

“She left a sizable RRSP”

Erica Weir

It's RRSP season once more, the time of year the advised and advantaged among us are fervently squirrelling away our money for the better days that surely lie ahead.

Few would dispute the desirability or privilege of ensuring economic security in old age. It signifies a degree of accomplishment, foresight and appreciable self-control that is commendable and enviable.

But to the languishing poets among the steeply mortgaged, it also prompts a question: “Just how many lattes, with their accompanying conversations and companions, must be foregone because of this socially marketed drive to ensure wealth and security in old age?”

Surely, the true measure of one's life lies as much in quality as in quantity, in the roses smelled and the wisdom gleaned.

This is why the epitaph, and not the size of one's RRSP, is the most signifying product of a thoughtful life. Thankfully, national banks, insurance companies and other corporate sponsors have failed to appreciate this, and watchful consumers have not yet been enticed to plan ahead for and to purchase the most signifying product of a well-lived life — the epitaph.

But, in the absence of advertising, most of us give no thought to our epitaphs. This is dangerous, since we risk either being buried mute or being topped forever with “Rest in Peace” or some other chiselled-in generic. After a blessedly long, circumstantial and vigorous life, is that really all we've got to say?

I've decided to take my cue from some of our more considerate poets and to plan my epitaph.

- “I had a lover's quarrel with life” (Robert Lee Frost)
- “Called back” (Emily Dickinson)
- “Since I am so quickly done for, I wonder what I was begun for” (epitaph for 3-month-old infant)
- “Excuse my dust” (Dorothy Parker)
- “Posterity will never survey a nobler grave than this. Here lies the bones of Castlereigh. Stop, traveller, and piss” (Lord Byron, purportedly written about Viscount R.S. Castlereigh)

When writing one's epitaph, it becomes apparent that it will need to be revised over time, depending on where one is in life.

Should I die soon, I have decided that my epitaph must involve some cautionary tale about the naming of childhood pets. My cat was called Topsy, the dog was Turvy. Our family was never quite sure where these names came from, but a father smitten with Gilbert and Sullivan is suspected.



Jeanne Simpson

Topsy-turvy turned out to be an unfortunate portent, since my life has been turned upside down on several occasions — a virtual yin-yang on a pin wheel, spinning in a sudden wind.

The most recent spin came in a phone call from my sister in Canberra this morning.

It was dawn here, midnight there.

I couldn't wake up, she couldn't sleep.

It was -20°C and snowing here, over 40°C and a drought there.

Her house was on fire and she had to leave.

I was stuck here and had to stay put.

This is all that I know so far. Topsy-turvy.

“Would that my dog were called Binky” (Erica Weir).

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