that you would ever hope to meet.”* A man I would

have liked to have known had this said about him in his obituary: *“He enjoyed making moonshine and hanging with his buddies around the fire pit.”* I bet there were many interesting conversation around that fire pit. The world will miss him.

These marvelous people were important in family life. They supported family members, created joyous atmospheres within the family, and were caring and nurturing. Many were described as devoted husband, wife, father and son, the quintessential family man with a real passion for loving family or the “pillar” of her family and an example of love, truth, and honesty. Frequently they were mentioned as being the “rock and foundation” of their family. When they passed away family members consistently wrote in their obituaries about the family chain being broken and things never being the same. They usually saw the family member being important and was “called away” for more important tasks in heaven.

After years of being the hard working provider, strong father and husband to a large and energetic family, he took on his last and most endearing role—that of a patient and loving caregiver to his wife. It was a task he managed heroically. The fact that he did this while fighting cancer that would ultimately take his life made it even more remarkable. (From the obituary of magnificent man.)

The deceased living meaningful lives had a lively sense of humor. They laughed! And, they made others laugh! They were described as witty, funny and cheerful. They encouraged us to search for the humorous people and associate with them and discouraged us from associating with the “Baaa, humbuggers” and “non-laughers”. A quick wit spread their reputations as always filling the room with laughter and tuning life into a fun party. These people lived a life of making everyone around them laugh, “infecting” the world with humor. One person dropped out of college to pursue his passions:

billiards, poker and blackjack. It also described his hobby of talking the ear off anyone who would listen, usually his wife, daughter or friends. Another had her life in college depicted humorously. “While attending college, she somehow sensed there was a dangerous grad student arriving from the North and switch majors, graduating in German and Spanish.” A year later, she married the guy anyway”. I wonder what the man who “retired to do as little as possible” actually did “not” do while in retirement. In any event, I bet he had fun. Or, I wonder if the man who passed to the “great golf course in the sky” is playing regularly? A lady starting life was depicted comically: “She was born on (date) after which the hospital promptly caught fire and burned to the ground.”

I always feel better when I laugh. And, I feel even better when I laugh with someone else. I like being around funny people and I like laughing. Seems that those who wrote the obituaries felt the same as I. After reading excerpts from their obituaries, I would like to have known these people.

He passed away, successfully saving civilization from a catastrophic meteor that was headed to a backyard near you. Some might call him our very own Bruce Willis. We just call him Jim. Jimmy had a successful career as an air traffic controller. (Obituary quote from man who radiated humor)

Observations

The departed portrayed in Example 1 were universally praised for their positive contribution to the lives of survivors, a remarkable achievement considering many survivors grew up facing extraordinary personal obstacles early in life.

Why were these people able to live joyfully with a positive mindset in spite of terrible obstacles? How could they live without becoming jaded from years of

adverse life experiences? After more research, I concluded they must have made a basic decision, consciously or unconsciously, at some point in their lives to be a positive influence in the world even with formidable forces against them. Why they made the basic decision was never clearly revealed in the obituaries, but a good number of obituaries to my surprise mentioned the departed formulated their life strategy early in life which, astonishingly stayed with them the rest of their lives. I also could not identify any one event or life experience that generated this basic decision to be a positive force in the world. It seems these amazing people believed they had a moral obligation to make a positive impact on the world.

The lesson taken from this is that to live a meaningful life uplift others with positivity.

Example 2

He was a man without a bucket list.

The deceased living meaningful lives taught us to live life boldly, to not back down from life.

The deceased who exhibited the human qualities in Example 2 did not live problem free lives. They faced formidable difficulties, many that could be consider almost insurmountable. These remarkable people were tenacious, adventurous and intrepid in overcoming horrible adversities. They interpreted the adversities of life as an unavoidable abundance of opportunities and challenges, to make the best of all life situations.

Lived life to the fullest and never backed down from a challenge. Fiercely independent woman, a beautiful spirit, and an inspiration to all who knew and loved her.

While the lives of meaningful lives stood up and faced life's challenges, they did not always succeed. It was their **unconquerable** spirit regardless of obstacles and hazards toward living meaningful lives that stood out. Confronted with serious incurable illness unquestionably leading to a death in the near future or suffering from a debilitating illness, lives of meaningful lives lived one day at a time with equanimity to make each day count to its fullest, seldom complaining about their fate.

Diagnosed with Parkinson's. Discovered Parkinson Voice Project and became very aggressive attending voice exercises several times a week which helped his vocal loudness and strengthened his swallowing capabilities until the last day of his life.

Committed to integrity and inclusiveness, and always championed the underdog and honest conversation.

Had an iron will, that's for sure, and if you were around her for long, you knew it.

Lived life to the fullest and never backed down from a challenge.

You could count on these people to make a difference. A child's father was killed on Omaha Beach on D-Day. Subsequently, as an adult she developed a special interests in making Quilts of Valor to honor her father's sacrifice. A man had the courage to valiantly rescue five people from a stormy lake. A woman refused to let blindness limit her. A woman courageously faced widowhood to raise two young children. An eight year old child lost his mother in a car accident, lived in foster homes until he was 18 then became the guardian of his younger brother.

Feisty woman who believed in speaking her mind. She believed no one else can do it for you.

Founded a friend group of exciting, intelligent, "ornery" women, who advocated for women's issues and women's right. Continued for the rest of her life to inspire women.

Successful, driven, business woman and organizer of all things.

You could count on these people to achieve goals. They believed in getting things accomplished. A 90 year old woman earned her college degree. A man blinded in a farming accident at age 43, refused to let this this slow him down. He maintained an incredible attitude and outlook in life. He had such an amazing spirit that people often wondered if he was really blind. A 70 career architect commitment to great design was unwavering, elegant. A man may have been small stature, but his heart and soul were those of a giant. A teacher who cherished opening students' minds to the beautiful language of Milton and Shakespeare.

No blade of grass ever grew around his feet.

Took flight at a young age and never looked back. Worked hard and played harder.

Observations

These unconquerable people were completely engaged in life. They “rose to the occasion” and intrepidly asserted their presence in the world. I once read when people stood up in a situation and failed, their self-esteem often went up and they became stronger. Maybe we should be more attuned to learning from life experiences, successes or failures, so that we can see the meaning and purpose in the events of our lives which will lead us to living fully engaged.

The lesson learned is to never give up on the important things that challenge you. Take action!

Example 3

The deceased living meaningful lives instructed us to find something in which to excel, either in a career or free-time activity.

Entrepreneur, builder, mechanic, rancher, land steward, sailor, yachtsman, sharpshooter, bass master, draftsman, art critic, photographer, philosopher, world traveler, story teller, mentor, and life saver. (Obituary of a brilliantly successful man.)

People described in Example 3 who lived meaningful lives had a high motivation to achieve excellence in some area of their lives. Among the career-related achievers were outstanding competitive athletes, creative photographers, entrepreneurs, artists, entertainers, religious leaders, innovators, inventors, pioneers in technology, pioneers in launching space crafts, horticulturists, legal scholars, doctors, secretaries, home builders, being an outstanding parent, etc.

Fifty years as a pastor, the church would grow to over 10,000 members.

Made her way in the business world as a legal secretary with lightning fast fingers and a keen mind.

Expert in modeling a variety of challenging business and financial problems. Fond of quoting "One 9 digit number looks exactly like another 9 digit number".

He and his peers were responsible for 112 successful launches of scientific spacecraft into earth's orbit.

They also pursued self-chosen free time activity to excel simply because it held an interest for them: knitting caps and blankets for infants, writing poetry, getting cities to build a bridge, becoming an Eagle scout, involvement in the blind community, developing a proprietary method for predicting major market corrections, becoming a political worker, forming a rock band, an avid

runner, a national teacher of embroidery, a scrabble champion, raising daffodils, birdwatching, Bible reader, motor cycles and fast cars, etc. Since their activities were wide-ranging I listed a few more of them below:

True passion was animal rescue where over the last 30 years she saved the lives of scores of strays.

Avid trap shooter for over 40 years...

Avid jigsaw and crossword puzzle fan, working a crossword puzzle almost every day.

Avid birder, and could name birds just by their song.

Delighted in watching critters along the creek that ran through his backyard, and making sure that the birds, fish, and turtles were well fed.

Made memorable silver dollar pancakes.

Gifted pianist and family knows there's a Steinway at the pearly gates so he can play...

Greatest claim to fame were her famous Sand Tart cookies. For her last batch, she prepared 9,000 cookies for friends at Christmas.

Scholar of history and tomato growing.

Claimed to have successfully beaten off all 32,000 Free Cell Solitaire games.

Enjoyed raising butterflies.

Avid gambler and patriot.

Lifelong advocate against the death penalty and committed to civil rights education.

Advocate for adopting dogs. Later in life he took up skydiving.

Observations

These incredible people were committed to being superb in a career or in a free time self-initiated activity. They plainly demonstrated that being outstanding at something or being an advocate for something was important to a meaningful life.

The lesson from this is to be exceptional at some self-selected activity: a career, avocation or cause.

Example 4

True cigar aficionado, he would spend hours spinning stories and tales Up in Smoke during his sessions of "aromatherapy. (From obituary of a great storyteller.)

The deceased living meaningful lives were great storytellers. They loved to amuse with stories from their past adventures.

Storytelling is one of our oldest and most important American traditions. Our culture is basically passed on through stories, the historic experiences of others. Stories link us with our past and provide us with glimpses of the future. Stories teach us about the goodness and evil in the world and inspire us to build better lives by showing us how others have lived.

Storytellers loved to regal listeners with their amusing and interesting escapades.

Those who knew him will treasure his stories and adventures.

He enjoyed making moonshine and hanging with his buddies around the fire pit. (This is an obituary from a man I would really like to have known. I bet he had some really good "tales".)

He was a great storyteller with a gift for building anticipation and loved telling big stories.

Appreciated words, well told stories, spirited conversation, and a well-turned phrase.

Storytellers passed on the good of our past culture, the things that enriched the lives of those who lived before us. Legacies encompassing guiding love and giving, unconditional compassion for others, nurturing, encouraging words, hard work, love of family and kindness were frequently mentioned.

Known for his ability to tell an amazing yarn.

An expert story-teller who never met a stranger.

Known for his ability to tell an amazing yarn.

Liked to dream big. He loved telling big stories.

Master storyteller, he entertained family and friends with his many adventures.”

An adept story teller who was as great with people as he was with numbers.

Observations

I was surprised at the number of comments by the obituary writers about storytelling of the deceased. The obituary writers held storytelling in high regard. Storytelling indeed has a formidable effect on survivors. Storytellers received admiration for their amusing, intriguing and regaling, stories, which passed on personal experiences, connecting us to the past. After seeing the obituary comments indicating the powerful impact of stories, I decided to do some research on storytelling. What I found was that storytelling has been part of cultures throughout the world for hundreds of years and has been an indispensable means of passing on history.

People conceptualize their experiences in stories or narrative form. When we have an experience we formulate stories about these experiences as a way to make sense of them. People tell stories to one another about themselves and to themselves, in part because human beings brains naturally organizes information in narrative form and create self-stories.

Storytelling is retrospective sense making that provides critical information for the survivors to live more meaningful lives. In summary, the

interpretation of past experiences organized into a story provides present survivors powerful information to use in living meaningful lives.

The lesson learned from storytelling is that we all need to listen to storyteller's stories. Their stories can have a profound impact on our living more meaningful lives.

Example 5

Remembered for his love of science fiction books and films, fondness for his LP of the 1812 overture, root beer floats, homemade coffee cake and French toast, being a smart ass (I bet he had a great sense of humor.) his talent for whistling, his failures in growing tomatoes and strawberries, love of the mountains, his perfect handwriting and many hundreds of hours maintaining an impeccably landscaped lawn. (What a life this man lived.)

The deceased living meaningful lives passed on their enthusiasm for living.

The will to live exist in all human beings and was demonstrated by the deceased in Example 5 by the amount of enthusiasm they exhibited for living. Eagerness, excitement, zest and passion brought meaning to these people's lives. Life experiences may diminish or destroy enthusiasm, but those living a meaningful life continued expressing formidable enthusiasm for living throughout their lives.

Always be remembered for his big, engaging smile and his gentle loving smile. Alzheimer's took his life but not his smile. It will live on in our hearts.

Love, character, joy, and spirit will be written on our hearts forever.

We pray that we all can come together from his sudden death and feel his light.

The enthusiasm for living inspired their survivors; instilled within a stronger will to live; elevated generosity; and gave support to enjoy life to its fullest.

Unique spirit will live on.

Leaves behind a legacy of hard work and quiet resilience for all to follow.

Remembered for his witty sense of humor, generosity and genuine care for others.

Beautiful, unique spirit will live on through her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Love, character, joy, and spirit will be written on our hearts forever.

Remembered for her positive outlook and determination to enjoy life to its fullest.

I always feel better when I laugh. And, I feel even better when I laugh with someone else. I like being around funny people and I like laughing. Seems that those who wrote the obituaries felt the same as I. After reading excerpts from their obituaries, I would like to have known these people.

He passed away, successfully saving civilization from a catastrophic meteor that was headed to a backyard near you. Some might call him \our very own Bruce Willis. We just call him (name). (Name) had a successful career as an air traffic controller. (Obituary quote from man who must haveradiated humor)

Observation

Our upbeat or downbeat mood influences those around us. Having an upbeat enthusiasm for living defined most of the deceased's lives. Enthusiasm spreads energy to others, influencing those around them to be more enthusiastic.

I have observed an inclination of people generally to downplay the role of enthusiasm since some believe it may be unrealistic and conceivably hazardous to be over enthusiastic. Being more "logical" is thought to be a better way to go. Contrary to this cautious approach to enthusiasm is a great

amount of behavioral research that shows the helpfulness of enthusiasm in encouragement of others, even when it is unrealistically over enthusiastic.

The lesson learned from this is to have enthusiasm for living: eagerness, passion, zeal, fervor, fondness, love, intensity.

Example 6

Above all things, he was a man of faith. In 2012, he stepped up his game when he embraced an out of the blue, stage IV cancer diagnosis that took him on the adventure of a lifetime. On (date) at the XXXXX hospital he “went skidding into heaven broadside in a cloud of smoke thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, “Wow! What a ride” as he was ushered into the presence of his savior. (Obituary of a man who lived a faith filled life. What a magnificent life this man must have lived.)

The deceased living meaning lives lived faith-guided spiritual lives that led them confidently throughout their lives.

The mention of faith and religion by far had the most comments in the obituaries. The deceased living meaningful lives had an intrinsic belief in their God. God had given them a mission to evangelize the world, to spread the “love of Christ” and to keep their faith while concentrating on actions their God wanted them to take. Life was to be an example of God’s love in action.

A trailblazer and earth shaker, an artist, and world traveler, a wife and mother, but most importantly a follower of Christ.

Greatest joy was to serve those in need, help in any way needed, and spread the Love of Christ.

Humble man who strove to help others and in so doing, sought quietly to glorify God.

Lived his life is an example of God’s love in action...

She stuck her sword in the sands of time and traded her white gloves for her heavenly crown on Sunday.

On June... she went to sing with the heavenly choir.

Went to be with his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with assurance.

These religious people received great happiness from serving their God. Some of their greatest joy in life was to serve God by helping those in need. Additionally, they took pride in being a god-fearing obedient servant to the Lord.

Everybody who knew her recognized her strong devotion to God and dedication to spiritual growth.

Had an unwavering faith in God.

"Mission accomplished, Sir: Our dad said that was the only obituary he wanted as he prepared to meet the Lord. He purpose said he hoped to hear the Lord Say, "Well done. Welcome home."

The lives of meaningful lives had a faith-guided life that seemed to be more spiritual than institutionally religious. Spirituality by my definition is the pursuit of meaning and purpose in life through a direct personal and loving relationship with a God. These faith-guided people's ultimate reason for being was defined through their relationship with God, and their lives were committed to spread God's love and commitment to helping others live through their faith. Religion, on the other hand, is the expression of faith and spirituality in culturally sanctioned institutions such as churches, synagogues, etc. While these people may have been deeply committed to religious institutions, the emphasis in their obituaries was on the spreading of spiritual actions of love, caring, compassion, and hope. I did not find any obituary statements that emphasized institutionally religious achievements.

In summary, these people had an unyielding and inflexible faith in God. There was no doubt in their beliefs. Dedication to their sacred beliefs was clear to everyone who knew them. So, it seems these people every act and every thought had meaning.

Life for these people was a transition to a better life. These people were keenly focused on a purpose that transcended life on earth. Whether their beliefs were accurate or inaccurate, they were genuine and their faith generated a meaningful life for them. It leads me to conclude that spirituality and genuine belief in a God can be important to a meaningful life.

Transitioned from this life at age 99.

Knowing her time was short due to terminal Leukemia, she exclaimed cheerfully to her family shortly before her death, "I win! I get to see Jesus first before any of you."

She fell asleep in the land of the dying and woke up in the land of the living on Tuesday.....

People will persist for a cause with greater effort than for money. People living a meaningful lives had a reason to not only live but to live fully, guided by a superordinate purpose which gave them strength to persist to the end of life before making a transition to an advanced life of reward. It was their reason for being in this world.

Humble man who strove to help others and in so doing, sought quietly to glorify God.

Had a passion for the Lord. Her faith in Him remained remarkably strong through her life, regardless of the challenges she faced.

Foremost a woman of deep faith who wholeheartedly loved Jesus.

She is in heaven enjoying Easter with her Heavenly Father.

God-fearing man that lived life to the fullest every day that he was on this earth.

Strong servant of the lord. Her faith kept her safe in his loving arms where she is today.

Let his light shine bright and touched many lives in his 82 years and was greeted at the gates of heaven by his father, mother and brother.

Recognized God's providence in her life on many occasions when she was in need or in uncertain circumstances, remarking that her needs were often met in unexpected ways.

The lesson learned from this is to have a faith in a life after death destiny.

Observations

Sometimes people know they know without any visible evidence. They just know. It seems these amazing faith-guided people distinctly knew their mission from God. It had been communicated to them in some way not understandably explained to others.

The Dark Side of Death

*Hello darkness my old friend.
I've come to talk with you again.
(Sound of Silence, Simon & Garfunkle)*

Life May Not Work Out as Expected

Even when we make the basic decision to live a meaningful life and even when we struggle valiantly with all our heart and soul to live fully, there is no promise that our lives will be meaningful. Circumstances beyond our control or our self-imposed actions can thwart meaning.

Life simply may not work out. A few lives in the obituaries did not turn out as well as expected, although I believe eventually these people's lives will touch someone in a positive way. The three people describe below vividly

demonstrate my point about life not working out as expected. It broke my heart when I read them.

They Were Meant to Be

There was one couple who with all their heart believed they were meant to be together.

All their friends saw the great love they had for each other. Tragically, they were involved in a fatal car crash. She died. He lived. And police say his drunken driving was to blame for her death and he was charged with intoxication manslaughter. They were both described as amazing people, with a tragic end to their love story.

I wonder what the future will be for this young man? Will this tragedy in his life and his fiancé make a difference in the world? I am going to predict as a result of the tragedy, he will live a life that makes a difference.

Her Story Could Make a Difference

This obituary told by a loving writer is a story that has a message of important value to all of us. Read it carefully and think about the consequences of addiction.

She was well-liked. She had a big heart and she was painfully honest. She battled addiction to prescription pain medicine, a battle she lost. Even though she was lost unacceptably early, her story survives her with the purpose to raise awareness and help others. If her story can save one life, then it is worth telling.

The Life of My Beautiful Baby Boy

The description below is excerpted from obituary written by his loving mother. It touched my heart because this young man with a big heart and a lot to give to the world was gone to soon.

He had a ginormous heart bigger than anyone we have ever known. He served in the Marines and retired with honors. He was deeply compassionate about homeless veterans. He would help

anyone anywhere, anytime. I remember him once, when he took a brand new pair of red sneakers and gave them to a homeless man. Simple acts of kindness were part of his everyday life. He overcame numerous obstacles and tragedies in life to die a senseless sudden death at such a young age of 32. Let us pray that with time, we can begin to understand why a young man who had everything to live for, had to be taken so quickly from us. We pray that we all can come together from his sudden death and feel his light.

Summary

A well written obituary captures the spirit of a deceased loved one's life. I believe the 477 examples I found were amazing. Perhaps my research can be helpful for anyone grieving the loss of a loved one or to give these support to professional counselors, psychologists and funeral home directors in their counseling with those grieving.

This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps the end of the beginning. Winston Churchill