



REWRITE YOUR *future*

It's a tough road between being the person you want to be and the person you currently are. NEXT speaks to three women who wrote their own obituaries in order to change their lives

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PHOTOGRAPHS MARA SOMMER

Are you living the life you want? Or are you so busy getting through the day you've forgotten what makes you happy? One way to find out if you're on track is to write your own obituary: an account of how you would most want to be remembered. It might sound a little morbid, but taking a moment now to think about how you hope to live will help pinpoint any areas where you need to make changes. It could be as simple as the way you interact with your family, or as major as a complete career change.

The following three women took pen to paper and were surprised by the results. As they discovered, it was a great way to jolt them into action. The women share how, with the help of a life coach, they've learned ways to get from where they are now to the person they really want to be.

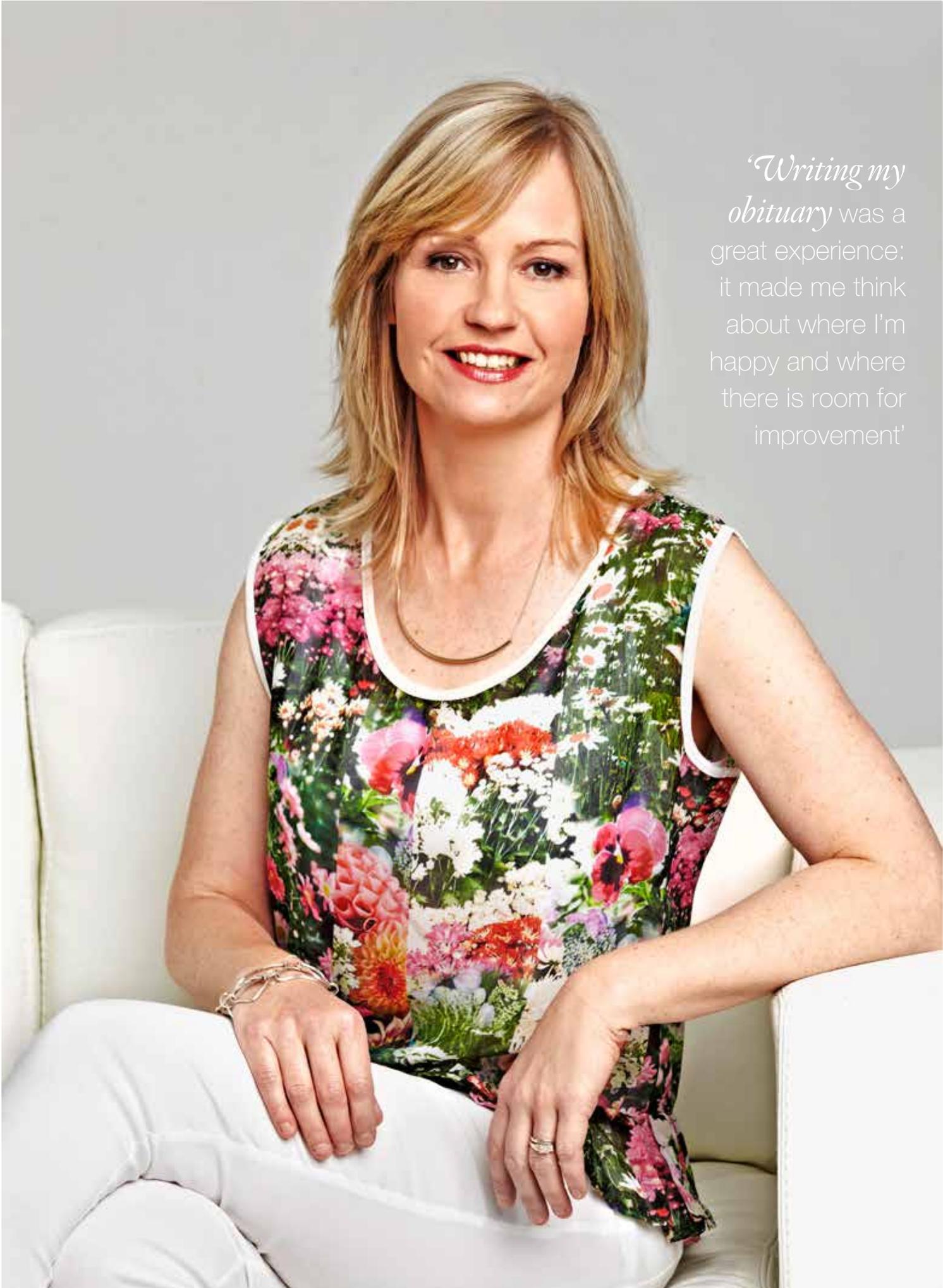
SUSANNAH MALONEY, 42.

Susannah will be remembered as a fearless, spontaneous, innovative woman who lived in the moment and sought out every opportunity for adventure and challenge.

Although always viewed as successful by friends, it wasn't until she discovered a career that really motivated her that she fully reached her potential. She was a loving and loyal wife who helped drive the family business to great success, allowing her and husband Julian to achieve the ideal work-life balance.

She contributed in many ways to her family, friends, community and society and gained great pleasure from helping others – she made a difference. She managed to combine this with fulfilling her lifelong dream to travel to Africa, the continent of her birth.

A picture of health up until the end, Susannah practised yoga, dancing and laughing into her old age. »



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SUSANNAH'S JOURNEY

Despite being seen by everyone around her as a high-achieving, intelligent personable individual, Susannah Maloney, 42, often wondered whether her obituary might read 'Susannah who?' Having recently quit her job in conference management without

another to go to, she was looking for direction.

"Writing my obituary was a great experience; it made me think about the areas of my life and where I'm happy and where there is room for improvement. I realised I was already achieving many of the things I wanted to. I have a great life, with a wonderful husband and we do swing dancing and have a fantastic social circle. The things that trouble me more are on the professional side, finding a job I love and being more confident in my abilities."

The process of seeing Allison Fisher, a career and life coach, was very interesting for Maloney. "We did the Myers-Briggs test; scarily accurate! I had to sort some skills cards into ones I liked using and ones I didn't." Fisher then showed her careers where her skills could be useful, including writing, training, learning and development, creative/arts, and the not-for-profit sector. Maloney was pleased to find areas she hadn't thought about investigating such as learning and development, and training. But she also realised the bigger issue was she'd previously only believed she could apply for jobs in industries she's worked in before. "Allison helped me realise so many of my skills are transferrable and I need to widen my net a bit and have the confidence to look at other industries."

This widening of her net also applied to the way she viewed any potential role in their family business. Maloney's husband owns a popular barber's shop called Maloney's. "Allison and I talked about me expanding my involvement there and helping with marketing, communications and social media. I realised I wasn't looking at different ways of structuring my life and trying to just stay in a safe nine-to-five job in an industry I knew. Although Maloney's might not be a stable salaried role, Allison showed me how I could make it more task-focused and timetabled to work with my personality. It was nice to realise that just by thinking a bit more broadly, there were so many more options: a full-time job, several part-time jobs in different industries or working on Maloney's and driving our own business forward.

"The other area where I felt I was failing on my obituary was service, but Allison said the options for volunteering outside work were endless. She suggested while I was off work I could volunteer at events, helping charities and gaining more events experience at the same time. Writing my obituary and seeing a life coach was a great exercise to undertake at this crossroads in my life. A fresh perspective from a skilled outside source is very valuable."

MICHELLE SOKOLICH, 38.

Laughter, passion and joy are our enduring memories of Michelle. An incredible mum, her connection with her children was evident in their strong relationship. Warm, loving and empathetic, she was a tower of strength and her children always felt they could turn to her in times of need.

Her relationship with her husband was a testament to their enduring love. Stronger together than apart, Michelle and Kim brought out the best in each other and set a shining example of a relationship to their children.

Michelle was an independent woman who had a very strong sense of self. Her enthusiasm and drive was infectious, she was a hard worker and always gave 100%. This was evidenced in her very successful career as an entrepreneur – setting up one successful business after another.

Eternally positive, Michelle was always looking for the silver lining. Her life centred around mindfulness and gratitude, which made her relaxed and grounded. She had a busy social life and a wide variety of close friends she could always count on in times of need. Also very community-minded, she was often found volunteering with people less fortunate than herself.

Michelle laughed often, loved a lot and lived an extremely fulfilling life.

MICHELLE'S JOURNEY

A usually joyous-by-default woman, Michelle Sokolich, 38, felt in recent times she had been failing on most fronts to be the person she wanted to be, because she felt stressed, grumpy and overwhelmed. Writing her obituary only reinforced this.

"It was a pretty full-on exercise. I felt quite emotional writing it and cried more than once."

Sokolich sought the help of Louise Thompson, life coach and author of *The Busy Woman's Guide to High Energy Happiness*, and came away renewed and relieved.

"With various exercises Louise

helped me see the problem wasn't how I am as a mum, wife, employee or business owner. She made me realise the underlying problem was I'm trying to cram way too much into every week and not being able to do anything well because I am spread too thin," she says.

Giving things up is a challenge for Sokolich. Her daughters Mila, seven, Rosa, four, and Sylvie, 22 months, all have food allergies. Between them the family must avoid gluten, dairy, egg, food additives and salicylates – a naturally occurring chemical in many foods, including fruit and vegetables. As a result,



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Sokolich has to prepare most foods from scratch - from mayonnaise to stock to home baking. She's also active in Playcentre as well as working weekends on her new business and many weeknights at TV3 as an editor. The juggle is often overwhelming. She didn't know where to start but Thompson was able to look at it all as an objective outsider.

"I was stuck in the daily grind, I couldn't see the wood for the trees, I felt totally trapped and just couldn't see a way out of my situation. We took a snapshot of how satisfied I am with my life. It was an eye opener and a bit scary to see how I'm living."

Thompson then helped Sokolich prioritise her goals - three personal and three professional - which she has on the fridge.

These include taking better care of herself, delegating household chores, and studying to further her business skills.

"Anytime I'm considering whether to do something or not, I just need to check my goals. If it's not on there I say no. She helped me realise that to become the happy, relaxed person I so desperately want to be, some stuff has to be sacrificed. There was no room for anything that wasn't working towards my most important goals."

Sokolich has had some hard decisions to make, but has realised she has to leave Playcentre, put her business on hold for a while and modify some of the extra cooking she is doing for her kids. "It's hard but I can see now the alternative is bad burnout and if

I follow my goals I can be that relaxed person I so badly want to be. I felt like doing cartwheels around the lounge after I got home. It was like a huge burden had been lifted.

"Writing my obituary was heart-breaking at a time when I was so far away from being the person I wanted to be, but it was so worth it. I now realise sometimes it's necessary to look at your life as a whole rather than focusing on a myriad of individual problems.

"Realising it wasn't one thing or another but rather the sheer volume of activity I was trying to pack into a week made it much easier to cut down what I was doing. It's already made me feel less stressed and grumpy and more like the kind of person I want to be remembered as once I'm gone." >>



JUSTINA FROST, 41.

Justina had a warm personality and a zest for life that uplifted and inspired everyone she met.

A fiery redhead at times, she was passionate about justice and fighting for the underdog.

Despite having a busy life, raising two amazing boys, Justina always had the time to give to friends or family, to share her knowledge or lend an ear to those going through difficulties.

As a practitioner of Kundalini yoga she inspired her students to fulfil their true potential and see a higher purpose to life. She was a great teacher who introduced this transformative style of yoga to many.

As a mother she was keen to lead by example and show her sons that our purpose here on earth is to find a true calling and be of service to others.

Justina's school motto was 'By Love Serve' and she embodied this mantra in all areas of her life.

JUSTINA'S JOURNEY

Justina Frost felt while career-wise she had always been successful (a former lawyer turned communications professional), there was something missing in her life in terms of service to others. Her obituary talked about uplifting and inspiring others, but she felt she wasn't really doing that at all.

The 41-year-old went to see Jenny Devine, who specialises in leadership and executive coaching, to talk about this. Devine had some concerns that as a working mother of two boys, one aged five and the other 16 months, Frost already had enough going on and adding to the pile was not necessarily going to make her life better.

"Jenny got me to examine the reasons I want to be more of service. I realised some of it came down to people pleasing and also comparing myself to other 'supermum' friends who seem to be everywhere helping others all the time, while also juggling busy family lives. There was an element of social pressure and wanting to be the ideal friend for sure," Frost explains.

"Jenny also pointed out that to be of service to others I had to walk the talk. Not taking care of myself and being stressed out is hardly the way to inspire.

"We talked about self care, getting some time with friends, some time alone, making time for my yoga and meditation practice and stopping comparing myself to others as ways of being more balanced, and in turn

Jenny got me to examine the reasons I want to be more of service and I realised some of it came down to people pleasing'

having the energy left to be present to help others. I needed reminding of just how important all these things are and I am definitely making sure I find more time to address these needs."

The two women also discussed ways Frost could bring this mindfulness to her work, and be of service in companies where she contracts, rather than adding it in as yet another part of her day. Frost used to have a corporate yoga business in London and they discussed her starting up something similar here once she felt she had got herself in balance.

"I see that so many large companies in New Zealand could benefit from having someone teach their staff to work smarter and be more present with meditation and yoga classes in lunch breaks or before work, and I have decided to really look into this in 2014," Frost says.

"I am so fired-up after seeing Jenny. The idea of meeting my need to help others more as part of a job feels like a much easier

solution than trying to run a household, hold down a corporate job, be an available mother to my two boys and do volunteer work on top of it all. It feels balanced and so much more in line with the person I want to be.

"It's a relief to take the pressure off myself a bit and realise sometimes less is truly more. Trying to simplify my life and be better at fewer things, rather than adding more because of a sense of obligation, seems so much more sensible than the way I was viewing things before.

"I would recommend not only thinking about what you want people to say after you die, but why you want them to say that, as a very valuable exercise for anyone. The changes you feel you need to make might not necessarily be the right ones.

"In my case, Jenny helped me to see I just need to integrate my values and the yoga into what I'm trying to manage now - parenting, comms work and being a friend, before adding anything else in." □

HOW TO WRITE YOUR OBITUARY

Far from this being a morbid exercise that focuses on The End, penning your own obit gives you a whole new lease on The Now. It's your chance to get back on track, refocus your priorities and 'resurrect' the dreams that have become lost in the daily grind. So approaching the task with this in mind, here are some pointers to get you started.

- 1 To make sure you don't miss anything important, start out with headings like Health, Friends, Work, Creativity, Exercise, Study. You don't have to stick to these but it's a useful guide.
- 2 Remember, this is about who you want to be - so make this exercise a criticism-free zone. If you'd like to be a source of strength for your loved ones but have been a stressed-out, wrung-out mess recently, still write down 'she was a rock for her children and friends'.
- 3 You wouldn't want your eulogy to sound like it came from a template, so make your obituary reflect the real you, with all your quirks and charming idiosyncracies. Writing

them down will help you embrace who you are - even while you plan to make a few tweaks here and there to help you be the best you can be.

- 4 Write down those things you've done that have made you proud. A stock-take of your accomplishments will be just the boost you need to pursue future goals. It can be anything from 'she changed her own spark plugs' to 'she taught herself Spanish so she could backpack around Peru'. Similarly, write down the goals you'd love to pursue. 'Never one to give up on her dreams, she penned her first movie screenplay aged 75/ran her 10th Paris Marathon aged 60' etc. Don't hold back; this is your life - so go for it. □

HAIR/MAKEUP LUISA PETCH STYLING BLAIRE MCALLISTER PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT KINGY HSU SUSANNAH WEARS PAGE 57 TOP ANDREA MOORE PANTS DECUJUBA HEELS WILD PAIR BRACELET JANE DANIELS NECKLACE GLASSONS. MICHELLE WEARS PAGE 59 TOP RICOCHET PANTS AND HEELS GLASSONS JACKET PORTMANS NECKLACE JANE DANIELS JUSTINA WEARS PAGE 60 TOP CHARMAINE REVELEY PANTS ANDREA MOORE HEELS WOACHI CUFF PORTMANS. TRIBECA TWO-SEAT SOFA AND SIGNATURE BAR STOOL FREEDOM FURNITURE.