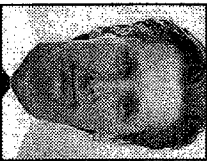


**COMMENT**

# Funerals can teach a lesson in living

**If I were king, attending a funeral would be mandatory for all under 40.**

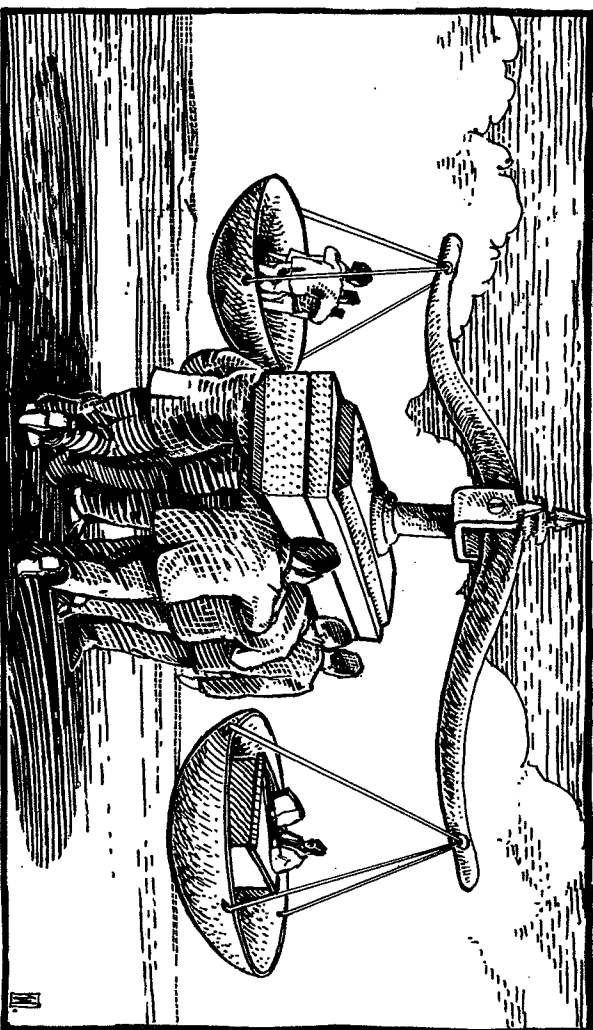
I get the strangest looks from people when I tell them that I have already carefully considered and have decided what my first act would be as king of this great country. The looks get even stranger, if possible, when I reveal my dec-



**By Michael Levine, Los Angeles writer**  
 Perhaps this idea came to me after attend-

ing the funeral of an employee's father who passed away suddenly at age 57 I had never met the gentleman and went to the service out of a sense of obligation, wanting to show respect. That's all. What I learned that day was a great deal more.

The speakers at the service talked about the man's human connections to family and friends. Even his business asso-



By Web Bryant, USA TODAY

ciates made no mention of his many professional accomplishments but focused on what kind of person they had come to know and love.

"Whoever dies with the most toys wins," was regarded as a funny thing to say in the late '80s, but since that day I've no longer been able to find the slogan amusing.

Amazing. For years, people constantly are reminded of the importance of dedication to their careers and the need for hard work. Of course that's true, but apparently, in the final analysis, as important as

obligations are to your given profession, you will be remembered for being a human being first. Human connections with spouses, with children and with friends are what overwhelmingly will leave a lasting impression.

This whole experience got me thinking about whether or not a funeral can be more than a time of grief. I started to wonder: If young people spent an hour a year listening to what people are remembered for, wouldn't it act as a massive smoke alarm, redirecting many of us?

ing his own obituary, and he didn't like what he was going to be remembered for. He took his fortune and established awards to benefit humanity.

So, it seems, no matter what advances we make in technology, time cannot be manipulated by us. We get a beginning and, all too quickly and often without warning, an end. These two important parts of life are largely out of our control. But attendance at a funeral just might make us question what comes between the launch and the finale and point us in the direction of trying to create something time cannot erode.

Some may be pleased to know that my proposal, while firm, does have some flexibility. While you must attend one funeral a year, I make no determination on whose service you attend, including someone you don't know personally. The message I got from attending the funeral of my co-worker's father was in some ways even more powerful because I had never met the man.

Modernity seems to have delivered a special need for my idea. In days gone by, life's reality taught people, through the early death of siblings and elders, that "life is earnest, life is short."

So, while you await my coronation, try to make peace with my idea. After some thought, it may appear much more useful than morbid.