

# Writing a Eulogy

A eulogy is a speech designed to share the details of the life of the loved one who has died.

A eulogy usually contains the significant points in the history of that person; details about their family, education, career, interests and achievements.

It is most usually presented by a family member or friend of the deceased. The way in which it is presented will reflect the relationship you had, as well as the circumstances surrounding the death. It can be a difficult challenge to present a eulogy when coping with the loss of a loved one, however remember that it is a tribute to the person you have lost. It does not have to be perfect – whatever you are able to share will be appreciated.

The sharing of special memories, stories and, if appropriate, the use of humour all help to make the eulogy real, touching and interesting for those at the service.

The eulogy may help others to recall their own special memories. So, talk about your feelings and tell a yarn or two. You may also choose to include some memories or special words from other family members who feel unable to speak publicly themselves.

In our experience, the key to a well thought out and presented eulogy is preparation. For many people, giving any type of speech without preparation is challenging. It is easy to drift off the subject, or to lose the thread especially at this difficult time. Preparation helps you to contain and convey your emotions without being overwhelmed by them. However if you do become emotional during your delivery that is fine - it is likely that those listening will be emotional too.

The following tips may be useful when you are preparing your eulogy:

It is often helpful to jot down all your thoughts in note form to begin with.

- Collect the information about when and where they were born, a little about their family background and their current family members, their education, career, interests and pastimes. Where they have lived over their lifetime? Have they travelled? What are the highlights from their personal and professional life?
- Think about the person who has died and the relationship you had with them. What were the funny/sad/happy times? What will you miss now that they are no longer there?
- Talk with family members and friends – what were their memories? What information do they have that you may not have been aware of? Do co-workers, members of clubs and organisations they belonged to also have meaningful memories to share?

- Organise your information – use whatever method you are most comfortable with. Some people like to present their eulogy in a chronologic form and others prefer to start with a story, poem or a special reading and carry on from there.
- Write the eulogy in a way that feels natural to you. Remember that it is not an essay or a formal presentation but a story of a life.
- Read through what you have written. Think about how it flows. Are you happy with it or does it need some tweaking? Read it through to others and ask for their honest feedback.
- You may like to time how long it takes to present and to think about how this works with the other content of the service.
- Rehearse it several times so you are comfortable with presenting it.
- You may like to make short notes that you can refer to. It is also a good idea to have a printed copy (with numbered pages) in front of you at the service for reference.
- On the day, it is helpful to have another person on stand-by – perhaps a family member, friend or the officiant.
- Have tissues and a glass of water handy.
- Breathe deeply; try to speak slowly and to breathe regularly. If you need to pause –do so. If you become emotional, that is ok. Take a bit of time to regain your composure and if you are not able to carry on, pass your notes to your standby-by person to finish presenting the eulogy for you.



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# Sample Eulogy

This sample eulogy may be helpful to you when crafting your eulogy.

Eulogy for Ivy Reardonfrew Lilley  
(15 March 1920 – 28 October 2010)

Read by her son Edward

Our mother, Ivy Reardonfrew Lilley was born in Dundee, Scotland in 1920 – the eldest of five children. Her father, Andrew Reardonfrew, was a baker – locally renowned for his prize winning “Dundee Cakes”, and her mother, Morag (nee Marlow) had been a cook before she married. After the First World War Andrew could no longer bake as the flour irritated his gas damaged lungs- a legacy of his time in the trenches. His brother Harry had previously moved to New Zealand to farm, and encouraged Andrew to consider the purchase of a block of land in North Otago that was “going for a song”. In 1924, the family emigrated and settled on the block near Oamaru.

Ivy was sent to boarding school in Dunedin where she excelled academically and she then went on to study medicine at Otago University – a rare feat for a woman in those times. At University she had met and enjoyed the company of fellow medical student Bill Lilley.

After several years of study, she had to leave medical school and return to the family farm to care for her mother, who was very ill, and her younger siblings. In later years Ivy talked about how difficult this was for her and how much she missed her life in Dunedin.

Bill pined without her and subsequently arrived at the farm gate in the Christmas holidays seeking summer work and the pleasure of Ivy’s company!

A gentle wooing took place over that summer and an engagement announced prior to Bill returning to Dunedin. Bill graduated in 1943 and promptly enlisted as a medical officer and was sent to North Africa and then Italy.

On his first leave home, they decided to wait no longer, and were married in Wellington in a small family ceremony. They were able to snatch a quick honeymoon before Bill sailed off again, and Ivy returned to the farm to help her father. Morag had passed away in 1941.

At the end of the war, Bill continued his medical studies and began training as a surgeon. He and Ivy settled in Dunedin in a small flat near the medical school and before too long, Harry was born. Eighteen months afterwards, he was joined by myself and in 1952; Eleanor made a speedy entry into the world. She started school in 1957 and at that time Ivy decided to return to medical school. This was a very challenging time for her as, with three young children, she met with much disapproval for her decision amongst the other doctors’ wives. Dad supported her, however, and she had the help of her sister Edie who was living with them at that time.

The next few years were very busy, and Ivy was often up late at night completing assignments after helping us with our homework. Our father was much in demand at the hospital and worked long hours. We had moved to our

new home by then - a large two storied house in George St and we enjoyed being able to play in such a spacious house. We all have happy memories of “Hide and Go Seek”, sliding down the banisters on both sets of stairs and playing tag around the garden. Mum would often join in the games and one day was discovered by Eleanor having a wee nap in the cupboard under the stairs.

Mum and Dad bought a little crib on the beach at the Catlins and we spent many happy summer holidays exploring the bush and swimming in the sea. This was the time that Ivy enjoyed letting her hair down and would occasionally run into the sea in her “birthday suit” when there was no-one else around. That was all very well until one of her GP colleagues turned up unexpectedly for a visit one summer’s day!

The family also regularly visited the old family farm (run by our Uncle George) for holidays and enjoyed meeting up each year with the latest generation of Kune Kune pigs that George bred and showed. One year Ivy wanted to bring her favourite piglet home to Dunedin but was persuaded against it by the family!

Both Bill and Ivy developed their love of the outdoors as we grew older. They went tramping, climbing, skiing and kayaking and had lots of adventures. Ivy enjoyed photography and her faithful Nikon travelled everywhere with her.

Ivy worked as a GP through the sixties and seventies before retiring in 1980. Bill continued as a surgeon and from time to time they travelled together and worked as locums in small hospitals around the country.

They also developed a great love for international travel and backpacked around Europe in 1981. Ivy visited family in Scotland several times and enjoyed learning about family history.

In 1993 Bill and Ivy celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Their three children and ten grandchildren were all there to share their joy and to hear family stories and reminiscences.

In later years, as Mum became less mobile, she developed an interest in embroidery and baking – her cup-cakes were very popular with the great-grandchildren. This was a time when Harry, Eleanor and I saw a lot of Mum and Dad and we will always treasure those memories of sitting around the kitchen table and listening to stories of their travels and adventures.

Sadly, Dad passed away last year, and Mum found that she could no longer manage at home, so moved into a rest home where she spent her last days. She quietly passed in her sleep on 28 October with her family by her side.

