

LOCAL VIEWPOINT

The changing conversations about mortality

There rarely is a convenient time to think about one's death, eh? Yet, more people are taking the time to do just that. As individuals, as families and as a society, there are advantages to candid talking and advance planning. Part of this contemplation can be writing your own obituary.

There has been a bit of a revolution happening in the way we look at death. The book "Being Mortal" by Atul Gawande (reviewed here two years ago) has become a rallying cry for change at the societal level. Gawande, a U.S. physician, asserts that modern medicine often fails patients at the end of their lives.

What dying patients mostly want, Gawande says, is not medical intervention with harsh treatments, but instead a chance to be at peace and in comfort. To bring about this needed re-

orientation of the health-care system, Gawande urges us to talk more openly about end-of-life issues.



David McConkey

CITIZEN ACTIVE

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well-known people are now being written in a less formal style. As well, media obits of regular people are making more of an appearance. (One example: the feature on the last page of Maclean's magazine, fittingly named "The End.")

And more folks are looking into the notion of writing their own obituary. This can be part of planning ahead, and of saving their family another chore at a difficult time.

An excellent book about crafting your own obit was written last year by American writer and retired teacher Martin Kimeldorf. The title is "Writing an Obituary Worth Reading: A Guide to Writing a Fulfilling Life Review."

Author Kimeldorf immersed himself in what he calls today's "evolving conversations about mortality." He read books about end-of-life stages,

reviewed legacy letters and researched the art of obituary writing. He also "met with death doulas and brought cookies to the local death café meetings."

Kimeldorf invited people he knew to compose their own obituary and submit it for publication. The project was a great success: the book contains 20 self-written obits. There were no rules: the submitted obituaries vary in length from six to 900 words. The writers ranged in age from 19 to over 80.

Writing your own obituary can become a springboard to a larger project like a personal memoir or a family history. Another benefit can be the opportunity to take stock of the life you are living, and of the legacy you are leaving.

"The summing up of a life can bring a bit more clarity into

your present moment at any age," Kimeldorf observes. "The experience could renew your focus on your remaining time."

"Writing an Obituary Worth Reading" is empowering. The author notes that he intentionally solicited sample obituaries from friends and neighbours — none of whom were professional writers. "They did it," Kimeldorf concludes. "You can too."

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Are you in the "third age" of your life (i.e. retired or semi-retired) and would like to explore the idea of writing your own obituary? Join me Friday,

April 21, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in Room 107 of the Brandon University education building for a session hosted by the Third Age Learning Cooperative. More info is at talcbrandon.weebly.com. Free of charge and open to all.

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