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John Muller, left, and Justin McNeil, playwrights of "The 70," a Northwest D.C. bus route.

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An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

A Word about Writing about People

Real life experiences and facts about historic and contemporary people are fertile areas to cultivate for a variety of writing experiences.

Awareness of oneself can lead to a piece of fewer than 100 words that provides insight into the human experience — its foibles, humor, and achievements; quiet, raucous and serious moments.

The end of life on earth can provide another insight. The well-written obituary allows the reader to reflect on the life of a family member or friend, and the stranger to wish he or she had met the individual who lived in the same community.

Individuals who contributed to American society can provide students with research experience, an oral presentation and an engaging puppet project. Varied opportunities to share their knowledge and understanding help students to mature.

Students who read a wide range of print and nonprint text build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world, according to NCTE and International Reading Association standards.

Through the articles found in *The Washington Post*, students and teachers have models and inspiration for their own writing about people.

Lesson: A wide variety of journalistic models are available to write about people.

Level: Low to high

Subjects: English, Language Arts, Social Studies

Related Activity: Journalism, Art

NIE Online Guide

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Writing about People**Write about Yourself**

Use the assignment given readers of LIFE IS SHORT! Autobiography as Haiku on page 1 of the *Washington Post* Sunday Style section. To prepare for this class activity, collect examples over several weeks. Share these with students. Give students “Special Assignment: Write about You.”

If you do not keep the paired pieces together, note which ones were originally published together. Although the selections can stand alone, the juxtaposition of pieces by strangers presents a variation on a theme or a comparison/contrast for readers. When students have finished with their short works, you might have students find the best “partner” for their pieces. Display these together with a self-portrait drawn by each student.

Use a Model

Download and read one of the “My Name Is ...” articles from the KidsPost profile series (www.washingtonpost.com/kidspost). Discuss the kind of information that is included in the narrative and what was put into sidebars and lists. You might want to download all of the profiles and post them or provide one set per group of students. Some of the questions that you might ask students are:

- Compile a list of questions that might have been asked in the interviews to get the information that is included.
- What information was gained from observation of the student?
- Besides the student, who is quoted in the articles? Instead of giving the name of the person, state the relationship to the student (parent, teacher, coach, friend).

- Is there a main focus in each of the profiles? A trait, talent or attitude that is emphasized?
- What kind of information is listed?
- What do the photographs and maps add to the article?

“Joey Jett’ Is Ready for Liftoff,” a Feb. 6, 2007, KidsPost article, is included in this guide. “Get Ready to Write” is provided to guide students in analyzing how the article was structured to introduce readers to this 8-year-old and to convey the main focus of the article. In addition to the questions in the activity sheet, some of the above questions might apply.

Write a Profile

Using the models from KidsPost, students will write a mini-profile of a classmate.

Following the “My Name Is ...” model, students may be asked to prepare a list and a map.

Prepare a Biography Project

This project is based on one shared by Caroline Goldstrom, third grade teacher at Keene Mill Elementary. Although students of Mrs. Mattocks and Mrs. Goldstrom work in their language arts and social studies classes to research, write and prepare the parts of this project, they are encouraged to do additional reading and artwork at home.

“Biography Project” is the student activity sheet that provides an overview of the four steps to be completed: News Story, Oral Report, Puppet and Biography Celebration Day.

Read about People**Always Inventing: A Photobiography of Alexander Graham Bell**

Matthews, Tom L.
National Geographic Photobiography series, 2006 (Ages 9-12)
Text and authentic photographs bring Bell and his many inventions to life.

I. M. Pei

Dacquino, V.T.
The life of the architect of many buildings including the National Gallery of Art East Wing

Jesse Owens

Streissguth, Tom.
A&E Biography series, 1999 (Grades 7-10)
Life of a sharecropper’s son who won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

Mozart: The Boy Who Changed the World with His Music

Weeks, Marcus
National Geographic, 2007 (Ages 8-12)
The musical genius began performing before royalty at the age of six. Meet the 18th century kings and queens as well as the life of young people.

Remember the Ladies

Harness, Cheryl.
Harper Collins, 2001 (Ages 8-12)
Profiles of 100 notable American women

The Real Vikings: Craftsmen, Traders and Fearsome Raiders

Berger, Melvin
National Geographic, 2003 (Grade 5)
Viking life and culture are revealed in illustrations and narrative.

Young Patriots Series

www.patriapress.com/lesson.html
Lesson plans to use with more than a dozen biographies in the series

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The news article and the oral report reflect the information students have collected and the understanding they have of their person's place in history. The news articles could be combined into a class newspaper to be distributed on Biography Celebration Day. In addition to an article, each student could provide an illustration to accompany it.

The puppets are large enough for young hands to manipulate and allow for creativity that distinguishes each one. The face of the puppet is created from a 2-quart milk or juice container. Teachers may wish to provide students with patterns for the face (above and below the lips) and arms. Construction paper, felt and fabric will be used for the face and clothing. Students may use yarn, construction paper or other material for the hair. Paint sticks may also be provided to strengthen the puppet. Each puppet is to hold an object that is associated with the individual. For example, Betsy Ross would hold a flag.

Keene Mill Elementary GT students are asked to dress in appropriate costumes on Biography Celebration Day. This certainly adds to the spirit of the day, but your students may not be able to afford this additional requirement. You may ask your students to dress in white tops and black or blue pants/skirts so that their puppets stand out or to wear the school's T-shirt and jeans. Whatever they wear, students will be ready to role-play, to be their historic person, when parents circulate the room and talk to them. You may also combine the oral report with this day or have the class vote on

three students to present their oral reports to the parents.

Get Inspiration from Those Around You

Do you ever wonder about the people who sit next to you on a bus or in a Metro car? Do you walk or drive the same way to school? Some people are always there, following the same routine, but occasionally someone new appears. Could these be the inspiration for a one-act play, short story, essay or poem?

Have students observe and write journals for a week. They are to observe one person, people at the bus stop or students in the cafeteria. Read "Some Scenes From the 70 Bus" to demonstrate how two students were inspired by people riding one bus route to write a play.

Read an Obituary

Journalism teachers may give their students the assignment to write their own obituaries. Some colleges ask applicants to provide page 110 of their autobiographies. Many readers turn to the obituaries each morning, especially in small towns. Traditionally, young reporters were assigned to write obits in their first year at a newspaper.

"You Really Have to Love Life to Write about Death Every Day . . ." provides insight into the life of a Post obituary writer. You may wish to read and discuss the components of the day's obituaries or the special Sunday feature, "A Local Life." Students might be asked to write a similar obituary for an author, a contemporary personality or someone in their families.

Classroom People

Writing about people provides many opportunities for research, reading, interviewing and writing across the disciplines. One teacher shares some of the many ways writing about people may be included in classroom projects.

English

Read one or more of the KidsPost "My Name Is ..." articles. Discuss the comparisons and contrasts that exist between the lives of your students and those in the articles. Students then prepare a Venn diagram in groups. After discussion, each student writes an essay about the differences and similarities in their lives.

A variation would be to write *to* people. My third graders wrote letters to soldiers in Iraq about what they thought it was like to be a soldier. They also wished them happy holidays and to come home soon. This gives students an experience in writing letters. My students are also excellent artists so the letters were true "works of heart."

History

Pop-up biography. Second and third grade students read about a famous person. Around the head of the individual are pasted balloons with information (similar to that used in cartoon strips).

Social Studies/Journalism

Students interview their grandparents. This can be a focused interview on a particular topic — life when they were children, immigration, memories of their grandparents — or a conversation between two generations. This is a wonderful activity to use at all grade levels because it teaches kids so much and they will never forget the experience.

— *Caroline Goldstrom*
GT Third Grade, Keene Mill Elementary
Springfield, Virginia

Just two years after he got his first board from a yard sale, this Maryland 8-year-old has become one of the best young skaters in the world.



'Joey Jett' Is Ready For Liftoff



PHOTOS BY KEVIN CLARK — THE WASHINGTON POST

Joey "Jett" Hornish looks down the six-foot ramp and doesn't seem the least bit hesitant as he tips his skateboard over the edge. Within seconds he's going about 25 miles an hour, spinning around on another ramp about 50 feet away and shooting back to the starting point.

He flies up and touches the ceiling before turning again and coming to a stop. Then he looks at his mother for her reaction.

Joey is 8 years old. He is one of the youngest skateboarding sensations in the world. He lives outside Baltimore with his parents and brother, Stephen, who is 10.

Joey practices four times a week at State of Confusion, a skate park in Baltimore where most of the other skaters are teenagers or older. Few are as good as Joey.

"The first time I saw him I just filmed the heck out of him," says Beau Barlow, 27, manager of the skate park. "He was obviously a little prodigy. Obviously."

Joey says the attention of others makes him feel "a little embarrassed, but good." He remembers at one competition he had just done a "540" — that's 1½ turns in the air, a big deal even for an older skater — when everyone started calling his number. "The people in the stands, they were all saying, 'Number Six! Number Six!'" Joey says.

No wonder people chant. It's hard to imagine having the skill, much less the guts, to go as fast, jump as high and do the complicated moves that Joey does.

Get a Move On

Some of the moves in skateboarding have silly-sounding names. Here are a few from Joey's bag of tricks.

Ollie — skating on a flat surface and jumping in the air, bringing the skateboard up with you, then landing on it. This was Joey's first move.

540 Air — grabbing the board and doing 1½ turns in the air at the top of the ramp. Don't try this at home!

180 Nose Grab Over the Gap — grabbing the front tip of the board while doing a half turn and jumping over a gap in the ramp.

Mexican Blunt — Joey's signature move. A blunt is stopping quickly at the top of the ramp, balanced on two wheels. Joey invented a variation: kicking a leg out to the side. Sometimes he does a half spin before going back down the ramp.

He's never had a bad injury from skateboarding, but he does fall hard sometimes. He is protected by a helmet and heavy padding on his elbows, knees and hips.

Joey says his mom, Isabel Cumming, is his coach, but everything she



knows about skating she learned from him. And she is amazed by what Joey has learned to do since she bought his first skateboard at a yard sale two years ago.

"It doesn't make any sense," she says, laughing over how quickly he's mastered the sport.

At first Joey thought skateboarding was dull. But when he started playing with a neighborhood friend who had a small ramp, he got hooked. "I just keep doing something over and over till I get it," he says.

It was his mom who came up with

the name Joey Jett, and it stuck as his professional name.

Last year at the PlayStation Big Hookup tournament in Philadelphia, Joey came in first among skaters 14 and younger and seventh overall in a field of 80 competitors. He is the youngest skater to land a 540 in competition. Sponsors help pay for his gear, and Conformist, a Baltimore skateboarding company, makes a Joey Jett skateboard in several sizes.

This month Joey will travel to Minnesota for the King of the Groms tournament, which attracts 12-and-under

skaters from all over the world. Last year he was the youngest skater there, placing ninth.

Sports come naturally to Joey. His mother was a top gymnast in Maryland; his father, an Air Force officer, was an accomplished lacrosse player; and Stephen is a competitive tennis player. But Joey doesn't care only about skateboarding; he also loves to play football and collects Yu-Gi-Oh! cards. One thing he never does, though, is play video games.



"It's boring," he says.
— Margaret Webb Pressler

Get Ready to Write

Select someone in your family, neighborhood, school or other group to introduce in writing. As you get acquainted with the person, certain quotations, gestures and scenes will emerge that are just right to communicate the individual's personality, attitude and abilities.

As you are preparing to organize your profile, it doesn't hurt to read some models to see how other writers have ordered the details. Read "Joey Jett' Is Ready for Liftoff." Write a one-sentence summary of the profile or the impression you have of Joey Hornish.

After reading the profile once, answer the following questions as you read it again. This time you are reading to analyze the craft of writing.

1. The author, Margaret Webb Pressler, begins the profile with a description of Joey in a setting. What details does she include in the first paragraph so the reader can see the scene?
2. Two actions are added in the second paragraph. What do they communicate about Joey?
3. Notice the short, five-word sentence that begins the third paragraph. How does this change the picture you had of Joey before? When you juxtapose (place after the other) the last sentence of the second paragraph and the first two sentences of the third paragraph, what impression of Joey is conveyed?
4. List the people whom Pressler interviewed for this article and their relation to Joey. Which of these people would you have quoted first?
5. Why is the quotation from the manager of the skate park an important one to place first in the profile? Would you consider him an "expert" voice? Why or why not?
6. In the sixth sentence, the author defines a term she has included. It is important to be accurate in writing about specialized careers or hobbies. It is also important to define or explain any jargon or specialized terms that most of your readers would not know. How does the list of four skateboarding terms in the sidebar or pull-out also add to a reader's understanding of what is read?
7. A writer should let the people who are quoted and the actions of the person being profiled convey opinion. Does paragraph 7 come close to "editorializing"? Why or why not?
8. Before doing an interview, you need to plan the questions you want to ask. What questions do paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 answer?
9. Why would you not describe Joey in one of these settings?
 - a. In a park playing tennis
 - b. At home playing a video game
 - c. At an ice skating rink practicing jumps
10. Which term best describes Joey Hornish?
 - a. Advertureous
 - b. Conformist
 - c. Disciplined

Biography Project

You will research and read about one American who has contributed to our society. After you have completed your reading, you will have four steps to complete.

Step One: News Story

You will write a news article about your famous person. The article should be no more than three paragraphs long. In the first paragraph, you should include as many of the 5 Ws and 1 H as is appropriate: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. Include the following information about the individual:

- Name
- Childhood — where and when he or she lived
- Education
- Contribution to society
- Two to three interesting facts about the individual
- Death — how and when he or she died
- Why Americans should remember this individual

We will collect the news stories and publish a classroom newspaper.

Due Date: _____

Step Two: Oral Report

You are to use four (4) note cards on which you write notes about the following topics. These will help you to remember the main ideas you want to present to the class. Know the information so you can look at your audience when making your oral report.

Your topics for the oral report are:

- His or her important accomplishments were ...
- I'd ask him or her ...
- I enjoyed reading about this individual because ...
- I think this individual is important to American society because ...

Your oral report should be *no more than* three (s) minutes.

Due Date: _____



Step Three: Puppet

You will create a puppet that resembles your famous person. You will dress your puppet to reflect the time period in which your individual lived, his or her occupation or a particular event. You will design an object for your famous person to hold. The object should be associated with the person.

Due Date: _____

Step Four: Biography Celebration Day

Your parents will be invited to our classroom to interact with your biographical characters. On Biography Celebration Day you will role-play your person and answer questions about the individual.

We will give parents a copy of our class newspaper. Refreshments will be served!

Date and time of Biography Celebration Day: _____

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Special Assignment: Write About You

The Assignment: Find a way to give insight into your life in under 100 words.

1. Begin with an idea. What concept about daily life, what truth about people, what words of wisdom do you want to share? This is autobiographical so tell the truth — no fictional accounts, please.
2. Select a tone. You can be serious or humorous. You can share the irony of mantras taught to you since you could walk or the terrible truth within them as you drive to and from your job.
3. Select a scene or event that captures the concept. It might be the moment you came to this truth or it might be just another daily illustration of it. You may use quotations, only actions, a twist of fate or a play on words.
4. Write a draft. Count the words. If you have more than 100 words, you now begin honing your piece. How can you capture the scene in fewer words? What word conveys the same idea as the 10-word phrase you have used?
5. Share your piece — and, perhaps, submit it to the LIFE IS SHORT | Autobiography as Haiku column. See the Sunday Style section for instructions.
6. The first sentence is very important. It sets the scene or establishes the point of view. How do the following first sentences from published LIFE IS SHORT pieces set up the scene and prepare you for the insight?
 - I've never been thin.
 - We don't do Santa.
 - For 20 years we ended our phone calls with an upbeat "love!" to signify our devotion.
 - While a student at the University of Texas, I envied those who wore beautiful cowboy boots.
7. The last sentence provides the punch line.
 - So it's true — beauty is in the eye of the beholder.
 - My 5-year-old told them, "Santa's not coming this year. He's dead."
 - That must have been the sound of her flip-phone closing.
 - Would a horse seem a little over the top?
8. The Autobiography as Haiku will be as varied as your life experiences. Although we may not have done the same action, there is a similar emotion we may share with the writers. Here is an example from the December 17, 2006, *Washington Post*.

Being from France, I am accustomed to the offertory in church. At this Catholic church in Washington, however, the collection plate was passed not once but twice during Mass and, as the service ended, I thought I heard the priest announce still a third collection for a special charity that we'd find at the door. As I left, I saw a man at the door holding a cup. I fumbled for change and, just as I dropped it in, he said: "No, no! That's my coffee!"

Anne Marzin
Washington

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Some Scenes From the 70 Bus

2 Playwrights Find a Cast of Real Characters Aboard

By ROBERT SAMUELS
Washington Post Staff Writer

• *Original Date of Publication: July 25, 2006*

L.T. Hawkins's bus was sweltering, with the air conditioning out on one of the summer's hottest days. So at the end of her route, she was relieved to sit outside and sip iced tea from a jumbo plastic cup.

Sitting at the final stop on the 70 line, at Maine Avenue and Ninth Street SW, the Metrobus driver noticed two men staring at her. One was 5 foot 9, about 145 pounds and wearing a Washington Nationals baseball cap. The other was 6 foot 3, about 310 pounds and wearing a flat-tip black cap. He had a booming low voice.

"Excuse me, miss," the larger one said, holding a Marlboro in his hand.

"What!" she said, jumping. "Are you talking to me?"

"My name's Justin McNeil. This is my friend John," he said. "We are founders of the DreamCity Theater Group. We're producing a play about the 70 bus."

"Bah!" Hawkins laughed, bowling over. "Ain't nothing like the 70."

The 70 runs between the waterfront in Southwest Washington and the plaza in downtown Silver Spring. No other route mixes so many types of people, she told them. Along the D.C. waterfront, the passengers are apt to wear fancy suits and have fancy federal jobs. They pay with SmarTrip passes. They rarely talk to one another.

The mix changes as the bus heads north, through Chinatown, Shaw and Petworth. Some people climb aboard in dirty clothes, carrying plastic bags. Now the regulars are more likely to talk to one another. Hustlers might be

peddling bootleg copies of movies such as *Superman Returns*. If the bus gets too crowded, people can get testy. Fights might even break out.

It can be unpredictable, this ride, as it makes its way along Seventh Street and then Georgia Avenue. Gazes out the window reveal neighborhoods, their politics and sparks of change within them.

McNeil and John Muller, both 22 and best friends since high school, adapted what they've witnessed on the bus for their play, "The 70." It premieres at 6:45 tonight at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library and is the first play produced by their theater company.

The inspiration came last summer when McNeil and Muller were working the late shift at a CVS pharmacy on Van Buren Street NW, near one of the route's stops. They took the bus to work, and they watched episodes of everyday life unfold. With 18,000 passengers daily, the 70 is rich with opportunities.

One day, missionaries tried to convert a homeless man, who in turn taught them a lesson about the hardships on the street.

The playwrights also were drawn to a *Washington Post* story in September about "Mr. Wonderful," a driver on the 70 who let homeless people sleep on his bus at night. McNeil recalled meeting Mr. Wonderful, Floyd Thurston, who still works for Metro.

The play has its own version of a "Mr. Wonderful," and the story covers the character's last day driving the route. It's more a comedy than a drama, with characters aplenty.

Last week, even amid rehearsals, McNeil and Muller kept tinkering with the story line. So they rode the bus to grab some last-minute material. They compared the experience to Mark Twain's traveling the Mississippi and writing *Huckleberry Finn*. That's how they

wound up at the bus stop with Hawkins, who was about to get back to work and head north. They joined her for the ride.

"Do you have any interesting stories?" Muller asked.

"I have lots," she told them, slapping her hand on her knee. "You should have been on the ride I just ended. On my bus, I just had an altercation."

It happened at Georgia Avenue and Peabody Street NW, she said. A woman got on with some bags from a thrift store and was shocked at how crowded the bus was. She started yelling, "Move! Move!" Another woman didn't like the attitude and started calling the noisy woman names.

"I thought it was going to go to blows," Hawkins said. "People get irritated when it's hot."

The bus grumbled into Chinatown. A frowning man — in a long blond wig — circled the bus at Seventh and H streets NW. He didn't get on. But a scruffy-looking, bearded man in a black shirt did get aboard with a cellphone-shaped object attached to his ankle. He walked toward the back, announcing to everyone that he hadn't used marijuana in three days because he had to take a urine test at Walter Reed Army Medical Center that day.

McNeil and Muller didn't react. They had a similar scene in the play already. Not getting much material, they soon decided to call it a day.

"That was one of the most boring rides I've had in my life," Muller griped as he and McNeil walked into downtown Silver Spring. "That's not the 70."

As it turned out, McNeil and Muller might have given up too soon. They could have switched buses and caught another troop of riders in Silver Spring. A woman in a green business suit and high heels boarded the bus. A man smelling

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like alcohol, with ripped jeans and no shoes, followed her.

Another passenger, Cassandra Frazier, an office manager with tightly pulled back black hair, boarded the bus, sweat gleaming on her face.

"Yes, I'm on the 70," Frazier said, talking on her cellphone. "I know. I just got off this nice, plush Montgomery County bus, and now I'm on this. It was freezing cold on that bus. Now I'm on a place where there's no air conditioning."

Riders have a love-hate relationship with the 70, perhaps because of the strange goings-on.

"Oh, let me tell you about yesterday," one bus driver, S. J. Wilkes, said in an interview. "A man who was six feet tall came on with a miniskirt. And he was wearing no underwear. The man sitting across from him said, 'Oh, hell no,' and walked off. Another woman, she just sat there staring. She couldn't believe what she was seeing."

Two nights after their unproductive trip, McNeil and Muller tried again.

They boarded in Chinatown, heading north. This time, a teenager was singing an out-of-tune version of "Love," a popular R&B song by Keyshia Cole. Three men in dark shades were playing a dice game in the back.

"No, man!" one yelled. "You're cheatin'!"

Some obscenities followed.

The alleged cheater ran out the back door with a pair of New Balance shoes in his hand.

Near Howard University, about three miles away from Chinatown, McNeil saw a familiar face — the man in the blond wig. Once again the guy circled the bus. Once again he didn't get on.

"What is up with that dude?" McNeil asked. That man probably has a good story, he said.

Most people on the 70 have stories, Muller said. Even though you might not want to talk to some of them because they smell or look odd, Muller said, they all have something interesting to say.

"Why are you talking about me?" asked passenger Peter Whyte, who had appeared to be sleeping. "I've been

listening to you two since I got on. Man, you two are so condescending."

"We're not talking about you, sir," McNeil said.

"But you're right," Whyte said. "Everybody has highs; everybody has lows. ... You shouldn't judge people."

He stood up at Randolph Street and Georgia Avenue NW. "I have to go now. This is my stop," he said. "I need to do some research."

Muller asked: "What are you studying?"

"Astrology," the man yelled as he came off the bus.

McNeil shook his head.

"That's the 70," he said.

"The 70" will be performed at the MLK Library, 901 G St. NW, at 6:45 pm. Tuesdays through Thursdays through Aug. 10, with no performance Aug. 1., and at 3:30 p.m. Saturdays through Aug. 12. Admission is free. The playwrights say the material is suitable for anyone 13 or older. The library is a short walk from the 70 bus's stop at Seventh and H streets NW.



PHOTO BY MARVIN JOSEPH — THE WASHINGTON POST

Justin McNeil, front, and John Muller produced a play about Bus 70, which runs along Georgia avenue in Washington, D.C.

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in trusts and estates. He canoed and played paddle tennis, and he tossed boomerangs, which always came back. He was an amateur ballet dancer. He once danced the part of an animated cherry tree in a ballet titled "The Cherry Tree Carol." He died at 88 in 2002.

There were thousands of others, such men as Marcus Bles, a Missouri farmer who arrived in the Washington area in 1939 with \$50 in his pocket and a sixth-grade education. Bles was a self-styled "good old boy" who liked hound dogs, Stetson hats and string ties. He raised cattle, and he bought land, including hundreds of acres around a rural Northern Virginia intersection known as Tysons Corner. He was worth an estimated \$50 million when he died at 81 in 1986.

In 2003, we ran an obituary of Stephen N. Jones, 82, a Rockville physician who must have been one of the last doctors in the Washington area to have made house calls a regular part of his practice. His record was 51 in a single day. We wrote about a Foreign Service officer named Christopher P. English, whose avocation was commercial airline travel. On long weekends, he'd book passage on a round-trip flight to Asia or around the world, just for the fun of flying. Rarely did he leave the airport once his plane landed. He just got the next flight out. He was said to have logged more than a million miles of air travel. English died at 48 in 2000.

If there were an obituary "love is patient" award, mine would go to Ruth Hull Bennett, who put off marriage for two decades while she pursued a professional career. Bennett died at the age of 101 in 1998. As a college student in Iowa, she'd accepted a classmate's marriage proposal. But then she went off to medical school, became a physician and founded a

Quaker hospital in India that she directed for several years. When she returned to the United States, her old beau, miraculously, was waiting. They married, and for the next 25 years she was a wheat farmer's wife in Colorado. She moved to Sandy Spring in 1979 and at 90 won a gold medal in her age group in the 1,500-meter race-walk in the Maryland Senior Olympics.

I'll not forget Alan Marks, a Washington stockbroker who learned he had terminal cancer in 1997. Marks planned his memorial service. But he hated the idea of missing it, so he held it before he died. He called it a "celebration of life" and invited 500 people. It was held Feb. 16, 1998, at the University of Maryland chapel. Marks died less than three weeks later, on March 6. "Please smile about my life. It was a full and good one," he said in a statement read at his grave. He was 59.

I would love to have met Eloise Randolph Page, a stereotypical steel magnolia. She was white-gloved and proper, a quintessential lady of Old Virginia who traced her ancestry to Colonial times; a former Sunday school teacher and chief of the flower committee and Altar Guild at Christ Episcopal Church in Georgetown, where she demanded perfection in the ironing of altar linens. In her professional identity, Page was a top clandestine operative of the Central Intelligence Agency. She was known as the "Iron Butterfly." She was the CIA's first woman station chief, and her station was Athens, where terrorists had assassinated a predecessor. The CIA did not want us to say where Page had served, but it was hard to see how this would have harmed national security. Half the people at her church knew. A CIA friend told me the agency's problem: "We deny we have a station in Athens," he said.

Those who write obituaries learn the truth of the old proverb that "success has many fathers while failure is an

orphan." For years, it seemed, we were always writing about scientists who had played key roles in the development of the atomic bomb, which helped the United States win World War II. We must have written a dozen obituaries of men and women who helped create modern computer technology. When Carlton R. Sickles (D), a former Maryland congressman and longtime Metro board member, died in January 2004, he was widely eulogized as a "father" of the Washington area Metrorail system. At least two other men also claimed to have been the "father" of Metro.

We rarely were asked to write about the fatherhood of projects, ideas and ventures that ended badly. We wrote about the NASA scientists who worked on the Apollo and other successful space missions but little or nothing about those who worked on the Challenger, which exploded in January 1986, killing all seven crew members. We ran few, if any, obituaries of the automotive engineers who participated in the creation of Ford's disastrous Edsel.

In our dealings with families and friends of the departed — the primary sources of information in most of our obituaries — we tried to tread carefully. Most of them were having bad days, and many were prone to exaggerated notions of how very good the person who died really was. Often they could remember only what they wanted to remember. Sometimes they remembered things that never happened. They were bound to be disappointed in the obituaries we produced.

Ex-wives were among the few exceptions to this truth. They tended to be realistic about their former husbands. They did not expect us to write the obituary of a saint. In fact, they did not want us to. One of

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the more unusual complaints of my obituary-writing career came from an ex-wife who said I had failed to describe how bad her ex-husband really was. His second wife, however, loved the obituary I wrote. She sent me flowers. A colleague suggested I send them along to the first wife, but it seemed this would only rub salt into her wounds.

Many ex-wives wanted to be left out of their former husbands' obituaries, but this we could not do. We reasoned that an obituary should be a summary of the principal events in a life, and a marriage is a principal event. This explanation appeared to satisfy most of the ex-wives with whom I spoke but not all. I remember one woman who was especially apprehensive.

"What are you going to say?" she asked.

"We'll say his marriage to you ended in divorce," I said.

She was relieved. "I only want everyone to know I divorced him," she said.

Depending on families and friends for our obituary information, we were not always sure we were getting the full story. There were times when we could not tell whether relevant, but embarrassing, facts were being left out. But there also were times when it was obvious that something was missing.

One obituary in particular stands out. It was of a man whose resume included an Ivy League college degree, service in the Marine Corps and the CIA and a stint as an executive with an advertising agency. For the last 15 years of his career, he was a letter carrier. Something clearly was missing from that picture. The man also was an alcoholic whose addiction had cost him his white-collar career. But in the end, he defeated his alcoholism. He quit drinking, joined Alcoholics Anonymous and died a sober man. We included this in the obituary, and it made it a much better story.

In any story about a life, the subject is one of the best sources of information, but in obituaries, that person usually was unavailable. Occasionally we did interview public figures whose obituaries we were preparing in advance. Two men I spoke with about their obituaries were Clark M. Clifford, the former secretary of defense and quintessential Washington insider; and S. Dillon Ripley II, the longtime secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Clifford, in particular, was talkative. He said he was delighted to be able to contribute firsthand to his obituary. Unfortunately for him, he would have much preferred the one I prepared immediately after our interview to the one that was published. He was 79 when we met in his law office in downtown Washington in 1986 to discuss his obituary, which as initially written described him as a trusted confidant and counselor to presidents, and a wise and able helmsman to anyone needing help in navigating the corridors of power in Washington.

But Clifford lived 12 more years and in that period became embroiled in a banking scandal related to the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. Charges of fraud, conspiracy and bribe-taking eventually were set aside on grounds of his old age and failing health, but they nevertheless figured prominently in his obituary when he died at 91 in October 1998.

Ripley was amused at the thought of discussing his obituary. I had written him a note asking for a meeting and he wrote back, signing his reply "the late Dillon Ripley." We spent a pleasant afternoon talking about his love of ornithology; his explorations and travels to remote parts of the world; and his years as chief of the Smithsonian Institution, which he liked to call "the nation's attic." He died at 87 in 2001.

It was traditional at *The Post* to include in obituaries memberships and associations of the person who had

died. These ranged from religious to social and fraternal. There were such professional groups as the Alexander Graham Bell chapter of the Telephone Pioneers of America, to which it seemed every C&P Telephone Co. retiree belonged. We often wondered what telephone pioneers did when they got together. We had similar questions about Mensa, the club for the super-intelligent. Did they play three-dimensional chess? One member told me they mainly talked about how smart they were.

Some of these groups had exotic-sounding names — Ancient Arabic Order, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine comes to mind. But listing these memberships was mostly routine work, and often it was boring. Still, we had to be careful. Mistakes were embarrassing at best and often hurtful. Several years ago, a colleague, intending to describe someone as having been a member of the Clans of Scotland, wrote instead that he was a member of the Klans of Scotland, apparently thinking subconsciously of the white-hooded "invisible empire" that terrorized blacks, civil rights workers and others in the American South. Fortunately, an alert copy editor spotted the gaffe and corrected it before it got in the paper.

Would that obituary writers were always that fortunate. I once misattributed the authorship of a short story written by W. Somerset Maugham to Henry James, and I heard about it for months. A colleague once got the date and location wrong for the sinking of a Japanese battleship during World War II, and we were inundated with demands for a correction, which we ran in the next day's paper. At least the corrections kept us humble, or they should have. The good news was that they also told us our stories were being read.

Somebody cared about every single obituary we wrote.

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Academic Content Standards

This lesson addresses academic content standards of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Maryland

Reading/ELA: Develop comprehension skills through exposure to a variety of texts. (Grade 3, General Reading Comprehension)

Reading/ELA: Students will compose in a variety of modes by developing content, employing specific forms, and selecting language appropriate for a particular audience and purpose. (Grade 3, Writing, Standard 4)

Reading/ELA: 2 Compose oral, written and visual presentations that express personal ideas, inform, and persuade. (Grade 3, Writing, 4.2 Indicator)

Social Studies: Research the role of Marylanders who influenced the building of our new nation, such as the Sons of Liberty, William Paca, Charles Carroll, Thomas Stone, and Samuel Chase. (Grade 5, Political Science, B.1.b Objectives)

The Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum Content Standards can be found online at <http://mdk12.org/mspp/vsc/index.html>.

Virginia

History and Social Science: The student will explain the importance of the basic principles that form the foundation of a republican form of government by identifying the contributions of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Rosa Parks, Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Civics, 3.11)

English: Explain how knowledge of the lives and experiences of individuals in history can relate to individuals who have similar goals or face similar challenges. (Reading/Literature, Grade 4, 4.4)

English: The student will write narratives, descriptions, and explanations. (Writing, Grade 6, 6.7)

English: The student will develop narrative, literary, expository, and technical writings to inform, explain, analyze and entertain. (Writing, Grade 9, 9.6)

Standards of Learning currently in effect for Virginia Public Schools can be found online at www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml.

Washington, D.C.

Social Studies: Students identify the views, lives, and influences of key leaders during this period (e.g., King George III, Patrick Henry, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams (War of Independence, Grade 4, 4.8.5)

Reading/English Language Arts: Recognize that some words and phrases have both a literal and nonliteral meaning (e.g., take steps). (Grade 3, 3LD-V.11)

Reading/English Language Arts: Describe the narrative structure of biographies and autobiographies and the themes or central ideas contained within them. (Grade 5, 5.LT-LNF.6)

Reading/English Language Arts: Create multiparagraph essays that

- present effective introductions and concluding paragraphs and
- guide and inform the reader's understanding of key ideas and evidence. (Grade 5, 5.W-E.3)

Learning Standards for DCPS are found online at www.k12.dc.us/dcps/Standards/standardsHome.htm.