



## **Aging Happens: Tips for crafting an obituary — even your own**

*By Ellen Waldman*

*May 8, 2018*

When I was a lot younger, I'd watch my parents reading an occasional obituary out loud to one another. They would sigh or seem surprised or saddened by the news of someone's death. At that time, I could not imagine why anyone would want to read these death notices. I've changed my mind on this topic, as more and more people I know are passing on, and I want to remember them.

I also find it enlightening to read about the lives of people born a long time ago, many of them living very different lives than we do now. I like to see the photos of this person, either taken more recently, or from decades past. I've noticed that some are written in a conversational style, and others a lot more formally. And it makes me wonder how I would like to have an obit written about my life, when it's my turn.

Here's some information about obituaries from our local newspapers. First of all, it's not free. Some people don't realize this, and it's not always inexpensive. Some people actually plan for this and leave some reserves to cover this expense. Here's an idea of what these costs might be.

First, I spoke to Mel Friend, director at Litwiller-Simonson Funeral Home in Ashland (541-482-2816). He said that a death notice, which simply has the person's name, date of death, age, and which funeral home is in charge of these arrangements, costs \$35. If you want a photo, the fee is \$45. The funeral home submits this notice to the newspapers.

Larger obituaries cost quite a bit more. I spoke to Claudia Bates at Rosebud Media, which publishes the Ashland

Daily Tidings and the Medford Mail Tribune. It's hard to get an exact quote as it all depends on size. Consider this a range to expect: from under \$100 in the Daily Tidings, to starting at \$100 in the Medford Mail Tribune. It can go as high as \$1,000. There's not a cost for the photo itself, as again, it's based on space. They can be emailed to: [obits@rosebudmedia.com](mailto:obits@rosebudmedia.com), or hand delivered to the Medford office (111 North Fir St.). Submit your obit with your contact info and which paper you're requesting. A proof is emailed back to you with the price, prior to publication. For more info, call the main classified department at 541-776-4466.

Here's my own obit story that was both funny and not funny. When my mom died 25 years ago, no one was asked to proof the obit. My dad, Jerry, was the first to notice that in the obit, he was named "Steve"! Where did that come from? They obviously got his name wrong, and it became a moment to remember.

Most people leave writing the obituary to family or friends. Doing this task after a death can sometimes be inspiring, but other times, it's too much a challenge to undertake. Here's a thought. If you're up for this, write your own obit and put it in your file for your family. Have a photo included that you feel reflects your life as you experienced it. You can always allow room for someone else to add their own words, if they wish.

There are some basic standards to include such as: personal information, date and location of death (obviously someone else has to fill in this info), special history and interests, survivors, service and memorial information, and donations.

Here's a great website that will give you a template for writing your own. <http://obituaryguide.com/>. It also has info on obituary writing ideas and pitfalls, and delicate questions. From their site, here are a few tips:

- Just get started.
- Read other obits for ideas.
- Say what your life means to you.
- Find three words that would aptly sum up your life and conclude your obituary.
- Use this project as an opportunity to expand your work into a longer memoir or family history that you can leave to your descendants.
- Inspire yourself.

Plan for an exceptional obituary. Create as interesting and meaningful a life as possible, while you can. Maybe you don't read the obituaries now. But the time will come when your family might want you to be remembered this way. Consider how you'd like to let others know of your passing, and about your well-lived life. Maybe it's time to write this down.

Addendum: After sending in this column, I watched the movie "The Last Word" that I rented from the Ashland Public Library starring Shirley MacLaine. That's the reason I rented it, but it turned out to be a story about her writing her obituary. What a coincidence — and a good story, too.