This is My Life...

Recording some memories and thoughts about life is a good way of remembering some specific events and achievements.

It can be a wonderful gift for members of your family, and friends.

This won't be your complete biography. Rather it will be a selection of relevant snapshots of your life that are important to you, and to those who might be privileged to read it. It can also be an opportunity to leave a message for people who have been important to you.

What ends up in the story is entirely up to you, and only you decide with whom you would like to share your story.



Let's Begin:

Start with a few basics about your life history – who you are, date of birth, and where you were born.

See if you can remember any important events in your early childhood and schooldays. What were your developing interests and talents?

Remember the important relationships in your life, and the most important roles you have played (eg. family, vocational, community roles). What are your most important achievements that you feel proud of?

Have you had any particular interests, hobbies, activities or passions to talk about?

There may have been important decisions and turning points, ups and downs, good times and bad. What have you learned about life that you want to pass on to others?

Are there any words of advice or guidance that you have for particular members of your family?

What are your hopes and dreams for your loved ones?

And finally, is there anything else that you would like included?

What Will Matter...

Some day life will end: death will come - ready or not!
So much becomes irrelevant: previously important wins and losses just fade away.
All your stuff, treasured or forgotten, will pass to someone else.
Hopes, ambitions, plans and 'to-do' lists will expire.
Frustrations, and everything that was unfair, will disappear.
It won't matter whether or not you were brilliant, or beautiful.
There is so much that won't matter anymore.



So what will matter? How will your days be measured?

What will matter -

is not what you got, but what you gave.
is not what you learned, but what you taught.
is not your success, but your compassion.
What will matter is not how many people you knew,
but who will be inspired by your example,
and who will feel a lasting loss when you are gone.
What will matter is not your memories,
but the memories that live in those who loved you.
Living a life that leaves such a legacy won't happen just by accident.
It's a matter of choice, and courage.
Choose to live a life that will matter.

– Adapted from a poem by Michael Josephson –



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Palliative Care

The "Doing-it-in-Style" Kit



The Palliative Care: 'Doing-it-in-Style' Kit was collated by; Dr. Eric Fairbank,
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10 Steps To Take...

1. Understand as much as you can about your illness, and what to expect later.

If you need help, or have any particular worries, talk to your doctor, Palliative Care nurse, or another Palliative Care team member.

2. Be organised.

This refers to recording your symptoms, their timing and severity, the medication you take, and writing down the questions you want to ask at your next appointment.



3. Complete an Advance Care Plan.

This involves having conversations that will help you make, and then preferably document, decisions about your future health care, including your choice of place of care. It also involves appointing someone else (called an agent) who will be your Medical Enduring Power of Attorney. This person will have the authority to make sure your decisions are carried out, in case you are unable to speak for yourself. Your doctor, and the Palliative Care team will help you complete this process correctly.

4. Make opportunities to resolve 'unfinished business'.

This applies particularly to relationships with family, and friends, and to other spiritual and/or religious matters. Write that letter, make that phone call, visit that friend. In the long run, this is what really matters.

5. Live as well as you can.

There will no doubt be limitations now, and a need to consciously pace yourself. Study the "Wellness Wheels" page, and be inspired to do what you can. This will help you remain realistically hopeful, and work towards peace of mind.

6. Learn about meditation, and mindfulness.

Meditation deals with stress by stilling the mind. Techniques such as concentrating on the breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation help achieve this. Mindfulness just means paying attention to the present moment, without judgement eg. when you walk, concentrate how it feels to walk; when you eat, concentrate on eating. This is described in Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn's book "Wherever you go, there you are." Living in the present removes regrets about the past, and anxiety about the future.



7. Record your story in a life review.

This is an opportunity to choose a selection of snapshots from your life, and to leave a message for people who are important to you. Read the guidelines, and ask for help if you would like it.

8. Put legal and financial matters in order, particularly a will.

Unlike the Medical Enduring Power of Attorney that can be done by your doctor and the Palliative Care team, you may need legal and/or financial advice for other issues.

9. Perhaps give some thought to a funeral.

10. Make use of available resources.

Members of the Palliative Care team include doctors, nurses, allied health professionals such as occupational therapists, dieticians, counsellors, and psychologists, perhaps art and music therapists, pastoral care workers and volunteers. A variety of written materials are available, there are educational and support groups, and other community services to draw on if needed. Ask your doctor, or your Palliative Care team member for more information.



Things we could Talk About

THINGS WE COULD TALK ABOUT:

Here is a list of things we could talk about. You may have some suggestions as well. Between us, we can decide the priorities.

- Just what is Palliative Care?
- Just what is cancer..... or any other disease?
- Symptoms, and measuring their severity.
- Other Problems: physical, psychological, social, spiritual
- Treatments, Medications – 'orthodox', alternative, complementary
- Relationships, children.
- Relaxation, Meditation
- The Weather
- Hope
- The Footy
- Advance Care Planning
- Healing and Curing
- Dying
- 'The Bucket List' – new priorities
- Loss and Bereavement
- Legal and Financial issues
- Home Care
- Life Stories, and Family Trees
- The Glow Worm Poem...

  I wish I were a glow worm,
  A glow worm's never glum,
  It's hard to be unhappy,
  When the sun shines out your bum!



THINGS YOU COULD READ ABOUT:

- 'Prescriptions for life with cancer.' by Dr. Eric Fairbank
- 'Home Care' " "
- 'Living and Dying in Style' " "
- Cancer Council Publications
- Palliative Care Victoria: 'About.....series

THINGS YOU COULD LOOK UP:

- Cancer Council Victoria (Helpline: 131120) www.cancervic.org.au
- Palliative Care Knowledge Network – Helping Carers & Families www.caresearch.com.au
- Advance Care Planning www.respectingpatientchoices.org.au
- Palliative Care Victoria www.pallcarevic.asn.au
- Palliative Care Australia www.palliativecare.org.au

