

On Obituaries  
Robert S. Griffin  
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I remember my Aunt Beatrice in her later years telling me, "It's kind of sad I guess, but Joe [her husband] and my main social activity these days is going to funerals." I'm older than my Aunt Beatrice was then and I'm pretty much cut off from everybody so I don't have funerals to go to, but my advanced age, I guess, prompts me to read a lot of obituaries. I'm struck by how admirable all these people were in their lives and how their deaths weren't all that bad as far as deaths go, dying peacefully surrounded by their loved ones and so forth. I've from Minnesota and now live on the east coast and get forwarded obituaries about people from where I grew up. Here's one I received today that's typical of the ones I get (I've changed names and places but left the content as is):

Theodore Garrick

Ted passed away peacefully in his sleep the morning of Wednesday, February 27th, 2013--three days before his 73rd birthday. A lifetime resident of Minneapolis, he was a graduate of Wilson High School, Mankato State University, and received his graduate degree at the University of Minnesota. For over thirty years, he was fulfilled by his work at the University of Minnesota's Claymore Health Service. Ted found happiness in the time he spent with his colleagues, either mentoring or working side by side with them, which was as rewarding as the work. After his retirement, he was excited to return there as a volunteer and maintain his favorite relationships. In his later years, befitting his curiosity and love of learning, he found great joy and solace in painting and drawing, as well as developing his life-long talent for cooking. His open and friendly personality was infectious, many always declaring, "I love talking to Ted." Even those who knew him only a short time were taken with his warmth and easygoing manner. Through all this, he was always a loving and selfless father, and his laughter and charm will be missed. He is survived by his son Greg and his daughter Carolyn; his brother Les and sister Rene and all their loved ones, as well as his two grandchildren Devin and Lindsay. He would be remiss if he didn't thank all his family, friends and

colleagues who supported and loved him through his life, and especially over the past four months. As a family, we are grateful for all the love and good will you extended to us over this time. In lieu of flowers, we ask, if you'd like, that you make a small donation to a charity of your choice. A memorial will be held in Minneapolis, details to follow.

After reading this obituary, I thought to myself, what if in reality Ted hadn't been such a great guy as he obviously was? Not-so-great guys, and women, die too—what about them? What about the obituaries of people whose lives weren't so rosy? With that as a premise, I edited Ted's obituary to reflect how it might have read if he had been less than exemplary in the life he lived and it hadn't ended so peacefully.

Theodore Garrick

After four months of terror and agony, Ted died in an ICU with only a nurse present gasping for breath and flailing his arms and legs and screaming, "I don't want to die! And where is everybody?" on Wednesday, February 27th, 2013—three days before his 73rd birthday. A lifetime resident of Minneapolis, Ted dropped out of Wilson High School. He later gave some thought to studying for his G.E.D and then going on to Mankato State University for undergraduate work and the University of Minnesota for graduate study but decided it would take too much out of him. For over thirty years, Ted hated every minute of his job at the University of Minnesota's Claymore Health Service. He was in constant conflict with his colleagues and supervisors. He pointedly refused to help out new hires--"Get out of my face," he would snarl. A couple weeks after Ted's retirement he returned to his workplace to pick up his mail and then mooned everybody and left and never came back. In his later years, Ted was bored out of his mind. His only respite from the tedium was drawing pornographic pictures involving housewives and UPS deliverymen, although he ran into trouble for distributing them through the fence at the local elementary school playground. A big event in Ted's last years, his attempt to break from existing on Beefaroni and Chinese take-out resulted in a kitchen fire that got out of hand and gutted his apartment building. Ted's closed and unfriendly personality was likened to an infectious disease, with many declaring, "Talking to Ted

is worse than a case of the runs." Even those who knew Ted only a short time were taken by his cold and tense manner. That and his grimness and boorishness will not be missed in the least. Through the years, Ted was always a rejecting and selfish father. He is survived by his estranged son Greg and daughter Carolyn, who will not let him anywhere near his two grandchildren Devin and Lindsay, and his brother Les and sister Rene and all their loved ones, none of whom will speak to him. Upon hearing of Ted's passing, his ex-wife said, "May he burn in hell." Before he passed, Ted let it be known that he would be remiss if he failed to give the finger to all his family, "friends" (make sure you put that in quotes, Ted directed), and colleagues who crapped on him throughout his entire life and then totally abandoned him over his last four months of catheters and bedpans. As a family, we are grateful for all the love and good will extended to us for finally being rid of this creature. In lieu of flowers, we ask, if you'd like, that you make a small donation to a fund we have set up for elementary school children traumatized by sordid and sick pornographic images. A celebration of Ted's absence from all of our lives will be held in Minneapolis, details to follow.

While I'm on obituaries, they all seem to be about people who made a big difference in the world. How about the ones about people whose lives made no difference to anything or anybody? For example:

Robert S. Griffin

On August 15th, 2013, university professor Robert S. Griffin was found dead in his rented apartment during the summer break at the university by a repairman who was checking thermostats in the building. It is estimated that he died in late July, likely of a heart attack or stroke. Suicide and foul play are not suspected. A university official reports that records indicate that Dr. Griffin was 73 and had been employed at the university since 1974. Nothing is known of his personal history or professional accomplishments. Colleagues say they have no recollections of him that stand out and are surprised to hear that he was still on the faculty. No students report having ever heard of him. There are no known friends or survivors and no services or memorials are planned. The body has not been claimed and will be disposed

of per statutory directive.