Start by reflecting…

What are the most important moments in my life? What makes them important?

How do I want to be remembered? What would I want someone who never met me to know about me?

If I could share only one story from my life to help someone get to know me, what would it be?

Create a rough outline of the main points.

Consider including: Earliest memories, first friends, family joys and miseries, education, career, romantic entanglements, passions, victories, defeats, and lessons learned

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

- Exact date of birth

- Birth order in your family

- Exact date of death (can be left to be filled in)

- Original full name, spelling out any middle name(s) and later alterations

- Parent’s full names, including mother’s maiden name

- Place of birth and where you grew up

- Occupations of parents (Be specific! Sales of what, exactly?)

- What type of home did you grow up in? Were your parents together, did someone die? How did it shape you?

- Religion or lack of one: how did this shape you? If faith is a major influence on your life, that should be reflected in your story.

- Other major influences (people, philosophies, or books that guided your life and why)

- Early interests and jobs

- How you met your spouse(s)/significant others (full names, specific dates of marriages, divorces, deaths, etc)

- Full names and birth dates of children

- Pets

- Educational attainments

- Military service (what impact did this have on your life?)

- Career progression

- Community involvements: Where and how did you serve and why? What did you achieve?

- Outside interests, hobbies, collections

- Pet peeves and quirks (these are part of what makes you who you are, too)

- Favorite stories (don’t assume your family knows these!)

- Photographs (if you don’t choose, someone else will and you might not like it!)

WHAT NOT TO INCLUDE:

- Endorsements (if you gave a million dollars to UMary, that’s great, but we don’t need a quote from them)

- Boasts (this is not an application for sainthood. Don’t wear the reader out with your accomplishments)

- Exaggerations (how big was the fish, really?)

- Complete list of every club membership and activity or public service appointment (again, do not tire out the reader with things that were less important)

- Things you’re not sure about (were you 5th or 6th in a class of 380? Do you really need to include that?)

- Things that go without saying (would anyone assume your family isn’t loving? If not, do you need to say it?)

REMEMBER:

* This is your chance to tell your own story as you see it - to correct misconceptions, to thank those who helped you on your way, to share meaning and history that only you know, and more!
* Obituaries don’t have to be chronological or fit a certain style. This is your story, tell it the way you want to. If your voice comes out in the writing, so much the better!
* Don’t worry too much about length. Write the story you want to write. You can always edit it down for a shorter version if you need to. Remember, too, that obituaries are much less constrained for length these days with the ability to share them on websites, etc, rather than just in the newspaper. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar right away, either. This can be fixed later. Just get started.
* Consider writing in small chunks - maybe only 10 or 20 minutes a day. This often works better for people than trying to do it all in one sitting.
* Try to answer these questions:
  + - * + What were you trying to achieve in life? Why? How did it turn out?
* Include details - these are what make the story come alive. Choose details that will highlight the story you want to tell and the message you’d like people to take away.
* Once you have a draft, have family or friends read it. Have them look for errors in facts, spelling, or grammar. Ask them: what questions do you have after reading it? This is an opportunity to expand or clarify.
* During the editing process, verify dates, names, locations, and proper spellings of all names and places. If you’re not sure about a detail and can’t verify it, consider whether or not you should include it.
* Your obituary can be a gift to you for your life now. Take time to reflect on what you’ve learned in the process of writing. As you think about where you’ve been in your life, what would you still like to do? What hopes do you have for your life going forward? What changes, if any, would you like to make? What new stories do you hope to be able to write?
* Return to your story periodically - is there anything you want to add or change?
* Make sure to provide copies of the most recent version to friends or family members who should have it, and include a copy with your funeral plans as well.

People who have copies of my obituary are/will be (include name and contact #):

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