

COMPANION RESOURCE

WRITE YOUR OWN OBITUARY WORKBOOK

Write the Story Yourself - While You Still Can

Writing your own obituary may sound unsettling.

It may even sound a little morbid.

But this workbook is not really an exercise about dying.

It is an opportunity to think about your life while you are very much living it.

What matters to you?

What would you want people to remember?

Which accomplishments actually mean something to you - and which ones merely look impressive on paper?

What stories explain who you are better than a list of facts ever could?

Is the life you are living now telling the story you hope someone will someday tell about you?

You do not need to finish this workbook in one sitting.

You do not even need to answer every question.

Choose what interests you. Skip what does not. Return to something later if the answer is not clear yet.

Your obituary does not have to be finished today.

Neither does your story.

PART ONE

THE FACTS SOMEONE WOULD NEED

Let's get the easy things out of the way first.

These are the details someone else would probably have to locate someday. Recording them now can save your family time - and prevent mistakes.

Full legal name:

Name I actually use or prefer to be called:

Maiden name, former name or other names that may be relevant:

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Places I have lived that were important to my story:

EDUCATION

Schools, colleges, degrees, certifications or other training I would want mentioned:

MILITARY SERVICE

If applicable:

CAREER

Jobs, professions, businesses or work that mattered to me:

ORGANIZATIONS & COMMUNITY

Volunteer work, organizations, clubs, faith communities or causes that have been important to me:

FAMILY & IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

People I would want included:

Those are the facts. They matter. But they are not yet the story.

PART TWO

WHO AM I - REALLY?

Imagine that someone who loves you is asked: "What was _____ really like?" What do you hope they say?

Choose five words you believe describe you:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Would the people closest to you choose the same words?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Maybe some of them
- ☐ I'm not sure
- ☐ Absolutely not - and that may be interesting

If you are not sure, ask them. You may learn something.

PART THREE

THE LIFE THAT DOES NOT GO ON A RÉSUMÉ

Most obituaries contain accomplishments. Few résumés mention the things our families actually remember.

My family knows never to ask me to:

I make a particularly good:

I am terrible at:

I own far too many:

I am surprisingly particular about:

Something I almost always have with me is:

The food people associate with me is:

My usual restaurant order is:

My favorite indulgence is:

The television show, movie, musician, team or hobby people associate with me is:

A phrase I say far too often is:

Something people tease me about is:

Something I do in a way I am convinced is the correct way is:

A tradition I insist upon is:

Something in my home that tells a story about me is:

These details may seem insignificant. They are not. They are often the things people recognize first.

PART FOUR

THE STORIES THAT EXPLAIN ME

An adjective tells us something. A story shows us.

Instead of simply writing that you are generous, funny, stubborn, adventurous, loyal, resilient or hardworking, think of a moment that demonstrates it.

A STORY THAT MAKES ME LAUGH

What happened?

Why does it feel like me?

A STORY THAT SHOWS SOMETHING IMPORTANT ABOUT MY CHARACTER

What happened?

What does it reveal?

A DECISION THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

What did I decide?

What might have happened if I had chosen differently?

SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED ALMOST BY ACCIDENT

Where did it lead?

SOMETHING THAT WAS DIFFICULT BUT CHANGED ME

What did I learn - or become - because of it?

SOMETHING I AM PROUD OF THAT MAY NEVER APPEAR ON A RÉSUMÉ

Why does it matter to me?

PART FIVE

THE PEOPLE IN MY STORY

No life is lived alone. Who changed yours?

Someone who made me feel loved:

Someone who believed in me:

Someone who taught me something important:

Someone who made me laugh:

Someone who challenged me:

Someone I forgave:

Someone who forgave me:

Someone who showed up when I needed them:

Someone I wish I had thanked more clearly:

Someone I would still like to reconnect with:

Who would be surprised to learn how important they were to your life?

Perhaps they should not have to be surprised.

PART SIX

WHAT DO I WANT REMEMBERED?

Imagine your obituary has already been written. Someone who loved you reads it and says: "They forgot the most important thing." What are you afraid they might have forgotten?

What accomplishment matters most to you?

What relationship matters most?

What role have you most valued?

What kindness are you glad you offered?

What difficult experience deserves to be understood as part of your story?

What should not become the defining feature of your story?

What do you hope the people closest to you learned from you?

What do you hope people felt when they were around you?

When people tell stories about you years from now, what do you hope makes them laugh?

What do you hope they miss?

PART SEVEN

WHAT DOES NOT BELONG?

Writing your own obituary also gives you something families do not always have later: your opinion.

Are there things about your life you do not want publicly discussed?

Are there sensitive experiences you do want included because they were important to who you became?

Is there something people might be tempted to emphasize that you would prefer they not allow to define you?

Do you want the cause of your death included?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ It depends

If it depends, on what?

Are there relationships that should be described carefully?

Is there anything you want your family to know about how you would like your story handled?

Privacy is not dishonesty. And telling the truth does not require telling every truth.

PART EIGHT

WRITE YOUR OPENING

You do not have to begin with your name, age and date of death. Try three different approaches.

THE TRADITIONAL VERSION

Begin with the basic facts.

THE STORY-FIRST VERSION

Begin with something unmistakably you. Perhaps it is a habit, passion, saying, contradiction or detail.

THE MEANING-FIRST VERSION

Begin with what mattered most in your life or the role you played in other people's lives.

Which sounds most like you?

- ☐ Traditional
- ☐ Story-first
- ☐ Meaning-first
- ☐ Some combination of them

PART TEN

THE LIFE AUDIT

Now put the obituary aside.

This may be the most important part of the exercise.

Look at what you wrote.

Does your obituary describe the life you believe you are living now?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ Not entirely
- ☐ Not yet

What appears in your obituary that you wish played a larger role in your current life?

What takes up a great deal of your time now but probably would not deserve a sentence in your obituary?

Is someone missing from your life who you would like back in it?

Is there something you have been meaning to say?

Is there someplace you still want to go?

Something you still want to learn?

Something you still want to make?

Someone you still want to help?

Something you need to forgive?

Something you need to stop postponing?

What would you like the next chapter of your life to contain?

ONE YEAR FROM NOW

Imagine you return to this workbook one year from today.

What would you be delighted to have changed?

What story would you like to have added?

What would you like to be able to cross off because you finally did it?

Write one thing you can do now - not someday - that moves you toward that version of your story.

BEFORE YOU FINISH

Writing your own obituary does not mean you believe your life is nearly over.

Quite the opposite.

It gives you a chance to notice the life you are living while you can still do something about it.

You may decide your story already reflects exactly what matters to you.

Wonderful.

You may discover that something important is missing.

That is useful too.

An obituary written someday by someone else will necessarily look backward.

Writing your own today allows you to do something different.

You can look forward.

Your story is not finished.

So what would you like to happen next?