

# SIX WORDS

From page 1

"With Hemingway as our guide, we basically said to our readers, 'We'd like you to write a six-word memoir, your own life story. It could be about how your day went, or your whole life, some kind of essence of who you are in just six words,'" Smith says.

And then, to provide inspiration, he gave his readers some examples.

The first person he e-mailed for a six-word memoir was Elizabeth Gilbert, author of the best-selling full-length memoir "Eat, Pray, Love." She wrote back that she was running to hop a plane to Indonesia, but sent back a memoir "to be spoken in the voice of a giddy, Tarzan-like (but girlish) figure": "Me see world! Me write stories!"

"Kind of like a Tarzan-like thing, swinging from country to country," Smith says. Then he contacted Dave Eggers, who offered, "Fifteen years since last professional haircut."

Smith's own six-word memoir is: "Big hair, big heart, big hurry."

"Joined Army. Came out. Got booted."

— Johan Baumeister

"I wrote it pretty quickly," he says. "And I say to people, 'Go with your first instinct, often. Don't over-think it. Take your time and be careful, but don't make it a big thing.' I did mine really kind of quickly, and it works. And then I thought, maybe I should do a better one, and I started asking friends, and they said, 'No, that is it, man, that is you.'"

And then the six-word memoirs started pouring in.

"You give people examples, and they start thinking," says Smith. "And wow, not only can they do it, but they love it. They can get good at it. And they get addicted to doing it. So that's what happens. You put the challenge out, and thousands and thousands of people sent in six-word memoirs. And for days, we were like, 'whoa!'"

To date, Smith's received over 30,000 six-word memoirs.

Readers sent in memoirs such as:  
 "Wasn't born a redhead. Fixed that." (Andie Grace)  
 "Time to start over again, again." (Dan Petronelli)  
 "Everyone who loved me is dead." (Ellen Fanning)  
 "Always dreamt of kissing pretty

girls." (Jessica Furey)  
 "Life is circular. Caring for parents." (Timothy McGrath)  
 "Mmm, tea. So stereotypical. Rule Britannia!" (Paul O'Brien)  
 "Big heart protected by sharp tongue." (Kris Kleindienst)

"Entire story written with quotidian nouns." (Tim Batton)  
 "No shit I'm critical - you're flawed." (Elizabeth Koch)  
 "Joined Army. Came out. Got booted." (Johan Baumeister)  
 "A crush on Susan Sarandon. Unrequited." (Wally Edge)  
 "Sperm too potent. Now have triplets." (Rachel Schunk)  
 "Blogging is easy. Writing is hard." (Jennifer Shreve)

Some were sad: "I still make coffee for two." (Zak Nelson), "Mom died, Dad screwed us over." (Lesley Kysely) Some were wistful: "Born in the desert. Still thirsty." (Georgene Nunn) Others were defiant: "She walked barefoot in wet cement." (Michelle Pinchev) Some are humorous: "The psychic said I'd be richer." (Elizabeth Bernstein) And one channeled his inner Sir Mixalot: "I like big butts, can't lie." (Dave Russ)

The entries were so diverse and creative that Smith and fellow editor Rachel Fershleiser put together a book, "Not Quite What I Was Planning." (Harper Perennial, paperback, \$12.)

It was praised in Oprah magazine and in Vanity Fair, became a New York Times Bestseller and is now in its sixth printing.

Interspersed among six-word memoirs from readers of Smith are entries from famous people and celebrities, though they're not identified as such.

Author Nora Ephron ("Heartburn," "I Feel Bad About My Neck" and the screenplay for "Sleepless in Seattle") wrote: "Secret of Life: marry an Italian."

Prolific novelist Joyce Carol Oates wrote: "Revenge is living well, without you." (She also submitted three "found" six-word memoirs from the poems of Emily Dickinson, including "Hope is a thing with feathers." Dickinson "seems

"The psychic said I'd be richer."

— Elizabeth Bernstein

to have had a genius for the sub-genre," Oates told the magazine.)

Satirist and author Neal Pollack ("Alternadad") submitted: "Eight thousand orgasms. Only one baby."

And Mary Roach, whose humorous book "Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers" was a critical success and New York Times Bestseller,

# Locals chime in with their own six-word memoirs

We decided to ask some of the local arts people to write their own six-word memoirs, to see how they'd condense their lives into a short sextet of words. Some came up with more than one, though each six-word sentence is a complete and full thought. The memoirs are mysterious, whimsical, straight-forward. One even riffs on Mame's famous lines: "Life is a banquet, and most poor bastards are starving to death." (The line was later changed to "...most poor suckers are starving to death.") Here's what they had to say:



"I'm a tough act to follow."

—Carrie Lund  
Florida Repertory Theatre

"Work in progress, please stand by."

—Rachel Burtrram  
Florida Repertory Theatre



"Family first, artfully inspired, compassionate liberal."

—Will Prather  
Broadway Palm Dinner Theater

"Things aren't always as they appear."

—Dallas Dunnagan  
The Naples Players



"Just two cats, and a rabbit."

—Ron Bishop  
Bob Rauschenberg Gallery

offered: "Cadavers played an unexpectedly large part."

New age guru Deepak Chopra wrote the mystical "Danced in fields of infinite possibilities." And his son, Gotham Chopra, offered "Soul'd out so I could prophet."

"I asked. They answered. I wrote." Sebastian Junger, author of "The Perfect Storm" submitted.

Celebrity chef Mario Batali submitted half a dozen mini-memoirs. Smith went with "Brought it to a boil, often," which lends itself to multiple interpretations.

TV celebrity Steven Corbert offered, "Well, I thought it was funny."

Singer/songwriter Aimee Mann wrote, "Couldn't cope, so I wrote songs."

And Wikipedia creator Jimmy Wales wrote, "Yes, you can edit this biography."

People have taken the idea of six-word memoirs and run with it, Smith says. One reader used the concept while eulogizing their grandmother, a poker enthusiast. Explaining the six-word memoir concept, they ended their tribute with this summary: "Life was like a royal flush."

A battered women's shelter in Philadelphia uses it as an easy way for women to tell their stories and reflect on their lives. And teachers all over are using the concept in their classrooms.

"I've taught six-word memoirs in some classrooms," Smith says. "And I know teachers all around the country, really, the world, have used it all over, in grade schools, kindergarten, grad school."

Smith taught six-word memoirs at his nephew's classroom at George C. Baker Elementary School in Moorestown, New Jersey. All the teachers

## Excursion Train & Dinner Murder Mystery

Join the fun as we unravel a comical mystery before your eyes. It is up to you to decide just who the killer is and why they would do such a dastardly deed. Make sure to write down all the clues you discover. Clue sheets will be collected before the final act, when everyone will discover why the perfect murder just can't be pulled off... or can it? A prize will be awarded to the one super sleuth in each dining car.

NOW PLAYING!	
"A HARD DAY'S DEATH" boarding at 6:00 PM Fridays \$59.00 + tax/gratuity Saturdays \$69.00 + tax/gratuity	"CALOOSA GET YOUR GUN" boarding at 6:00 PM Wed./Thurs.; 5:00 PM on Sunday \$59.00 + tax/gratuity

The Daytime Excursion is a great way for family and friends to enjoy a new experience, or share nostalgic memories. Join us for an 1-1/2 hour ride of fun and education. The Excursion travels through Fort Myers and across Caloosahatchee River, with views only accessible by rail.



**SEMIFLYER TRAIN**

239-275-8487 or 1-800-SEM-GULF  
www.SEMGULF.com • Gift Certificates Available •

## Rene's Custom Catering

We make your vision a reality.

- Private Dining Room
- Full Service Bar with Liquor License
- Complete Event Production
- Delivery, On or Off Premises Catering

We're your last minute Catering Experts!

(239) 489-4424

Conveniently located at 7050 Winkler Road  
(between Cypress Lake and Gladiolus)

www.RenesCustomCatering.com

