

DOs AND DON'Ts OF WRITING YOUR OWN OBITUARY

LEARN presentation 4-22-21 by Diane Ronayne (dianeronayne@gmail.com; 208-336-2128)

Considering your own death is scary and can make you feel sad, but a well-written obituary reveals the joy its subject took in *living*. So gird yourself and think positive. You want your obituary to honor you, as well as touch those who know you and all who will read it. These are your last words, so deliver your message thoughtfully, compassionately and personally.

1. **DO write down specific details of your life to include in your obituary.**

Use this as an opportunity to *celebrate* your life! Recollect, talk to friends and family, and reflect on what has been meaningful for you and for them. Remember, this is *not* a resume, it's a story! To help you identify and focus on these details, ask yourself:

- * What were the notable turning points in my life? How did I respond?
- * What people, activities, events, honors, books, pets, etc., meant the most to me?
- * Who had the greatest influence on me, and why?
- * How did I most influence others, including those I loved?
- * Are there messages for family and friends that I want to deliver in my obituary?
- * What were my particular passions?
- * What family stories did I pass down and/or will be passed down about me?
- * What three adjectives best describe me?
- * What do I like best about myself?
- * What trips or experiences in my life were most memorable, and why?
- * How do I want to be remembered?

As you ask yourself these questions, write down answers and follow your train of thought. It may lead you to unexpected but useful places!

2. **DO invest your time.**

It takes a while to pull these details into a cohesive story of your life. Give yourself a few uninterrupted hours. Sit down and write a draft, as though you were writing a letter to a good friend. It can begin with your birth—or not. Come back to it several times over the next few days. Keep revising: Your subconscious will be working on it as you do other things.

What about tone? Look in the mirror! Your obit reflects your personality and style: methodical or free-spirited, serious or silly. Feel free to use humor, be inspirational, share hard lessons you've learned from life, thank those who deserve it. Write in the first person ("I died on Jan. 1) or third person (She/he died on Jan. 1), whichever feels most comfortable.

Early on, decide which family members and others to name and how they will be identified. Try to mention everyone important to you, whether or not you had a formal relationship. Pets count, too.

Double-check the spelling of all names, and get all dates and places right. Don't worry about grammar or punctuation until the final draft. Then, ask someone who knows you and your family to proofread the obituary for accuracy, correct your English and tell you if something is missing.

Finally, specify who will update it before publication and where it should be submitted. Tell the person who will handle your end-of-life arrangements where it is.

If you wish, write shorter versions for civic, fraternal, professional, alumni or religious publications, focusing on your experiences with these organizations and the people you shared them with. Include instructions for delivering your obituary to these publications at the proper time.

3. ***DON'T forget photographs.***

They attract readers' attention and refresh their memories. Find photos you like best from a school yearbook, fraternal or professional publication and/or family album, then have them digitized at 150 dpi to 300 dpi resolution. Scratches can be corrected, but the photos must be sharp. Head shots are typical, but if you prefer a glimpse of you doing something fun or being with someone you love, use it. Some publication format templates allow two photos.

4. ***DO consider your funeral.***

If you plan to have a funeral or celebration of your life, what would you like the written program to contain? Do you have advice to give to those who will attend? A favorite poem or prose piece to share? Specific photos of yourself or perhaps of a beautiful place you love? Put any or all of these in the program. If you wish, create a video or slide show of images, accompanied by your favorite music. One friend of mine even had live music and ballet dancers perform on the chancel of her church at her funeral! This is your last event, so make it *yours*!

5. ***DO research your options for publication and estimate what it will cost.***

- The *Idaho Statesman* currently publishes in print on Sunday-Friday, with electronic publication 24/7. You post your obituary text and photo(s) online at <https://placead.mcclatchy.com/obits/boise/home/listItems.html>. Phone: 208-377-6310.
- The *Idaho Press* print deadline is 3:00 p.m. for publication the next day. Post your text at <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/idahopress/obituary-place-an-obituary.aspx>. Phone: Mon-Fri, 208-465-8128; Sat & Sun, 208-465-8124.
- The price depends on the length of text, design template and media package chosen. There's a running total on the page as the text is inserted. The *Idaho Statesman* starts at \$270; the *Idaho Press* at \$35.
- Other publications: Newspapers elsewhere and/or academic, fraternal or professional publications have their own submission guidelines. Contact them directly.
- Online obituary publication and online videos are also available through funeral homes.
- If Facebook is part of your life, ask friends to post your obit on their pages when the time comes. You may want to instruct your family to close down your own Facebook presence, to avoid identity theft. To set that up, from the Account icon on your Facebook page go to Settings/General/Memorialization Settings Your Legacy Contact and click on Learn More. This person can do a number of things, including request the removal of your Facebook account.

6. ***DON'T stop here!***

- Lots more tips for writing an obituary and/or eulogy are available free at www.Legacy.com.
- Another good source of information and inspiration is the ObitKit, a booklet and blog by Susan Soper (www.obitkit.com). For example, "A Baby Boomer turns 65 every 12 seconds, so it's a good time to start thinking about how we will leave this life -- ideally just as we lived it: with personality, panache and style, whether in our memorial services, parties, music, outfits and events. [CLICK HERE](#) for some of our favorite celebrations that put the 'fun' in funeral!"

HOW TO WRITE AN OBITUARY FOR SOMEONE ELSE

If your loved one just passed away, you may be asking yourself, "How do I write an obituary?" Some people feel overwhelmed by the responsibility. They worry that they'll forget important facts and information, or that the obit won't fully capture their loved one's life. To assist, Legacy.com makes these suggestions:

- a. Always check with the newspaper and/or funeral home first. Many funeral homes provide forms for basic information and will write the full obituary for you as part of the services they provide. Some newspapers have specific style guidelines or restrictions on length, some only accept obituaries directly from funeral homes, and some only publish obituaries written by newspaper staff members.
- b. Include biographical information, as much as you have available and feel comfortable sharing (the more information you include, the easier it is for acquaintances to identify the deceased as someone they knew). Some items you may wish to include:
 - Full name of the deceased (including maiden name, nickname, or any other name by which the decedent might be identified)
 - Dates and locations of birth, marriage, and death
 - Cause of death
 - Predeceased and surviving loved ones' names
 - Schools attended
 - Military service
 - Place of employment and position held
 - Membership in organizations (for example, civic, fraternal, church)
 - Hobbies or special interests
- c. Consider listing one or more charities to which donations may be made in memory of the deceased. Be sure to include the charity's mailing address or website.
- d. If services are public, provide full funeral service information: location, day and time of visitation, memorial or funeral service, and burial. If services are private, say so: "Burial will be private" or "Private services will be held."
- e. If the family prefers monetary contributions rather than flowers, say "in lieu of flowers, please consider...."
- f. Plan to publish the obituary at least one or two days prior to services so friends and family can make arrangements to attend.

To make the obituary memorable, says Susan Soper, author of *ObitKit®*, *A Guide to Celebrating Your Life*, include the *details*: "Try to dig for the intimate details that will keep the person alive in memory: quirks, hobbies, favorite passions, oft-heard quotes, travels, food or unusual pursuits. It doesn't matter if the person was a company president, an electrician, a cook or ballerina, everyone has a story to tell. But that story doesn't come together by itself. Ask friends, children, parents, co-workers and spouses for details they recall and favor. How did the person look or dress? What was his daily routine? Where did she find most happiness? Be creative, look outside the box to find the personality traits and characteristics to recall." (www.ObitKit.com)

Condolence and eulogy expert Florence Isaacs, author of *My Deepest Sympathies: Meaningful Sentiments for Condolence Notes and Conversations, Plus a Guide to Eulogies*, encourages obituary, eulogy and condolence note writers to reflect on what made their loved one unique. "Recall specific instances where she made a difference in the lives of others, in her profession or field and/or in the community. Instead of just listing her achievements, tell a little story about them. Keep an eye out for moments that speak eloquently of her humanity, kindness, zest for life or even her cranky disposition—whatever fits. Did she take tango lessons or play poker in her 80s? Say so. Such information inspires people and helps them connect with the deceased. Before you sit down to write, take a day or so to think about what you want to say and take notes as ideas come to you. Then get started."

"In the realm of narrative psychology, a person's life story is not a Wikipedia biography of the facts and events of a life, but rather the way a person integrates those facts and events internally—picks them apart and weaves them back together to make meaning. This narrative becomes a form of identity, in which the things someone chooses to include in the story, and the way she tells it, can both reflect and shape who she is. A life story doesn't just say what happened, it says why it was important, what it means for who the person is, for who they'll become, and for what happens next. ... Ultimately, the only material we've ever had to make stories out of is our own imagination, and life itself. Storytelling, then—fictional or nonfictional, realistic or embellished with dragons—is a way of making sense of the world around us." – *The Atlantic*, August 2015 <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/08/life-stories-narrative-psychology-redemption-mental-health/400796/>

Why publish an obituary in the local paper? Publishing an obituary in the local news, where it appears both online and in print, means maximizing the audience of people who have some connection to the person who died. Community members past and present look to their hometown newspaper to find out about local residents who have died — teachers, neighbors, colleagues, customers.

Even as news is increasingly accessed online, people continue to depend on the obituary page, one of the most-read local news destinations both in the paper and online, as a trusted source of information. A 2017 Nielsen Scarborough report found that:

- 69% of U.S. adults read newspaper content each month.
- More than half of those still read their newspaper in print — particularly the over-50 audience who are the key demographic for obituaries. That audience will be increasingly active as the baby boomer generation is only now just beginning to crest the 70-year-old mark.
- Of readers who access newspaper content digitally, two thirds are under the age of 50 — which means as local news readership continues segueing from print to digital, newspaper publishers will still have a robust audience for generations to come.

People researching their family's genealogy — now a billion-dollar industry — depend on newspaper obituaries to discover important pieces of family history. ... Obituaries help researchers identify female ancestors' married names. A daughter listed in the 1940 census by her maiden name, for instance, may be listed by her married name in a parent's obituary years later. All this genealogy work is possible because newspaper obituaries can be found through searches in online archives or in local public libraries. Good luck looking up that information if it only appeared in someone's 10-years-ago friends-only Facebook post! (<https://www.legacy.com/news/culture-and-history/why-publish-an-obituary-in-the-local-news-here-are-5-good-reasons/>)

Annotated Example, Formal Obituary

CHARLES FREDERICK HUMMEL



Charles Frederick Hummel, 1925 ~ 2016

Charles Frederick Hummel died at the Valley View Retirement Center in Boise on Saturday, October 22, 2016. He was 91 years old. Charles was dedicated to his family, his Catholic faith, and the Boise and Idaho communities.

Charles was born June 21, 1925 in Boise to Mary McAndrews Hummel and Frederick Charles "Fritz" Hummel. His was a family of architects. His grandfather and namesake, Charles Frederick Hummel, co-founded the Tourtellotte and Hummel firm in 1896. The senior Hummel's sons, Fritz and Frank, later became partners in the firm. When Charles joined in 1953, the firm, which today is known simply as Hummel, spanned three Hummel generations. The firm's design legacy includes the Idaho Statehouse, St. John's Cathedral, Egyptian Theater, churches, multiple buildings on the campuses of all three state universities, and many other buildings and homes throughout the northwest.

Charles attended St. Joseph's Academy and in 1943 graduated high school from St. Theresa's Academy, where he met his future wife, Calista "Lissa" Frances Ward.

Charles enlisted in the [Army](#) during [World War II](#) and became a rifleman in the 398th Infantry that fought its way across Europe. He was wounded and hospitalized in December 1944, but returned to his unit and experienced several more weeks of fighting until war's end. Charles then fulfilled various post-war assignments in occupied Germany and in Paris, Reims, London, and Belfast, finally returning to Boise (carrying the [Bronze Star](#) and [Purple Heart](#) Medals) in April 1946. Responding to his children's request, in 2007 he chronicled his World War II service in a personal memoir, "I Company," ending that work with these words: "I survived through the grace of God and I know that the war was harder on my mother and father than it was on me." Called up during the Korean War, Charles served as a lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers.

Charles attended Boise Junior College before his enlistment, but after the war switched to Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., from which he earned a bachelor of arts in architecture. After a hiatus for the Korean conflict, Charles received a Masters in Architecture from Columbia University in New York City.

Charles and Lissa married at St. John's Cathedral in Boise on June 5, 1951. After living in Florida during his Korean War service and New York City while he completed his graduate studies, Charles and Lissa settled in Boise in 1953. Son Michael was born in 1952 and daughter Mary Catherine "Kay" in 1954. Two more children – John in 1959 and Joan in 1964 – completed the family.

Charles served his Catholic faith tradition in many ways. A lifelong member of St. John's parish, he served on its council and on the financial council of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise. He was on the design team that built Bishop Kelly High School. Charles directed the restoration of St. John's Cathedral, which included adapting the sanctuary to the liturgical standards of the Second Vatican Council. He became a liturgical scholar in the process and used his knowledge to design and redesign other Catholic churches. In their later years, Lissa and Charles became members of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher and supported its charitable efforts in the Holy Land. Charles was a beloved member of his last Catholic community, St. Mark's, at Valley View Retirement Center, where he read the epistle and led singing every Sunday. Invariably, to close the communion service he would choose a hymn to the Blessed Mother, to whom he felt a special devotion.

Among the buildings that Charles designed during his nearly 50-year career were the United States Courthouse and Federal Building in Boise, the Boise State University Library and Student Union, the Idaho Department of Transportation headquarters, the Idaho Statesman building, Bishop Kelly High School, Our Lady of the Lake Church in McCall, Our Lady of the Valley Church, and smokejumper facilities in McCall and Boise. He also directed many historic restorations, including the O'Farrell Cabin in Boise and St. Francis Cathedral in Baker, Oregon. He was instrumental in the rescue of the Egyptian Theater and was the principal architect in its 1977 restoration.

It would understate the point to say that Charles Hummel was dedicated to giving his time and talents for the public good; he embodied the best of what being a citizen really means. He served on many volunteer boards and commissions, often as chairman: The Boise City and Ada County Planning and Zoning Commissions, Idaho State Board of Architectural Examiners, Idaho Historic Sites Review Board, Preservation Idaho, Idaho Humanities Commission, Idaho Commission on the Arts, St. Alphonsus Regional Medical Center, Boise Art Museum, Boise Philharmonic, Idaho Public Television, Boise Rotary Club, Ada County Chapter of the Idaho Conservation League, Egyptian Theater Organ Society, and the Idaho Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Friends and colleagues, who usually referred to him as "Chuck," could count on him to bring insight, creativity and a sense of humor to any situation, whether it be the musical selections at a Rotary luncheon or a high-stakes decision by the hospital board.

In retirement, Charles enjoyed gardening, travel with Lissa, mentoring historians and students, and standing up for causes such as Your Family, Friends and Neighbors, and loaned his expertise to Corpus Christi House and the Second Century Coalition-Rotary Grand Plaza upgrades to Julia Davis Park. In 2010, he co-authored, with Tim Woodward, "Quintessential Boise, An Architectural Journey." He earlier had provided much of the technical advice for "Historic Boise, An Introduction to the Architecture of Boise, 1863-1938," by Arthur Hart and the Boise Historic Preservation Commission. Charles was passionate about the arts and historic preservation, but probably would say he felt most proud of his leadership in the smart growth movement; he was co-founder and president of Idaho Smart Growth.

Charles received recognition for community service and architectural excellence. He is one of five Idahoans ever to be named a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He received the Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award for the Arts, the 2007 Making History in Ada County Award, BSU's Distinguished Alumnus Award, and the Idaho Statesman's Distinguished Citizen Award. Rotary

International named him a Paul Harris Fellow. The University of Idaho presented him with an honorary doctorate. Idaho Smart Growth's annual achievement award (which he also received) is now named after him.

Lissa preceded Charles in death on February 24, 2015. Survivors include Michael Hummel (Suzi Boyle), Kay Hummel (Jeff Fereday) and John Hummel, all of Boise; Joan Hummel of Denver; grandsons Wyatt Fereday, Charlie Fereday, Liam Sanda, and Jonathan Marshall. Charles, who had no siblings, was particularly fond of, and maintained connections to, his many cousins—the Meades (McAndrews) in Minnesota and the Nelsons (through his aunt Marie Hummel) of Gooding, Idaho, Montana and California.

The Hummel Family thanks the dedicated staff at Boise's Valley View Retirement Center. We especially appreciate Wendi Sackman, who assisted Charles for five years.

A Catholic Vigil will take place at St. John's Cathedral in Boise on Thursday, October 27, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. A Mass of Christian Burial, also at St. John's, will be celebrated Friday, October 28, 2016, at 2:00 p.m., with interment following at Morris Hill Cemetery. A celebration of life begins at 5:00 p.m. at Barber Park Education and Events Center, 4049 S. Eckert Rd., Boise, ID 83716.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Idaho Smart Growth www.idahosmartgrowth.org, 910 Main St., Suite 314, Boise, ID 83702; or Corpus Christi House, www.corpuschristiboise.org, 525 Americana Blvd., Boise, ID 83702.

Memories and condolences may be shared with the family on Charles's memorial webpage at www.summersfuneral.com.

Published in Idaho Statesman on Oct. 26, 2016

Diane Ronayne notes:

1. Date and place of death. Age is optional but nice to include.
2. Date and place of birth. Both parents' names, including mother's maiden name.
3. Schools attended. Chronology of life. (Military service)
4. Date and place of marriage; spouse's name.
5. Children's names, dates and place(s) of birth.

Chronology of life (Faith, professional achievements, public service, retirement activities, additional recognition)

6. Death of spouse and date. Surviving children, their spouses' names, and other relatives.
7. Thanks to health providers (optional).
8. Services' place(s), date and time; interment site.
9. Public celebration of life place and time, if there is one.
10. "In lieu of" request for donations in memory of decedent with location(s).
11. Website link for condolences.
12. Date obituary was published and where.