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**ICCFA Magazine
author spotlight**

►Rubin, Certified in
Thanatology: Death,
Dying and Bereave-
ment, is

author of the award-winning
book "A Good Goodbye:
Funeral Planning for Those
Who Don't Plan to Die" and
The Family Plot Blog.

www.AGoodGoodbye.com

<http://agoodgoodbye.com/the-family-plot-blog/>

► She is a death educator, Certified
Celebrant, and pioneering Death Café host
who uses radio, television and funny films to
help start funeral planning conversations.



► Her 12-episode TV
show, also called "A Good
Goodbye," helps bring the
funeral planning conver-
sation home. The four-
DVD set is now available
and the program is rolling
out to cable systems
across the U.S.

[http://agoodgoodbye.com/
radio-tv/a-good-goodbye-tv-series/](http://agoodgoodbye.com/radio-tv/a-good-goodbye-tv-series/)

► Read Rubin's "30 Funerals in 30 Days
Challenge" blog posts at [http://
agoodgoodbye.com/30-day-challenge/](http://agoodgoodbye.com/30-day-challenge/)



► Her funeral planning
conversation-starter,
"The Newly-Dead
Game" is available as
an electronic download

from [http://agoodgoodbye.com/to-die-
for-shopping/the-newly-dead-game/](http://agoodgoodbye.com/to-die-for-shopping/the-newly-dead-game/).

ICCFA
ALL STAR
ANNUAL CONVENTION
& EXPOSITION
April 8-11, Mandalay Bay Resort, Las Vegas

MORE FROM THIS AUTHOR

►Rubin will present "Jewish Funeral Tradi-
tions on Film" during the JFDA program at
the ICCFA Convention & Expo, April 8-11, at
the Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, Nevada. She
will use comedic film clips to illustrate key
information.

POPULAR CULTURE

These days, a funeral and permanent memorialization
are no longer "givens" when a death occurs. Yet Walter White,
a fictional character, got both—courtesy of grieving fans.



A *descanso* (roadside memorial) for fictional character Walter White of "Breaking Bad," considered one of the best TV shows of all time.

'Breaking Bad' fans mourn end of show with a funeral

Spoiler alert) Now that the highly
acclaimed TV series "Breaking
Bad" has finished its run, if you still
haven't gotten around to watching it but
plan to and don't want to know how it
ends, don't read this article.

Still reading? Don't say I didn't
warn you. The main character, Walter
White, who evolves (deolves?) from
mild-mannered science teacher to meth
manufacturer and drug lord, dies in the last
episode.

Here in Albuquerque, where the series
was based and filmed, local fans released a
torrent of emotion. Their tributes included
a paid obituary in the newspaper and a
funeral—for a fictional TV character!

The outpouring provides an interesting
commentary on the value of funeral
services.

On October 3, David Layman, an
Albuquerque high school science teacher,
and members of the "Unofficial Breaking
Bad Fan Tour" Facebook page placed a
paid obituary in the Albuquerque Journal.

WHITE, WALTER
aka "Heisenberg," 52,
of Albuquerque, died
Sunday after a
long battle with
lung cancer, and a
gunshot wound. A
co-founder of Gray
Matter, White was
a research chemist
who taught high school chemistry,
and later founded a meth
manufacturing empire. He is
survived by his wife, Skyler Lambert; son
Walter "Flynn" Jr.; and daughter Holly.
A private memorial was held by his
family. In lieu of flowers, donations
can be made to a drug abuse prevention
charity of your choice. He will be
greatly missed.

**A fan paid for an obituary for Walter
White after "Breaking Bad" ended with
his death. It was run in a separate section
from the newspaper's real obituaries.**

After five seasons of watching
"Breaking Bad," Layman had grown to
love the character and the TV show. He



Antram

“[Walter White] lived a lifestyle that is common in New Mexico—drugs are prevalent everywhere. We thought this would be a great opportunity for people to realize that living that type of lifestyle ends up at the cemetery.”

— Tom Antram, CEO of FRENCH Funerals-Cremations

was quoted in the Albuquerque Journal saying, “I’ve been a humongous Breaking Bad fan since the beginning.... Putting the obit in the paper was fitting, because the series was based in Albuquerque and it provides some of us some closure.”

Here’s how the obit read:

WHITE, WALTER: a.k.a. "Heisenberg," 52, of Albuquerque, died Sunday after a long battle with lung cancer, and a gunshot wound. A co-founder of Gray Matter, White was a research chemist who taught high school chemistry, and later founded a meth manufacturing empire. He is survived by his wife, Skyler Lambert; son Walter "Flynn" Jr.; and daughter Holly. A private memorial was held by his family. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to a drug abuse prevention charity of your choice. He will be greatly missed.

The announcement, which included a photo of actor Bryan Cranston as Walter White, ran in another part of the paper separate from the real death

announcements. That issue of the newspaper sold out in many locations, and out-of-state orders poured in to the Journal’s circulation department.

The online story about the obituary became the most-read article on the newspaper’s website since the Journal started keeping track of statistics in 2006. According to the Journal, the obituary itself or news about it was posted to a myriad of websites, including The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, Huffington Post, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The Seattle Times, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, MSN and many more.

Fans gather for funeral

Jackamoe Buzzell, an actor who auditioned for a role in “Breaking Bad” and a fan of the show, saw the obituary and said, “Well, we need a funeral.” He’s currently playing the role of a gangster doorman at the speakeasy-themed theater restaurant Vernon’s Hidden Valley Steakhouse.

From the start, the funeral was designed to be a fundraiser for a worthy cause. With series creator Vince Gilligan’s blessing, Buzzell contacted Bernalillo County Sheriff Dan Houston to ask his advice about which charity should benefit. Albuquerque’s Health Care for the Homeless organization, which helps many whose lives have been damaged by drug abuse, was selected.

Buzzell then approached FRENCH Funerals-Cremations about holding a graveside funeral service for Walter White at Sunset Memorial Park. They agreed to hold the funeral after being assured they could remove the memorial should it become an attractive nuisance.

“The goal was, number one, to raise money for a good cause,” said Tom Antram, CEO of FRENCH Funerals-Cremations, which operates Sunset Memorial Park.

He continued, “Number two, it was to raise awareness of what [Walter White] died from. He lived a lifestyle that is common in New Mexico—drugs are prevalent everywhere. We thought this would be a great opportunity for people to realize that living that type of lifestyle ends up at the cemetery.”

The idea evolved from theory to reality within four days—much like a real-life funeral. More than 200 people attended the event on October 19. Fans came from

“Breaking Bad” fan Jackamoe Buzzell, an actor who saw the obituary paid for by another fan and arranged for a funeral for Walter White, poses with the memorial. It was moved from FRENCH Funerals-Cremation’s Sunset Memorial Park to this courtyard outside Vernon’s Hidden Valley Steakhouse, where the post-funeral reception was held and where the memorial is installed.



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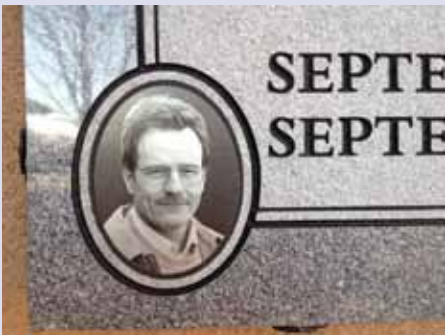
Fans felt they knew and loved Walter White and wanted closure when the series ended. This was one stellar example of community grieving and the closure funerals can help provide. When families don't hold a funeral, one might ask: Just what does it take to be a beloved star in one's own life?



Pins combining Albuquerque's famous balloon fiesta with Walter White's "Heisenberg" persona were a big seller at the 2013 festival.



Worthen Memorials in Albuquerque created a memorial for the character.



Links:

walterwhitefuneral.weebly.com/

www.abqjournal.com/277991/news/descanso-honors-tvs-walter-white.html

www.abqjournal.com/275038/news/abq-news/it-provides-closure.html

www.abqjournal.com/276439/news/breaking-bad-obit-triggers-frenzy.html

www.facebook.com/groups/161417077202383/



Walter White's "funeral" drew 300 fans, who paid for the privilege of attending. Funds were donated to charity.

across the United States, as well as from Mexico, Canada, England, Switzerland and Ireland. About 20 FRENCH employees, some fans of the show, volunteered to staff the event.

The funeral procession started at the Walter White *descanso* in Albuquerque's North Valley. *Descansos* are a common sight in the Southwest. These roadside memorials, usually in the shape of a cross, mark the spot where someone has died. Unfortunately, someone stole the marker shortly after the funeral.

The funeral procession included Bernalillo County Sheriff's deputies, the beat-up tan RV made famous in the show, a hearse, and 80 cars carrying diehard fans. The procession shut down streets and took 10 minutes to pass.

The event lasted over an hour, with a eulogy by "Breaking Bad" set decorator Michael Flowers. Fans deposited handfuls of earth on the "grave." People brought bouquets and had their pictures taken with the headstone.

The event, which was to be carried live online, was pulled from YouTube when copyrighted material from the show appeared. Nonetheless, the funeral was recorded and can be viewed online at www.WalterWhiteFuneral.com.

Worthen Memorials in Albuquerque created White's rectangular tombstone. The granite marker features a laser engraved

image of Walter White before he "broke bad." The designated resting spot was an unused space near a planter, a distance from actual cemetery plots.

However, some families with loved ones interred at Sunset Memorial Park were upset by the Walter White funeral and the idea of having his headstone there. During the funeral, some people in the large crowd stepped on flat-to-the-ground memorial markers and nearby graves.

About 50 to 60 families complained or expressed concern. Of the tens of thousands of individuals buried at Sunset Memorial Park, it was a statistically small percentage, but the local news media publicized the negative reaction.

"We underestimated the impact this had on certain family members," said Antram. He reached out to each family to express his sensitivity to their concerns. "I don't second-guess getting involved. I still think it was the right thing for us to do."

Due to how late in the day the funeral was held, the headstone was never set. It was immediately taken to Vernon's Hidden Valley Steakhouse in Albuquerque's North Valley for a post-funeral reception and safekeeping.

The marker is now set into a wall in a courtyard across from the restaurant. A live streaming webcam will be installed for security and to enable tourists to wave to the folks at home. The vault containing

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mementos from the show, which was to be buried at Sunset Memorial Park, also will be interred nearby.

Funeral, merchandise sales raised thousands for charity

More than \$30,000 was raised for Albuquerque's Health Care for the Homeless from proceeds related to the funeral, which fans paid \$20 each to attend. Sales of programs, T-shirts, special VIP receptions and baby blue silicon bracelets imprinted with Walter White's name contributed to the total.

Other folks jumped on the merchandising bandwagon. During the 2013 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta in early October, the hottest item in balloon pins was a Walter White/Breaking Bad pin.

Balloon pins are usually created for real balloons. There is not currently an actual Walter White balloon, and this was not a fundraising item associated with the funeral. Nonetheless, there was a run on the limited edition "Ballooning Bad" pin.

The fundraising isn't over yet. The Vernon's Steakhouse Walter White Endowment Fund at the Albuquerque Community Foundation continues to receive money from sales. There will likely be other celebratory events in the future, perhaps a party on the anniversary of Walter White's "death."

Michael Baird, owner of Vernon's Steakhouse said, "Walter White's legacy and final amends will have a positive impact on Albuquerque for many years to come."

Buzzell said of the series ending, "It was a perfect ending, absolute genius. It couldn't go on forever." He noted a prequel to "Breaking Bad" is in the works, called "Better Call Saul," which focuses on Walter White's crooked lawyer. Buzzell may have a shot at getting a part in that show.

Why did so many get caught up in memorializing a fictional TV character? And why do people hesitate to do the same for real people in their lives?

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