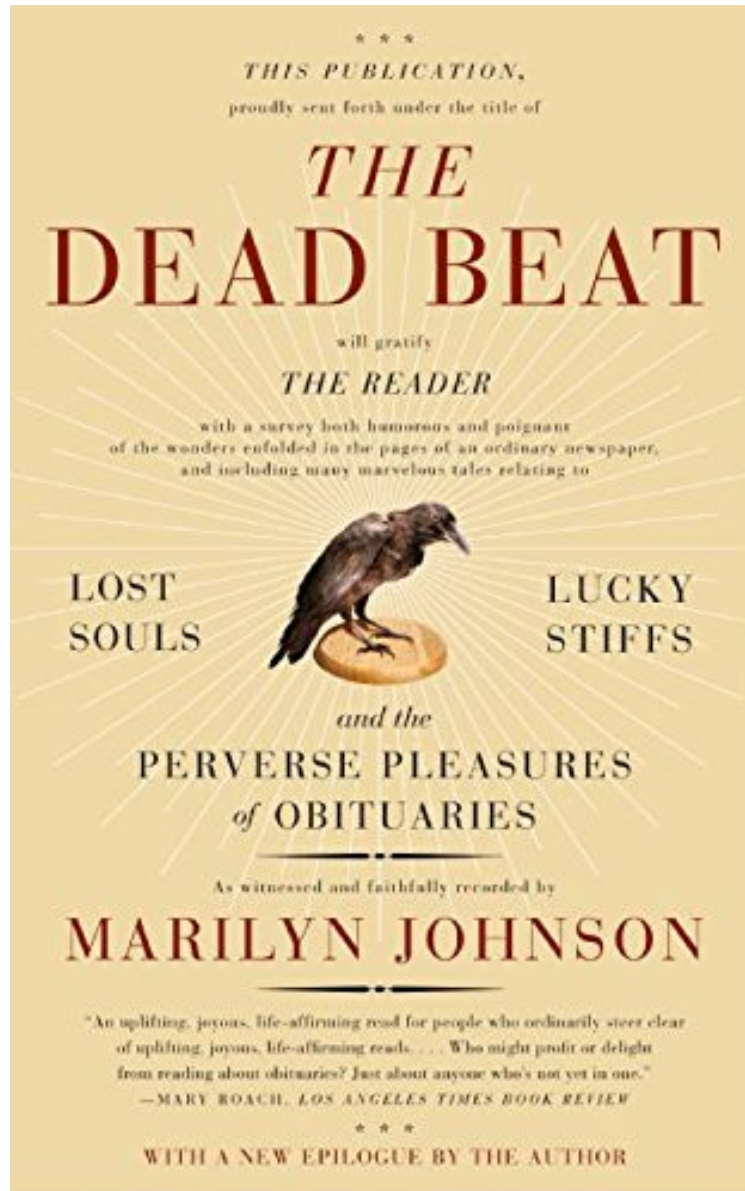


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The Dead Beat: Lost Souls, Lucky Stiffs, and the Perverse Pleasures of Obituaries (P.S.)

Marilyn Johnson

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Marilyn Johnson : The Dead Beat: Lost Souls, Lucky Stiffs, and the Perverse Pleasures of Obituaries (P.S.) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Dead Beat: Lost Souls, Lucky Stiffs, and the Perverse Pleasures of Obituaries (P.S.):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Review from an obit writer
By Amanda
When I took a job as an obit writer last September I researched books to read beforehand to prepare myself. This book was one of the first I picked up and was extremely helpful. A lot of people see obit writers as morbid or as having an awful job, but this book showcases the greatest parts of it. Johnson researched the best in the business, has interviews down with beautiful sideline information, and shows journalists who have done the hard jobs before and now have immense pleasure in writing obits. She shows the laughter that comes from memories shared, the beauty in writing about someone's life, and the clubs of obit readers who have formed. Highly recommend this book!
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Fun, quirky and informative...
By Cynthia K. Robertson
After reading and thoroughly enjoying Marilyn Johnson's *This Book is Overdue*, I just had to read *The Dead Beat: Lost Souls, Lucky Stiffs, and the Perverse Pleasures of Obituaries*. What a fun, quirky and informative book! Before reading *The Dead Beat*, I didn't realize that the reading of obituaries has become such a cult. Johnson calls obituary readers "members of the Church of Obituaries" and compares them to heroin addicts. "Like poetry, obituaries have had their flower period and their bleak period and their modern period." But I was surprised to discover that "we are living in the Golden Age of the Obituary... Our own glorious era has been a time of expansion, innovation, entertainment, and world-class one-upmanship. In one generation, a boring, moldy old form has sprung to life." I was especially pleased to discover that a local newspaper, *The Philadelphia Daily News*, led the charge with obituary writers Jim Nicholson and Leon Taylor. Johnson tells us everything we always wanted to know about obituaries, and then some. She talks to writers and editors, she attends the Annual Great Obituary Writers' International Conference, she belongs to internet sites, takes part in internet forums, and she reads obituaries from all over the globe. She gives examples of her favorite obits that run the gamut from moving and poignant to funny and irreverent. She also tells us how obituaries have become more personalized and how newspapers no longer reserve obituaries for just the rich and famous. After reading both of Marilyn Johnson's books (and also hearing her speak recently at the Free Library of Philadelphia), she has become one of my favorite non-fiction writers. So she better start writing a third book real soon or her fans will be disappointed!
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The title says it all
By Nolie
This history of obituary journalism fascinated me. "The evil that men do lives after them," unless a great obituary keeps the "the good" from being "interred with their bones," and Marilyn Johnson reveals how those writers who keep memories alive came to do their jobs. Well-written obituaries, far from dry bones lists of a family tree, enlighten and enliven the reader and actually make the dead our acquaintances, or, when at their best, our new-found friends. Johnson goes further by doing the same for the writers who transformed that facet of journalism.

Marilyn Johnson was enthralled by the remarkable lives that were marching out of this world so she sought out the best obits in the English language and the people who spent their lives writing about the dead. She surveyed the darkest corners of Internet chat rooms, and made a pilgrimage to London to savor the most caustic and literate obits of all. Now she leads us on a compelling journey into the cult and culture behind the obituary page and the unusual lives we don't quite appreciate until they're gone.

.com
Once upon a time, journalism profs duly instructed their greenhorn grads to seek out community papers and the obit pages as logical entrance points into the world of newspaper reporting. Working for cash-strapped local papers allowed novices to practice writing everything from hard news to lifestyle features. Obituaries, meanwhile, were a rung on the ladder of major publications, albeit the lowest. The musty, dusty obit pages also traditionally hosted aging reporters put out to pasture. Not any more, argues Marilyn Johnson in her unabashedly knock-kneed love letter to the obit pages, *The Dead Beat*. Today, august publications like *The New York Times*, England's *Daily Telegraph*, *Independent*, and *The Economist*, and Canada's *Globe and Mail* use exalted members of the fourth estate to turn out smart, hip tributes to widespread, almost cultish, acclaim. Why? Because, as Johnson persuasively demonstrates in her book, truth is almost always stranger than fiction and a well-written, deeply researched obit is not only a vital historical record but a damn fine read over coffee and toast. "God is my assignment editor," cracks Richard Pearson of the *Washington Post* and if that isn't more interesting than what's going on in your city council chambers, author Johnson and those working the so-called *Dead Beat* don't know what is. As Johnson explains in free-wheeling prose, today's obit writers are virtual folk heroes with global Internet followings and their own conventions. With care and an ear for gentle humor, Johnson guides her readers through the surprisingly structured, labyrinthine obit scene, pausing to meet the writers while pondering both the essence of our being and why, in the right hands, the life of an average Joe can be just as riveting as the shenanigans of a high-flying playboy. And infinitely more resonant. Savvy J-school professors and their students are advised to take heed. --Kim Hughes
From *Publishers Weekly*
Starred . A journalist who's written obituaries of Princess Di and Johnny Cash, Johnson counts herself among the obit obsessed, one who subsists on the "tiny pieces of cultural flotsam to profound illuminations of history" gathered from obits from around the world, which she reads online daily sometimes for hours. Her quirky, accessible book starts at the Sixth Great Obituary Writers' International Conference, where she meets others like herself. Johnson explores this written form like a scholar, delving into the differences between British and American obits, as well as regional differences within

this country; she visits Chuck Strum, the New York Times' obituary editor, but also highlights lesser-known papers that offer top-notch obits; she reaffirms life as much as she talks about death. Johnson handles her offbeat topic with an appropriate level of humor, while still respecting the gravity of mortality traits she admires in the best obit writers, who have "empathy and detachment; sensitivity and bluntness." The book claims that obits "contain the most creative writing in journalism" and that we are currently in the golden age of the obituary. We are also nearing the end of newspapers as we know them, Johnson observes, and so "it seems right that their obits are flourishing." (Mar. 1) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Bookmarks Magazine Johnson, a writer and editor for Life, Esquire, and Outside, knows whereof she speaks; she has written obituaries for such luminaries as Johnny Cash, Katherine Hepburn, and Marlon Brando. Though critics hint at the gloomy nature of her subject, they are won over by her humorous, "uplifting, joyous, life-affirming read for people who ordinarily steer clear of uplifting, joyous, life-affirming reads" (Los Angeles Times). Though spotty in places, Dead Beat never fails to entertain. Shunning the anthological approach, Johnson ties the book together with tales of the many writers responsible for the current vogue of obituaries and, of course, those lucky enough to be eulogized by them. Copyright 2004 Phillips Nelson Media, Inc.