

Anne Mayer's Auto-Obituary

What is more therapeutic than the psych ward? Writing your own obituary.

Anne Mayer



1 Life Story, Some of Which Is True

1.1 Narrative

Anne lived an ordinary life which included moments of transcendent happiness and episodes of almost unbearable loneliness. Just like everyone else.

If Anne's life was extraordinary in any way, it was not because of educational achievements—although she graduated first in her night school law class at the age of forty.

It wasn't because of her brilliant accomplishments in science and technology, although Anne invented a Time Machine, disguised it to protect the dangerous secrets time travel would expose, and then forgot the disguise. Apparently, it could look like any object in her mountain cave lair.

Anne was fluent in six languages but, apart from English, no one has ever been sure what the other five were because she mumbled.

Anne once saved fourteen young children from a burning orphanage but was sadly unable to save the nuns whose habits made them go up like tiki torches. Their rosaries glowed with jewel colors so rich.

Anne mostly overcame a lifelong daily struggle against an urge to employ the "Royal We" in referring to herself. (We mostly succeeded in avoiding the first person plural when referring to ourself.)

Anne had over 300 original jokes published in Reader's Digest "Humor in Uniform" section despite having last worn a uniform the day she was expelled from her Catholic girls' high school.

Anne was awarded the 1989 Nobel Prize in baking for her celebrated cookbook entitled *Nonstick, My Ass!*

Anne invented the concept of gender reveal parties and lived long enough to regret it.

Anne's other inventions include orthopedic bedroom slippers, the unitard, the wine spritzer, Play-Doh, teleportation booths, and yurts.

Most people may not have known about any of these and other inventions because Anne refused to selfishly profit from her genius by applying for patent protection. Apart from her natural modesty in eschewing publicity, Anne also made it her practice to be high as a silver weather balloon during public recognition award ceremonies, and so never made it to the stage to accept her many humanitarian awards.

Anne's imaginary friend Carol was tragically assassinated when she was mistaken for Elisabeth Amalie Eugenie, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, by Luigi Lucheni.

Anne's biggest regret was not living long enough to have her own jet pack or to be pictured backhandedly pushing a deserving villain off a cliff, while glancing perfunctorily into the camera. The caption would be "Nonchalant Murder."

Anne died by inhaling anthrax powder mistaking it for cocaine, but in the process somehow mysteriously and heroically saving yet another school bus filled with orphans and puppies.

Her life was not extraordinary because of professional achievements as a contract manager at UCSD—although she once met with an extremely difficult Nobel Prize Nominee to explain that she would not tolerate his disrespect and that as a nameless bureaucrat she could be his worst enemy or his best ally, after which they had an excellent relationship, and he promised his Nobel prize acceptance would include his "thanks to all the little people" who helped support him in his work.

No, it was because Anne produced her daughter Jesse Renny-Byfield, who achieved love, happiness, and a measure of professional success based on Jesse's own amazing, strong, and resilient character, her unbreakable ethics, and her compassion in a man's world. Jesse's success was all accomplished despite being one of the original latch-key children in a single-parent household.

Anne's greatest pride and lifetime achievement is her daughter Jesse. Jesse is my sunshine, the light of my world, and the glow in my heart.

Anne's most noteworthy lifetime achievements were that during her whole life she was loved, and that she never doubted that she was loved. She grew up in what sister Mary calls a unicorn family: with wonderful parents and amazing sisters and brothers.

1.2 Second-to-Last Wish

When I am canonized, I wish to be known as "St. Anne of Mediocre House Cats." I have given a lot of thought to the causes I want idol-worshipping papists to petition me for. I want to be one of those saints who patronizes a very few obscure and weirdly specific things rather than some generic problem millions pray for—like help with shit they lose, or with deadly diseases the minute they are contracted.

People who pray to me won't get lost in the shuffle. My special causes will attract so few petitioners that you just know the odds are good that I'll have an entire free afternoon to devote to just your prayerful petition. I want to be the patron saint of several totally unrelated minor and major causes: people encountering poorly installed latches on restaurant toilets that are so loose and rattle so much the lock won't engage; people who know they don't know the difference between affect and effect; people who can't find their car in huge stadium parking lots after their team suffers a humiliating loss; people who need to remember a brief moment of a beautiful lost dream.

Saint Anne, patron saint of always finding movie parking, and of forgotten dreams.

Can we throw in another cause? How about recovering a happy lost memory as one wakes up from a day nap. You know you'd pray to me. Anne says don't mourn or even grieve. Try to recall a happy memory with me. Make some up—dreams are memories that have yet to happen.

1.3 Last Wish

Anne's greatest wish is that Jesse enjoy peace and contentment in her own life and in those of her loved ones. May Jesse enjoy the company of others who, by their companionship and their shared and overlapping lives, have come to learn what they need to know, and who will come in the end to fear nothing.

She offered the first act of care-giving that I received after I got sick when she made me a cup of mint tea, and I cried. Some of the things she has done since, both upstairs and downstairs include trying to do do laundry, bathing me, doing dishes and other household chores. She feeds and me and cleans up.

She has been having troubles at work involving a difficult boss and a possible new job that involves stress and additional commute and complications. Plus SRB has just received a promotion that involves travel and more stress. Who used the phrase "Acquainted with Pain?" Jesse's potential new job now includes further complications and secrecy. I don't now how she manages it all with such care and grace.

2 Siblings

Farewell, my dear brothers and sisters: John who died In October 2021. Anne's surviving siblings are Charlie, Geo, Katie, Martha, Mary, Maureen, and Monica.



2.1 George

My only big brother, who somehow slid seamlessly into the role of Wright family patriarch when Dad died.

Some of my favorite memories are those of hanging out with you in your gigs with the Neons. The ultimate cool teenage experience. George and his wonderful wife Pat are always ready to host and entertain visitors. George also created a family archive that aggregates our family history. George never judges.

I love how you have changed a lot in recent years, becoming more open minded and less pedantic. Like me, you seem to relish the evolution of e-mail into a sib thread and the way we have renewed our childhood closeness.

You recently said you rarely offer your opinion about controversial subjects, and I've noticed your Socratic approach of asking open ended questions to elicit the opinions of others. Your super power is your ability to take on the role of a teacher, subtly mentoring us by opening doors into points of view we otherwise would have rushed right past. You have always done that but I love how you have honed and perfected a more gentle less confrontational way of sharing your wisdom.

I bequeath you comfort as your powers wane, because that's something that was hard for me and I hope you are spared. I will also ask Jesse to send you any pills I leave behind. Although you never mention it, I suspect you are "acquainted with pain" as Handel quotes Isaiah.

2.2 Charlie

The summer Charlie finally grew taller than Anne, he punched her in the stomach over some forgotten grievance. Although it only hurt her pride, Anne told on him, and he got in trouble. Charlie has either forgiven or forgotten this act of pointless revenge. Charlie is always ready to listen and engage (aka, argue) on any subject. But Charlie taught Anne vengeance is never the answer, and it diminishes one who hits back. One of life's most important lessons, and Charlie, who lives by this code, never knew he taught her this priceless lesson. Charlie also taught me to ride a bike.

Sometimes you make me so mad with the way you embrace your inner curmudgeon and almost reflexive contrarian attitude, especially about politics. Sometimes I think you don't see how hard it is for others. Then you surprise me by perfectly expressing an opinion I share, and by saying/doing just the right kindness at the right time. One super power of yours is that you never seem to stop trying to learn about the world and to share your weird interests and expertise in obscure subjects.

I love how you taught our little sisters to ride two-wheeled bikes and how you often remind us of things John would say or do, keeping him alive in our collective memory.

Another super power is your struggle to escape the curse of Jack's hair trigger anger. I think you have a bigger proportion of Dad than the rest of us. I've seen you continue to master that in recent years and hope you give yourself credit as a work in progress. You also have Dad's almost painful empathy for others. I bequeath to you a continuation of your transformation into a mellow dude who finds contentment in the sweetness of everyday life.

2.3 Martha

I've always wanted to be the first of Jack and Kathleen's children to die. I cannot bear the thought of being left alone. That fear is mostly centered on you. We shared a bedroom growing up, and you spent countless hours and hours attending my pity parties.

I'd hoped we would have time for me to make extended visits to you in Burien, talking together late into the night about nothing much. But at least I won't have to inhabit a world where I can't tell you any thing at any time and be certain of having a willing ear and sensible advice.

Your relentless optimism in the face of your cynical sibs is noticed and needed by the rest of us, even if we try to piss into your corn flakes. One of your super powers is your determination to speak up for what is good and right and hopeful, and that's harder these days. But just by speaking up you are making the world a better place. You are living the change you want to see and making room in the seemingly bleak future for Suren and her cohort.

I bequeath to you permission to set down some of that burden and enjoy more time to give your body and your mind a rest from serving others. Your other super power is your compassion for others and your ability to see the good in others. You would always look for the pony in the pile of shit. you have always been there for me.

2.4 John

John, who was the first of Anne's siblings to die, showed the grace and courage it took to die having lived a happy and fulfilling life. John left an enviable family legacy, and the advice to never lie on a security clearance test, allowing Anne to admit to using marijuana years before it was legalized where she lived.

2.5 Mary

Mary. Ahh, Mary. The oldest of the "Little Kids" whose bedtime routine was one of the rotating after-dinner chores the older siblings had to endure.

I think you are my sibling who is the most like me. We are alike in our need to use belligerence and anger to cover our doubts and worries. You don't waste energy on things you can't fix and you don't suffer fools gladly despite behaving outwardly with grace and kindness. You are generous to a fault when it comes to helping family. If I asked for money you'd send it immediately. If I asked you to sit with me you'd be here tomorrow. Your super power is your loyalty to those worthy of your love, and the fact that those you love know that even though it is unspoken.

Here's one of my favorite memories of you Mary. It happened at dinner after we switched to Daylight Savings. It was the first Sunday dinner after dark, which somehow infused a sepia-toned melancholy at the dinner table.

Dad: Please pass the butter.

Silence as butter is passed between two or three sets of hands.

Dad: who did this?

Grandma Wright (under her breath): WTF? Tooth marks?

Dad: **Who did this?**

Greek Chorus: Duh, Dad: Mary licking her greasy lips.

2.6 Katie

I love that in your retirement you have blossomed as a community organizer for a cause you have chosen and that is close to your heart. You and Greg have formed friendships with like minded people and made it your business to learn and take to heart the good work being done to make reparation for our shameful history of racism. Your example is a source of quiet pride to your family and a beacon of what your children and grandchildren can do to continue your hard and humbling work.

You have also taken on the role of making your home a family home base, making it a place to connect as our children and their children move their lives farther from the home we grew up in. Your legendary parties where family and friends of family are welcomed create the kinds of memories Dad used to consciously try to create. You exemplify how fortunate we are to come from a happy family. What a legacy.

I leave Katie my collection of scented candles, incense, and essential oils, because Katie is never unkind no matter how others may treat her.

Man in the teapot in a fur coat.

2.7 Moni

You are my sister who doesn't quite fit into our noisy, argumentative, opinionated gang. I love the way you gently refuse to join in our practice of expressing love through sarcasm. You don't shame or lecture, you just rise above. You refuse to let anger or bitterness in, even when it may be righteous or justified. Although I have seen you angry, it has usually been in the defense of something or someone else you feel is being unjustly attacked.

I think you are made up of a larger proportion of Kathleen than your siblings, and your stable and strong presence among us dilutes our worst characteristics and makes us better.

I haven't even touched on your role as caregiver to your life partner, modestly and quietly living the promise we all made to love for better and for worse. My brief time in that role was not easy and I managed it relatively poorly, and that has given me a tiny glimpse of what you are doing. I am amazed and humbled at what you are doing. You are doing hard work while practicing meditation to maintain your equilibrium and refresh your strength.

I will take with me the picture of you, my Little Sister Monica, as a living example of how to do good in the universe through acts of love and examples of kindness. How, no matter how short our reach to influence or to help others, no matter how powerless we can feel on a grievously sad day, how impoverished we feel on a day when comfort is needed, Monica looks and finds good.

I have also learned from you and your gentle spouse Jerry how much friendship can grow into family. How your collective sense of family spills over so generously to friends near and far, briefly or for a lifetime, is one of my favorite things about you both.

2.8 Mo

We grew up under the same roof but our age difference made it almost in two different worlds. The world too changed and by the time you had to make your way, the world became harsher. You had to work harder—much harder. You had to struggle harder and overcome more obstacles to become secure in your life, and your job, and your home. And look what you made! Your beautiful children and now grandchildren. You and Joe have survived together through times that would have broken other couples.

I bequeath to you certainty in knowing that you are deserving of happiness. I bequeath to you confidence in yourself. You are capable of accomplishing whatever you set your mind to. You are strong and stubborn and lovable.

Your endearing trait of crying when you get emotional and try to express your feelings is a strength not a weakness. Embrace it. Don't try to explain it any more, and don't ever apologize for it. While some people will judge, the people who are worth your time will understand and accept who you are. You are a human detector of which folks are worthy of being in your life and which folks should fuck all the way off. That's your superpower.

2.9 Willy

I don't believe I will be reunited with Willy, although some nights I try to cultivate a lucid dream where I'm going down the hall to Apartment 1608. I open the door, and Willy cheeps at me and falls down so I'm allowed to pick him up. He generally preferred to come to me by initiating things with a climbing hug. Picking up was a rare honor, and I could only carry him as far as the kitchen counter. Monica has probably learned this with Frederick by now, how long hugs and snuggles are permitted.

Sometimes Willy fell asleep being hugged like a burping baby, head smashed face first into that crick in my neck. His head would be just beneath my ear, his breaths were whispered secrets he told me.

The reason I tell you about this memory is because physical touch is important to me, and Willy was the best at giving hugs with whispered secrets. I'm getting to the point. I frequently try to meditate and rarely succeed. Today, my thoughts were how I bet you would be so fucking good at Hugs With Secrets. And here comes my point.

I imagine sometimes Monica and Jerry conversing might be like communicating by hugs and secrets that are given, might be received, might be reciprocated, might be understood, might not.

Isn't that the whole meaning of life, or at least the part about finding love? Being in love with someone who you love and who loves you back, I reckon, requires talking with someone who can untangle your secrets, or who accepts it when you can't untangle each other.

3 Dying

I haven't written for a while. Partly because I was contemplating another round of chemo the first week of May, and partly because I because I undertook another week off from radiation therapy the second week in May. I chickened out of the chemo partly because I had forgotten how awful the process of Fatigue is.

You'd think fatigue just means really tired, like exhausted, like need a nap. A brief comparison.

I have been eight out of ten in pain in pelvis, hips, and generally around the abdomen. Pain moves down hips, thighs, and both legs, mostly left side. My ankles and toes are swollen like sausages, and I have bumpy, itchy skin rashes from knee to toes. While it isn't the same as pain, fatigue is nine out of ten but everywhere, not localized.

And fatigue barely covers the work that makes preparing food so exhausting, that takes me an hour to get ready for bed and to get dressed in the morning. Moving and rolling over hurts with a sharp, cold, muddy color blue.

FINALLY things are turning the corner. I got my fly first dose of fentanyl yesterday, and that has helped me to keep from crying myself to sleep.

The fatigue is slowly abating. But meanwhile, several times in recent days, I have woken Jesse (and SRB can't sleep through my panic attacks). I'm convinced I am not getting enough air so they have to go through Charlie's custom "Don't Panic" steps, with Katie's hot pad, Moni's aromatherapy, and my amateur medication routine. Geo

checks in reasonably often, and Hugo pics are therapeutic AF.

I don't know what I would do without the love of people I love. Especially Simon and Jesse.

Jesse made me a hat with the soccer chicken logo. I don't want to choose this anymore. I am hurt. My whole side is cramped. I wanna go home. I wish it would all be over. I am dying of cancer.

I bought thousands of dollars of clothing in the past two days. First came a square 24x24" fuzzy pink pillow. So soft. I immediately took a nap right on it and slept until noon.

Peace the fuck out.

Anne Mayer

