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Protecting Families & Businesses Through All of Life's Journeys

HOW TO WRITE AN OBITUARY

When you are planning for your estate, don't forget to write your OWN obituary. It takes more than a will or trust or prepaid burial plan to ensure your family is protected and not in chaos when you pass away. Often, your loved ones will lay awake at night losing sleep over details that you may consider insignificant, but in the moment will be hard decisions. Your kids may agonize over the right picture to use, the outfit you should wear, and the type of flowers to order. They are grieving and when we grieve our brains just do not work the same. The good news is that one of the hardest tasks your loved ones will struggle with is something you can have prepared and ready for them: writing your obituary.

Writing your obituary may be difficult. Not only is it your last impression you leave with your loved ones, but it also hard to decide what your final words to the world will be. Don't get stuck in a state of inaction and remember it does not have to be perfect or final. You can change it. In fact, you should review it every 1-3 years when you review your trust or will.

You can write your obituary in any manner you wish, but there tends to be two different styles:

1. Conventional Style
2. Non-Traditional Style

1. CONVENTIONAL OBITUARIES

A look through your local paper will help guide you through writing a traditional obituary. Traditional obituaries tend to be concise farewells that follow a consistent format. This makes them easier to write and quicker to finish.



General Format:

- Your name, age, and where you lived (and/or where you are from)
- Short list of close family members and friends you left behind
- A few sentences summing up your general interests, hobbies, & charitable endeavors
- When & where your services will be (to be added by your family)
- A closing sentence reflecting your religious background

The format for conventional obituaries tends to be concise and short in part due to the old model of newspaper publication costs. Yes, you pay word for word cost for obituaries, but with online newspapers, obituaries, and guestbooks, you now have a lot more freedom to say goodbye with your own style without the added price tag.

MEMORIAL WISHES

We always recommend you leave your family guidance on your memorial wishes. If you would like a step-by-step guide to memorial instructions, see our guide under the Be Educated tab on our website at www.HarrisLawTrust.com.



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helping us better
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friends & family.

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videos, & seminar
opportunities.

2. NON-TRADITIONAL OBITUARIES

Non-traditional obituaries tend to paint a more open, honest, and sometimes humorous depiction of the deceased. They can be raw depictions of a person’s life or satirical portrayals of the life lived. Most non-traditional obituaries still contain the information found in a conventional obituary. It may just be mixed throughout additional statements or at the end of the obituary. Non-traditional obituaries have more personality and give the reader a sense of who the decedent really was or what kind of life they really lived. They do not make fun of the decedent, but they tell it like it is. You want to avoid “roasting” yourself in your obituary as that may seem overly cruel to those mourning you. So, what does one put in a non-traditional obituary? Below are excerpts from some more non-traditional obituaries.

- “Tim made his last inappropriate comment on April 08, 2019. For those of you that met him, we apologize, as we are sure he probably offended you. He was world renowned for not holding back and telling it like it is.”
- “George was born in 1976, which was about a 100 years too late as his demeanor was more of that of a weathered cowboy with a side of rugged pioneer.”
- “Mary left behind a bunch of junk her family doesn’t want or know what to do with and is survived by loved ones that should probably keep their day jobs.”

Most people write non-traditional obituaries because they want to make their loved ones smile or cry or both. They want to add emotion. Don’t write a novel. Remember, people have short attention spans and want to be able to read your obituary in a few minutes.

If you are struggling with writing your obituary, start with a conventional obituary and then add in other details as you go. Sometimes blending these styles is the easiest way to find “your” style. Plus, it gets you moving towards action.

I wrote my obituary, now what do I do with it?

Make sure to include a copy of your obituary in your estate planning portfolio or alongside your will or trust to ensure your loved ones will find it. If you have a prepaid funeral, you should also consider leaving a copy with the funeral home you have selected to carry out your services. Lastly, you should always tell your loved ones that you wrote your obituary already and where it is located. This way they know to look for it when you pass away and don’t find it after the fact.

If you need help writing your obituary or want to ensure your affairs are in order to make things as easy as you can for your loved ones when you pass away, give us a call. We offer no cost initial consultations and reviews. 605-777-1772.

**This article is intended for general informational purposes only and does not give specific legal advice. Always consult with an attorney about your situation.*