

Every life has meaning. Just read between the lines.

What this writer learned from her morning habit of reading a certain section of the newspaper.

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🕒 December 16, 2010 | P

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Princess Diana. Ryan White. Elizabeth Edwards.

Once again, we were a nation mourning someone we never met. Someone whose untimely passing touched us in a profound and unexpected way.

One was a princess, one a young knight and one a queen of grace.

Elizabeth Edwards' death saddened many of us. Here was a woman who lost her son in a tragic accident, lost her marriage to betrayal and lost her life to an unrelenting disease and yet, still inspired people to remember her resilience when facing their own challenging times.

These deaths make us stop and think about our own mortality and that of those we love.

With that, I have a confession to make. I read the obituaries in the newspaper. Every day. Every one. And I have for as long as I can remember. Hmm, here I am writing for an online news service and I read the newspaper every morning. I keep hearing that I am part of a dying generation, but so be it. Except for the sports scores and some of the classifieds, I pretty much read everything – including the obituaries.

They all start out fairly ubiquitous with a name and two dates, but then these souls come to life. If there's a photo, I look at it and think about where they were when it was taken, who took it and why was it chosen to be their last testament. And some photos just break your heart. The one of an infant, a young child, a smiling teenager in a cap and gown. A couple.

I wonder why some obituaries are incredibly long and others are just a few lines. Do fewer words mean less of a life? Or is this unassuming obituary all the person placing it could afford?

If the cause of death isn't stated in the first sentence, it may be alluded by where donations to honor the deceased are sent. Some people thank their doctors, caretakers and hospice. Some want you to know about their esteemed military service or professional accolades. Some read like a Lifetime movie script -- filled with what must have been a wonderful life -- full of friends, family, activities and an abundance of love. Others leave you wondering if the deceased have anyone to mourn them; no funeral is planned.

Reading between the lines, you'll learn if the deceased believed in God, and if so, which one. Were they single, married, widowed, gay, disabled or decorated? Did they leave siblings, children, parents and pets? Was their death expected or tragic? Were they the boss or the worker bee? A devoted football fan, an avid reader, a voracious volunteer?

I read them all. Maybe there's some underlying meaning or maybe it's just my way of bowing my head in reverence and paying my respects.

And while not everyone is an Elizabeth Edwards, whose obituary appeared in every newspaper across the country, her death reminds us that life in this kingdom is tenuous and to be grateful for every day.