

OPINION: Deaths of local teens are a reminder to live well

[BY MILO BRYANT, THE GAZETTE](#)

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What would we do today if we knew we'd be gone tomorrow?

We don't ask ourselves that question enough. More importantly, we don't do justice to the answers because we think tomorrow always starts with the next sunrise.

But the sun doesn't always rise.

For Ezekiel Peter Wetlesen, Diontea Jackson-Forrest and Fermin Alfonso Vialpando III, the sun set and stayed down much too soon.

Wetlesen, a former Evangelical Christian Academy basketball player, should be taking classes right now, preparing to become the math teacher he always wanted to be. He should be learning the tools it takes to further inspire young minds, giving them the moxie to explore their dreams the way he did.

Jackson-Forrest, who starred on the Wasson High School football team, should be getting ready to challenge for the starting running back spot at Western State College in Gunnison. On the football field, he should be leading by example right now, the same way he did at Wasson. Off it, he should be making people smile and creating the memories found on his many MySpace.com dedications.

And Vialpando, a football star and favorite son at Harrison High School, should be perfecting a palate-pleasing dish. Once working in the Wyndham kitchen and simultaneously taking culinary classes, Vialpando should be dreaming up plans for the kitchen in his own place.

Instead brain cancer took Wetlesen. His parents laid him to rest Friday at the Air Force Academy. He was 19.

An act of violence took Jackson-Forrest from his friends and family July 9. He was 19, too. A virtually undetectable congenital birth defect took Vialpando during Harrison's homecoming football game last year. He was 17.

These were three young athletes. Healthy. Strong. Vibrant. Adored by family, friends, teachers and coaches. Respected by their peers.

All three are gone when it appeared each had much to give. That's the case too often. Those given the most potential rarely get to see it realized.

Their family and friends have been and will continue to revel in the joy that Zeke, Diontea and Fermin brought. And they'll cry because the three won't provide new memories.

I haven't walked this road. Don't ever want to. And it's disrespectful to those close to them to attempt to convey that there is an understanding of what they're going through.

Instead, folks could respect these young men by learning something about ourselves. Respect them by taking what we've learned and applying it to improve something about us each day.

This isn't about carelessly tossing our worldly belongings and joining an extreme servitude group or about totally giving up activities we love. Our professions often add meaning and fill our lives with undoubting feelings.

This, however, is about taking an honest evaluation of one's life and where it's going.

Zeke knew what he wanted to do. He knew it a long time ago. And he started preparing for it. But Zeke was also lived with the indisputably somber and sobering knowledge that he might not live long enough to live his dream.

So, when it would have been perfectly fine to want to spend his days in as much happiness as possible, Zeke helped establish an endowment that would assist in supplementing salaries of deserving teachers. Until he lay down, Zeke was working to better himself and those around him.

We could learn something from that.

In the King James version of the Bible, Job 1:21, it says, "... the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ... "

Forget religious denominations for a second and think about the words. It's what we do between being given life and losing life that defines us.

What are we going to do today?

Columnist Milo F. Bryant can be reached at 636-0252 or milo.bryant@gazette.com. Check out Milo's blog, The Extra Milo, at <http://milobryant.blogspot.com/>