

Sadly missed

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What would you like your obituary to say? Who do you think might write it? Wouldn't you prefer them to say it to you now?

Death is an odd one isn't it? We often don't even use the word in deference to what we think are other people's feelings. 'I'm so sorry to hear of his passing' we euphemistically say. 'With sympathy' read the cards. 'It must be a great loss' the grieving relative often hears. It is as if using the word is responsible for evoking the act. Newspaper headlines observe the same uncharacteristic sensitivity. A greatly loved celebrity, an aged actress, or a household name 'dies', as in quietly, peacefully and at home. A loathed dictator, a savage gunman or an evil enemy is simply 'dead', as in extinguished.

Much as we might doubt it from time to time, or at least tell our nurses that we are likely to go on forever, even we as dentists ultimately have to meet the grim reaper and hang up our high-speeds. For once, I hope you didn't read it here first, as I understand how it could quite easily ruin your day. Somewhat chillingly though, the item that you will never be able to read here, unless some form of communication goes seriously wrong, is your own obituary. So, you'll never know what it says. Or will you? It depends of course on what we believe and what actually awaits us once the inevitable has happened irrespective of what we believe.

So, as with funerals when it is only those left on this earthly paradise that get the benefit of grieving (again, as far as we know) so too as the dear departed we probably don't have the plus of knowing what at least one person thought of us when they wrote our obituary. In the same way that there is an awkwardness that accompanies the use of the actual word 'death', it is also apparent in the reluctance to use the candid truth in the eulogy itself. Rather like politician's speak or estate agent's embroidery, the language of the obituary lacks a certain directness, or perhaps owns a deliberate diplomacy, depending on whether you agree with the assessment or if they died leaving their money and practice to someone else.

Despite everyone knowing what a terrible tyrant he was, or what an old misery guts she became in later life, the glowing words of tribute invoke a happy-go-lucky gad-about who had time for everyone and a good word for most. Nearly everyone, it seems, had a wonderful childhood and a fulfilling homelife. Unless, they didn't, in which case they had the strength of character to overcome a terrible start in life or sacrifice what would surely have been a fulfilling homelife to the betterment of the profession.

Then again many of the inmates of the obituary pages have held an assortment of offices at various stages of their careers. Although reading between the lines there can also be a hint of the underlying character, good or bad. 'Despite being a loyal Sec-

ends in almost 'nun-like contemplation' when to the best of your recollection the neighbours frequently were enraged enough by being woken from slumber in the small hours of Sunday morning to call the police about the noise from her jam sessions with her cronies in the local jazz band. Umm - slight rewrite - 'her remarkable rejoicing of the rich diversity of life was reflected in her combination of almost nun-like contemplation mixed with a widely acknowledged if strident love of improvised music'.

Perhaps we should just return to the intriguing possibility that we may be able, somehow, to see what does get to be scribed about us. What if, like in the films, the dead return and can see what goes on after they have died? And what if, when we return,

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retary to the Society for many years, he never gained the Presidency itself.' For which read: 'he was always willing to lick envelopes and was clearly no good at chairing a meeting so that no one ever nominated him'. Or then again, on the dental team front, 'her calm manner and relaxed attitude to all around her will leave many at a loss for words'. Which might uncharitably be interpreted as the fact that her casual attitude to time keeping and complete lack of interest towards anyone else in the practice left most people speechless.

Good works too, suddenly seem to surface in way that mystifies those who thought they knew the deceased well. Had you really any idea that his non-clinical life was devoted to the preservation of animal life, when many is the time you remember him championing a stack of blood-red venison cutlets on a summer barbecue? Something of an enigma that she spent her week-

we don't like what has been written in our obituary? Worse, what if we don't like (didn't like) the individual who wrote the obituary? What would we make of their thoughts and opinions, would we approve of the highlights of our lives that they mention?

The temptation, if you think your hours and days on this planet might be immortalised in the dental literature, might be to chat earnestly to the person who you think could actually pen the words. In the same spirit, if you would prefer them to say it to you now, then do as you would be done by and tell other people what you think about them before it's too late. It's a kind of 'living communication thing'. Otherwise what you really think might be sadly missed.

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