

Making the News More than Once in Your Life

By

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My college journalism professor said on more than one occasion, "Get the obituary right. It's probably the only time they've been in the newspaper."

It's obvious my professor had never lived in a small town. If he had, he would have known that you don't have to die to get into the newspaper--though the story may be longer if you do.

For many years, I've kept several issues of my hometown paper, *The Nation Center News*, as keepsakes. Yes, the name sounds a bit audacious, until you realize that my hometown, Buffalo, South Dakota is just north of the geographic center of the United States, when you count Alaska and Hawaii. Probably it still sounds audacious.

I came across these old newspapers recently and I found members of my family mentioned in every one of them--and not once on the obituary page. In one issue, you can actually read about us three times.

On the front page there is a photo of two of my nieces standing in their garden displaying a potential purple ribbon pumpkin. They weren't even in school yet, and they were already making the front page.

On the back page is a photo of my brother and sister-in-law's house and yard. Allow me to describe it to you: There is a house and there is a yard. And both are lovely. In fact, the photo was in the newspaper because my brother and his wife were chosen that particular week in late August to receive the *Yard of the Week Award* presented by the Coffeemate's Extension Club. At that time, the Coffeemates chose a different yard each week during the summer. And I don't mean to take anything away from my brother, but by August there weren't many left to choose from.

On page three in the society column, you can read the following: "Over the weekend Elsie Miller was visited by her daughter Dorothy." That, of course, is me. I didn't even live in Buffalo any more, and I was still making news.

So you can see, my family members didn't have to wait until they died to make it into the newspaper. And I won't mention any names, but back then there were several other families making the news even more than we did--only because they wrote the society column.

There is a downside, I suppose. If you have a little fender bender, are arrested, or do something else embarrassing, everyone you know will read about it. Once while working at a radio station in another small town, I got a threatening phone call from a newsmaker. He didn't want the story of how he'd accidentally shot himself in the leg read on the air one more time. Trouble was I didn't have much else for news that night. Besides, I told him, it wasn't like everyone in town didn't already know. At least when it makes the news, the facts are right -- usually.

And of course, all of this fame does not necessarily translate into fortune or even into an interesting social life--at least it didn't for me. I came from a very large family (two sisters and

seven brothers), and a very small town (population less than 350). When your brothers are half the male population of the high school, it makes for slim pickings at prom time.

But if I wasn't popular, at least I was famous. Everyone was famous. Or infamous. Those were our only two choices. Anonymous is not an option in a small town. And the obituary is certainly not your first opportunity to be in the paper--although it may well be your last.

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