WRITING OBITUARIES

Death is news. When death occurs unnaturally — by fire, murder, accident or war — your write news stories, which usually print alongside other breaking news. But when death occurs naturally — by illness or old age — you write obituaries, which are often gathered together on an “obituary” page in newspapers.

When you're covering death, it's important to depict public service that journalists provide for grieving old readers. (Writing about dead people? How creepy. How morbid.) But keep in mind that obituaries are read more closely, and by more people, than any other part of the paper. They tell stories. They touch hearts. They honor and inspire.

“There’s nothing morbid about a good obituary,” a New York Times editor once said, “because a good obit is about life, not death.”

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OBITUARY AND A DEATH NOTICE?

Obituaries are longer, providing more background and anecdotes. Death notices, in contrast, may be little more than a notice to hold the funeral or specify the time and place of the burial. But keep in mind that obituaries are read more closely, and by more people, than any other part of the paper. They tell stories. They touch hearts. They honor and inspire.

Most publications develop guidelines dictating how reporters handle:

- Addressess.
- Causes of death.
- Dates.
- Education.
- Education.
- Education.
- Education.
- Education.

These tell the life stories of ordinary folks using tech-
iques you’d never see in a standard news obituary:

ADDED DEPTH AND CHARACTER: THE FEATURE-obit

The best feature-obits reveal intimate details — so intimate you can’t believe the reporter knows them.

The lead of a news obituary will usually supply the personal history, the occupation and the passing date. Obituary writers will focus on the deceased’s personal history. If the cause of death is not natural, the most of the story will focus on the deceased’s personal history. If the cause of death is unnatural, or the time of death is unknown, the obituary will focus on the deceased’s personal history.

Here are some examples of obituaries:

**Debrief the News:**

Death isn’t news. There just isn’t room, or time, to write a story about everyone who dies. That’s why obituaries are generally reserved for prominent or influential people. But what about the people your readers may include nearby everyone.

That’s also why, in the lead of a news obituary, you want to emphasize the person’s significance.

Edward E. Hughes, founder of the city’s oldest and largest law firm, died of pancreatic cancer Tuesday at Mercy Hospital. He was 78.

Or: Obit—“Baby” Tucker, 30, a classic Mosquito Bum who died from AIDS and is suffering in the Westhurm Center.

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