

Writing a meaningful obituary for someone who has passed is an important part of honoring their legacy. It remains the best way to create a permanent record of their life story for history and genealogy purposes for generations to come. However, creating an obituary in a timely manner for someone close to you can be challenging.

David McConkey

Writing your own obituary might strike you as an odd notion. But some self-written obits recently in the news draw attention to this practice. A new word has even been coined to describe it: “autobituary.”

One such obituary was of New Jersey resident [Walter Bruhl](#), who died in March at age 80. He wrote a complete obituary for his family to use, leaving blanks for filling in just the last details. His humorous take on his own life prompted a grandson to post the obit on the website Reddit. It went viral, providing inspiration – and laughter – to readers everywhere.

Bruhl chronicled his life with wit and wisdom, even quoting Monty Python. According to his own account, as a youngster he “drifted” through the public school system, eventually “graduating, to his mother’s great relief.” During the Korean War, he joined the military “because of Hollywood propaganda.” After working at DuPont for 30 years, he was given a “fine anniversary dinner,” a “token gift,” and then summarily “downsized.”

As for burial arrangements, Bruhl wrote that “cremation will take place at the family’s convenience, and his ashes will be kept in an urn until they get tired of having it around.”

Another self-written obituary in the news was composed by veteran character actor [James Rebhorn](#). He wrote his own obituary shortly before he died in March at age 65. Known for appearing in many films and on television, he was most recently on the TV show “Homeland.” He became famous all over again as word of his obituary spread. Striking a chord was his gracious assessment of his life and his gratitude for those around him.

In his obituary, Rebhorn wrote that his mother “loved him very much and supported all his dreams. She taught him the value of good manners and courtesy, and that hospitality is no small thing.” His father “was no less devoted,” teaching him “that there is no excuse for poor craftsmanship.” His sister Janice “was his friend, his confidant, and, more often than either of them would like to admit, his bridge over troubled waters.”

Rebhorn described working as an actor as being “fortunate enough to earn his living doing what he loved.” He was thankful for the contribution of his teachers, the support of his union, and the representation of “the best agents in the business.” Without these influences, he humbly wrote, “he wouldn’t have had much of a career.”

His wife Rebecca “loved him with all his flaws”; she and their two daughters “anchored his life.” He hoped that his daughters, however, would “grieve his passing only as long as necessary. They have much good work to do, and they should get busy doing it.”

He concluded that “he was a lucky man in every way.”

Rebhorn was inspired to write his own obituary because he knew he was going to die. He had been living with skin cancer, first detected 20 years before. But aren't all of us – usually without knowing an exact timeline – in the same situation?

We may not have been as famous or as fortunate as James Rebhorn. We may not have been “lucky in every way.” But we still have an important life to recall: our own. Writing our own obituary can help us appreciate again the wonder of everyday life. And recognize that it is quite worthwhile simply to try to live well and to do a bit of good in the world. And then to reflect on how it all turned out.

Intrigued by the thought of writing your own obit? Here are five ideas:

- **Just start.** No matter how incomplete, it will benefit others after your death.
- **Record facts.** Then say what your life means to you, which may be hard for others to describe if you don't.
- **Make it available.** Leave the notes for your obituary (along with a photo) where they can be readily located when needed.
- **Go beyond.** Your obituary could be expanded into a longer memoir. As well, it can serve as a reminder to make arrangements such as your will and plans for your funeral.
- **Inspire yourself.** Live the kind of life that would make an interesting obituary.