

## DARTMOUTH ALUMNI MAGAZINE OBITUARIES 101

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*Prepared by Secretaries Association President Kaja Fickes '95  
for September 2014 Association meeting at Class Officers Weekend*

DAM publishes obituaries online at [dartmouthalumnimagazine.com](http://dartmouthalumnimagazine.com). To ensure accuracy, there is an established obituary process that covers three priorities: It makes sure the alumni records office learns of and properly records a death, that the secretary/necrologist receives the confirmed details of death, and that the secretary/necrologist receives any relevant information—most importantly any communications and obituaries sent by families/friends of the deceased—from the office of the alumni news editor, Theresa D’Orsi.

### **The Basics**

1. You should receive a monthly email from the College listing all recently confirmed alumni deaths. Attached to this email you will find preliminary information on the deceased, including last known address, next of kin, other Dartmouth relations, etc. This is a service provided by Alumni Relations; contact the Class Activities Coordinator, Hunter Foraker at [hunter.b.foraker@dartmouth.edu](mailto:hunter.b.foraker@dartmouth.edu) if you would like to be added to the list..
2. If you learn of a classmate’s death from the College list, you can expect an envelope to arrive from Theresa D’Orsi with a death notice and any previously published obituaries. In the meantime, you can begin to build the DAM obituary and proceed with any other communications/memorials/tributes that your class executive committee has deemed appropriate when a classmate dies. Please do not *submit* an obituary to DAM until you have received the packet from Theresa.
3. If you learn of a death from another source—classmate, news story, next of kin, etc. —contact Alumni Records immediately. The sooner the College is able to confirm the death, the sooner DAM will be able to publish the obituary. Once a death is confirmed, you will receive the death notice and articles from Theresa in the mail. Our contact at Alumni Records is:

Michelle Brown  
Alumni Records Supervisor  
603.646.2253  
[michelle.brown@dartmouth.edu](mailto:michelle.brown@dartmouth.edu)

4. The word limit for DAM obituaries is 250 words and they will be published online. The print magazine includes a listing of deceased alumni at the end of the Class Notes section.
5. There is now the opportunity to post additional remembrances and memorial information on the DAM website. If you have more material than will fit within the word count, you can take advantage of this option and encourage classmates, friends, and family to do the same if they are so moved.
6. Deadline is the 15th of the month after our column deadlines. Obituaries, like columns, need to be submitted directly to Theresa D’Orsi. We have a bit more breathing room here than with columns, as the obituaries do not need to be rushed into the print issue.

### **Things to Think About**

- “*The report of my death was an exaggeration.*” – Mark Twain  
**First and foremost, you do not want to predecease a classmate:** The College has a strict process in place to ensure that an alumnus/a who is believed to have passed away is truly deceased. We play an important role in that process. Obituaries will not run in the DAM until the College has confirmed the death and we need to be equally strict in our own measures before listing deceased classmates in our columns or otherwise communicating passings to our classes.

- **The DAM obituary is only one of many ways that you can share the news of a classmate's passing:** If you have not already done so, talk with your class president and executive committee and establish some guidelines for how to communicate the death of a classmate to your class, send appropriate condolences to next of kin, and memorialize deceased classmates.

### Thoughts on Obituaries: Perspectives from Two Secretaries/Necrologists

#### Alan Munro '59

As soon as I receive notice of a death, either from D or a classmate, we:

- Notify via email our classmates as soon as we know, ideally with funeral/memorial service information. We generally have about 35% of our notices with this detail. My experience is that I hear first from a classmate in 90% of the cases; from the college in 10%. In the email notice, we also say our Secretary (me) will be filing an obituary on the Class website *as soon as I get approval from a family member*. When I file the Class obituary we send another email that it is posted on the website.
- We also send any death notice to Alumni Relations. If the obituary is included it accelerates AR process. [Legacy.com](http://Legacy.com) is a good source for obituaries. DAM does not accept an electronic obituary until AR advises that they have confirmed the death, a process that takes awhile...and can be as long as a month or two or more from the time that we notify AR.
- We also decided to have our Class website obituary be written without concern for the number of words so that we can fully list accomplishments including classmate memories. Incidentally, the DAM website allows for classmates to leave memories but so far I do not see a lot of additions. I look at fraternities and other organizations in the Aegis to generate a list of classmates who might add thoughts and email them. In 70% of the cases this allows for two quotes and is one of the reasons for the longer obituary. In the 250 DAM obituary I have to drop quotes to make the word limit. My average website obituary is 400 words. DAM limits an obituary to 250 words, so cutting back from 400 to 250 adds a bit of work but it is worth it we believe.
- DAM mails the class secretary a notice about the death, plus the classmate's Dartmouth activities. By the time I get this I have written the Class obituary, but it serves to notify me that I can submit the 250 official DAM obituary. This delay is why we decided to publish our own Class Obituary...but only after having a family member sign off. It usually takes a few weeks to get family sign off. We did have one family that requested that we NOT write an obituary so family sign off is important for our class.
- DAM reports the death after confirmation by listing at the end of Class Notes. Depending on the issue sequence I have found that listing the death can be as much as 4-5 months after I write the class obituary, which is the reason we immediately send our initial email notice to all classmates.

#### Robert Conway Jr. '73

My general methodology is to use "public" sources (e.g., Class of 1973 Freshman Book, as it was called in 1969; the 1973 Aegis Yearbook; five-year/reunion personal info updates; published obituaries; and professional career information on the internet).

When the obits migrated a few years ago from the printed pages of DAM to the electronic edition, there was some expectation that the previously constrained length of the obits would grow and allow for more details that might be developed by contacting surviving kin and classmates. However, since DAM staff review time for electronic obits is limited, the obit writer still has to exercise some discipline as to how much information can be included in an obit. In other words obits must still be relatively short and contain only the most significant details. I have my own obit template (probably developed over the years by reading obits written by some of the great class secretaries and newsletter editors like the late Fritz Hier '44) that is offered below for those who have never before written an obit. The template is useful about 95 percent of the time and keeps the length generally at or below the maximum word limits.

There was some discussion a few years ago among class secretaries on the desirability of contacting a surviving spouse/partner or next of kin. I rarely speak to next of kin unless, due to an absence of public sources, I am unable to develop the obituary. This approach may not be the majority view and I don't want to appear to be

contradicting current guidance that class secretaries may be following. I would merely offer up what works for me.

### **VERY BASIC TEMPLATE**

*Prepared by 1973 Class Necrologist Robert Conway Jr.*

Key: Parentheses (...) indicate expected information; brackets [...] indicate optional information  
Class Year

FIRST NAME, MIDDLE NAME OR INITIAL, LAST NAME (if applicable: JR., II, III, Etc)

died [suddenly/after a long illness] [of cancer/from injuries received in an automobile accident/complications arising from multiple sclerosis] on (date) [at home/in hospital's or hospice's name]. [Full first name or preferred name or nickname] came to Dartmouth from (high school/prep school) in (city/town, state). At the College he/she majored in (major subject), [extracurricular activity], [intramural/varsity sports team], and was [Greek membership, organization membership]. [Significant campus volunteer activity or off-campus activity]. After Dartmouth (first major: service period – Peace Corps, Teacher Corps, military, etc.; work/job or postgraduate educational activity). [career employment, job progression or non-professional life's work/focus]. [Significant community/volunteer involvement and/or leadership]. (Name) is survived by (spouse/partner/significant other/former spouse/children – names if available/option: parents/option: siblings; if alumni, include family survivors and their class years) survivors). [Memorial contributions may be made to (institution/ mailing address or website address)].

### **SAMPLE CLASS MEMBER OBITUARY**

**Elizabeth Carrington Howe '73** died after a long illness on August 1, 2014, in the hospice at Upstate Medical Center in Chicago of cancer. Carrie came to Dartmouth from New Trier Township High School in Winnetka, Illinois. At the College she majored in history, sang in the Glee Club, played center on the women's varsity basketball team and was treasurer of Alpha Beta Kappa. Carrie was a Tucker Foundation volunteer who tutored disadvantaged children from the Upper Valley area. After Dartmouth she spent two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya before attending Northwestern Law School, where she earned a J.D. in 1978. Carrie was a trial lawyer for 10 years with the Chicago firm of Wheelock & O'connor before being appointed a federal district court judge by President Clinton in 1998. She was a member of the choir of St. James Episcopal Church in Chicago and a trustee of Northwestern Law School. Carrie is survived by her husband, John '73, daughter Ann '95 and son Carrington. She was predeceased by her father, Robert Carrington '44, and her grandfather, Winthrop Carrington, class of 1919, a former trustee of the College. Memorial contributions may be made to Tucker Foundation at Dartmouth or to the Hospice at Upstate Medical Center, 1545 Main Ave., Chicago, IL 60001.