

# Blog Life After Death

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For my sister, Joan.  
I miss you more than words can say.

## Acknowledgements

This book would never have come about without the work of my amazing sister, Joan Hayes. She gave so much to so many and never let her fame change her down to earth, people-centered approach to life. With her death, I inherited some amazing new friends that are too numerous to name here. Amber Bracegirdle from [FoodFanatic](#) encouraged me to share my thoughts with others and read the first draft of this book. [Cravings of a Lunatic](#)'s Kim Beaulieu also encouraged me to write this book and provided feedback on an early draft. Thank you both for your honest thoughts. You made this book better and more useful to others.

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## How This Book Came to Be

In September 2015, I was starting a year in Cambodia as a Fulbright scholar. The U.S. State Department sponsors the Fulbright program as a good will effort.

Each year hundreds of American professors travel overseas to share their expertise and learn from other countries. Likewise, hundreds of foreign professors come to America to learn from us and share their expertise.



As a science education professor, my goal was to work with faculty at the Royal University of Phnom Penh on improving instruction. I also worked on national educational reform efforts.

Cambodia was re-educating its teacher trainers. Cambodia has no university-based education programs so these teacher trainers are the people who educate future teachers. Most of them lack an undergraduate degree.

The minister of education wants all of them to have Master's degrees by 2020 so the teacher training centers can become colleges. One of my tasks was to teach science pedagogy to the science and math teacher trainers.

Although it meant missing one semester of her senior year, my daughter, Becky, came with me. She wanted to experience a little life abroad but she also wanted to graduate with her friends.



The plan was for her to return to Texas to live with my son who was “taking care of” my house and our pets. Becky has been traveling with me since she was 12. She’s a wonderful travel companion – even if she’s an incredibly picky eater.

One of my personal goals was to start a blog about my experiences. I was particularly eager document our mother-daughter experiences since Becky and I are very close and I knew it was the last time we’d spend extended time together. We had a brief introduction to blogging in our Fulbright orientation but my sister was the true expert.

My sister, Joan Hayes, was an amazing person. She raised three wonderful kids, did event planning for the city of Byron and ran her own business. In short, Joan was a pistol. Full of energy, vision and passion.



In 2011, she started a blog about cooking with her three kids. [Chocolate, Chocolate and More](#) grew into a profitable business with a Facebook following of over 4 million.

Still Joan had plans. Travel blogs pair well with food blogs. She saw a business opportunity in my starting a travel blog. In her mind, she'd write about the food and I'd write about the places. We'd travel the world together and write about our experiences.

It took Becky and me a month to settle in so in early October I asked Joan for help setting up my blog, [TwoGirlsTraveling](#). We brainstormed names, set up the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and bought the domain name.



I'd written two posts on blogspot but was thinking of just going straight to Word Press. I was waiting to get my next blogging lesson from Joan – it's a 12-hour difference between Phnom Penh and Byron, Georgia – when my cousin sent me a Facebook message to call home.

On October 22, 2015 Joan died from a massive heart attack. She went to bed the night before thinking she had a stomach bug and never woke up. I've never experienced such shock in my life. I literally couldn't breathe after I hung up the phone. Thank God Becky was with me. I don't know what I would have done without her.

Somehow, we managed to get reasonably priced plane tickets departing to Georgia three days after that phone call. The next two weeks were a blur of travel to the US, funeral, talks with Joan's lawyer, mediating family squabbles over heirlooms, inventorying and packing Joan's belongings and travel back to Cambodia. Then there was the blog.

Joan was a planner. She thought ahead so she had a will. She'd also put a number of things in place to make sure her work continued after she died. Still there were quite a few things I wish she had done. This e-book is about what Joan did right and the things I wish she had done.

If you have a blog that you want to continue, you need to think about how to make that happen. No one likes to think about the possibility of not being here but it happens to all of us.

This question came back to haunt me this week as another beloved blogger succumbed to a heart attack. Aly Cleary from *Cooking in Stilettos* died suddenly and it's not clear if she had a plan for her blog. If her blog is to continue, her successor will likely experience many of the things I did two years ago.

What will happen to your blog when you die? I hope this little book helps you plan ahead so that your work will continue to shine.





## Top Ten List for Blog Life After Death

I've put together a brief list of things that I think are important based on my experience of working on Joan's blog after her passing. After mulling this over for two years, I've come up with a list of 10 things you might do to give your blog legacy the best chances of a healthy long life. This list isn't all-inclusive but it is the most important things you need to plan ahead (IMO).

1. Make a Will
2. Choose your successor
3. Share Access to Blog Resources
4. Establish Brand Name Accounts
5. Create a List of Your Accounts
6. Establish a Filing System
7. Create Shared Photo Storage
8. Consider a Business Phone
9. Share Your Business Contacts
10. Write a Blog User Manual



## Make a Will

If you don't have a will, you need one - especially if you have a successful business. Whether or not you want your family to inherit your blog, you need a will that specifically mentions your blog.



Joan had a will but it didn't mention *Chocolate, Chocolate, and More* specifically. She was in the process of changing her will when she died but she hadn't signed the new one.

She wanted to leave *Chocolate, Chocolate and More* to me because she wanted it to continue and for someone in her family to benefit. She felt her kids were not passionate enough about cooking and writing about it to run the blog.

Unfortunately (or fortunately), an unsigned will isn't worth the paper it's printed on. So, *Chocolate, Chocolate and More* is in a trust for Joan's kids. Sadly, it's such a large business that no one in our family will have the cash to buy it when the trust ends so my sister's hope of it remaining a family business is in doubt.

You don't necessarily need a lawyer to make a will. There are some will-maker programs that produce legal wills. You can reduce fees by starting with one of those and having a lawyer review it.

The key is to give specific instructions about what you want to have happen with your blog. Do you want it sold and the proceeds distributed to your heirs? If you want it to continue, who will take it over?

Are there items that you use for your blog that would help ensure its continued success? Does your successor have photography equipment, props, cookware/dishes, hard drives? Are there things your heirs might not care about that would help with the blog?

My sister had a ton of mismatched plates. It's unlikely that her children wanted those so they were sold at the estate sale. Given that there was no mention of blog equipment in the will, this was the right thing to do but it meant that those of us running the blog had to buy our own props.

If your blog is successful unscrupulous people, or perhaps opportunistic people, will not wait to pressure your family about selling your work. Within 48 hours of my sister's death, I received an e-mail asking if we were selling her blog. It wasn't the last e-mail either.

Joan made her wishes clear to family and friends so it was easy for me to answer those e-mails (well easier than if I hadn't known what she wanted).

This leads to my next point. Tell your family and friends what you want to have happen. Also make sure your lawyer and executor have the contact information including a current phone number for your successor.

It takes a while to get together to find out what's in a will and during that time, the vultures will gather. If you don't want your loved ones needlessly harassed, tell them what you want so they can shoe the vultures away. I had my adult children witness my will so they know exactly what's in it.



## Choose Your Successor

Who do you want to run the blog? This is an extremely important question. Your successor needs to have your passion and a similar voice. It also helps if they have some skills and/or that they are willing and able to pick up the necessary skills to run things.

I think in an ideal world my sister would have wanted one of her kids to take over the blog. She told me that they just weren't that interested so she wanted me to take it over. Her thinking was that she had built a wonderful business and she wanted someone in her family to benefit.



She also knew I'd do anything for her kids and that I love to bake. I taught my sister to cook and I was the baker in the family until I moved out for college. In addition to our love of baking, my sister and I were close in age and we both had three kids.

I have a degree in instructional technology and I've done web design (this is a plus and a minus in word press environments). I also enjoy photography and taught myself a lot about it in high school.

But I'd never had a blog, run a Facebook page, made a Pin, tweeted or posted to Instagram. Joan's plan was to train me up on those things with my blog. She just never got the chance.

Once you've chosen your successor, you need a plan to introduce them to the workings of your blog. Ideally, you should introduce them to your audience as well. Have them guest post on occasion. Do some Facebook live videos with them. Think of ways to engage them in the workings of your blog.

## Share Access to Important Blog Resources



One thing Joan did right was she shared access to the important working aspects of her blog. She made trusted friends co-administrators on her social media sites. She set up a schedule of guest posters on her blog. These guest posters had access to her Word Press site.

While I was overwhelmed with grief, Joan's blogging friends maintained her Facebook page, guest posted on her blog and pinned to Pinterest.

When we returned to Cambodia from the funeral, those same friends helped Becky take over running the social media while my cousin Kim and I worked on posts. This transition was so smooth that some of Joan's fans didn't register that she had passed until I changed her photo on the newsletter a year afterwards.

Ideally your successor should have administrative privileges on your accounts. Consider what drives traffic to your blog and make sure they have access. Then give them some practice using those accounts so you're sure they can do what's needed.

Have them guest post in your word press site, run your Facebook page while you're on vacation, pin to your Pinterest groups, post videos to your YouTube channel, etc. This will help familiarize them with the tools you use.

## Establish Brand Name Accounts



In many regards, you are your brand. You are the one who built your blog from scratch. It is your baby and your legacy. However, if the blog is to outlast you, some of your accounts should be in the brand name only. This doesn't mean you can't have the personal ones, but you should have mirror accounts with the brand name.

One of the more painful aspects of transitioning to a world without my sister was responding to e-mails that started "Dear Joan." Joan only had one e-mail for the blog and it was [joan@chocolatechocolateandmore.com](mailto:joan@chocolatechocolateandmore.com). Of course, everyone who e-mailed saw the name in the e-mail and addressed their correspondence to her.

That meant that I had to explain that Joan had died on each e-mail response. This isn't just painful but also results in loss of income. New sponsors immediately see that the person they wanted to work with is gone.

One of the first changes I made was to have an [admin@chocolatechocolateandmore.com](mailto:admin@chocolatechocolateandmore.com) e-mail account. This didn't eliminate the "dear Joan" e-mails entirely but it did reduce them. The admin account is shared among all of us who work on the blog (remember shared access) so it's not dependent on any of us personally.

*Chocolate, Chocolate and More's* Twitter and Pinterest accounts were variations of our brand name, but Joan's Instagram was joanccmore. It took me two years to drum up the courage to change that to gailccmore. During that time I hardly posted to Instagram in part because it's weird posting as a dead person.

Undoubtedly, we lost some revenue from not using that social channel. Ultimately, we should probably change the *Chocolate, Chocolate and More* Instagram to just ccmore (if that's available). I'm just not ready for that yet.

In addition to problems with sponsors, changing account names is confusing for your audience. Changing account names drives home to your audience that you are no longer here. In some respects, that may be a good thing for your successor but it can also make things more difficult.

When my sister died, I posted a farewell to her on *Chocolate, Chocolate, and More*. The outpouring of support from her fans was overwhelming. However, it took months before I was ready to make other changes – like the e-mail.

For me, making those changes was like adding nails to my sister's coffin. Each change was one more reminder that she wasn't around to manage her business and I'd never get to talk with her again.

I also felt conflicted because I want to honor my sister's work. Every change is a step away from what she built and I want to keep as much intact for Joan's kids as possible.

Changes also meant I needed familiarity with the back end of *WordPress*, *MailChimp* and other programs affected by those changes. When you're trying to wrap your head around running all the pieces of a big blog, these important changes get put off.

If account name changes are not done right away (which is likely if your successor is grieving and/or has a learning curve), then it can be a delayed shock for followers.

This happened with Joan's newsletter. It took me a year to drum up the courage to take Joan's picture and bio off her newsletter. I wrote a special newsletter explaining the change and then received close to 100 e-mail condolence letters. It was like she'd died all over again. I spent the next several weeks in tears as I responded to shocked CC&M fans who had missed my original post about Joan's death.

## Create a List of Your Accounts



Do you have a list of your blog-related accounts along with login information? Is that list accessible to your successor?

Joan did have at least a partial list of her accounts and their logins stored in Google docs. However, Joan didn't tell us her password nor was it in her will.

Fortunately, she told me at one point that she always used my initials and birthday for her logins so we were able to hack into her Google account. (Note- we've changed all the logins so that is no longer the case). If she hadn't shared that with me, it would have taken us a lot longer to get things going again.

One problem with Joan's list was that it didn't include what all the accounts were for. Some things are obvious but others – say plugins or scheduling programs – are not. There was no way for us to quickly know which programs were vital for the upkeep of the blog and which ones were things Joan was trying out.

Another issue was that some of Joan's accounts were paid memberships and there was no way to know from the list which ones had fees, how much the fees were and when they were due.

There were several programs that lapsed because they sent renewal notices to Joan's gmail account that we weren't paying close attention to. This by the way, is another reason to have an admin e-mail account. Set all your renewal notices to go to that account because that is the e-mail your successor will use.

If you want to ease the transition, I recommend making a spreadsheet with the account name, login, password, what the account does, key contact person (if applicable), fees (monthly, annual, semi-annual), and due dates for payment.



## Establish a Filing System



How do you organize your receipts, contracts and other business files? Do you have separate e-mail folders for different aspects of your blog – sponsored posts, giveaways, product reviews?

Do you have folders in your computer documents for contracts and your media kit? Do you have hard copies of your sponsored post contracts? Where do you keep your receipts and are they labeled?

When Joan died she had no filing system of any kind. I love my sister but this was one of her bigger flaws (in a business sense). She did have a few file folders and post it notes on her desk but she really didn't have an organized system for keeping track of her business.

She had receipts tucked away in various places on her desk. She had papers and notebooks in various places. I had one week to sort through and organize all of that.

She had no folders in her e-mail so we had to comb through messages to see which might be important. We found an e-mail from California strawberries asking Joan for an invoice for sponsored work but we couldn't find the contract. Ultimately, we had to write California strawberries and ask them how much they'd agreed to pay Joan for her work.

Not having copies of old contracts for sponsored posts also meant that we had no idea how much to charge or what a contract looked like. The same was true of Joan's media kit. We never found it so we had no idea what she did for a media kit.

If you don't have folders in your e-mail for sponsored posts, giveaways, etc., make them now. Have a folder for completed sponsored posts awaiting payment, sponsored posts in progress, and old sponsored posts.

Buy a file box and put hard copies of old sponsored post contracts in it. Put your most recent media kit in it too.

On your computer or on GoogleDrive make a folder in your documents for your blog. Put important files in that folder – soft copies of your media kit, your business card template, your sponsored post contracts, your logo. It's not a bad idea to mirror your e-mail folders in your computer documents.



## Create Shared Photo Storage

Where do you store your full-size photos? Is that storage accessible to your successor? Is it in your will?

Joan had a hard drive that she used. Unfortunately, she didn't specify in her will that the hard drive with the photos was property of the blog so it went into storage until the estate sale.

We had a short turn around request from *Women's Day Magazine* for full size images from one of Joan's recipes but we couldn't access the files because they were on the hard drive. The blog lost out on a huge opportunity because we didn't have access to Joan's original photos.

Ideally, you are backing up your photos to an online account that can easily be accessed by your successor. If you are backing up to a hard drive as well (good idea actually), then make sure that hard drive is in your will as part of your blog.

If you're storing all your photos on your computer, you need to make a backup anyway. Even so, the computer should be in your will as part of the blog or you should indicate that a copy of blog-related photos will be given to your successor.

What do you store on your phone? Realize that when you die, your estate will cancel your phone and everything on it goes away.

We had trouble accessing Joan's twitter account because we didn't reset her password on it before the estate cancelled her phone.

If you have an iPhone, your photos will be uploaded to the cloud (assuming you have sufficient storage). If you aren't uploading photos and videos from your phone to another device, remember they will disappear when your estate cancels your phone. Either will your phone to your successor or back it up.

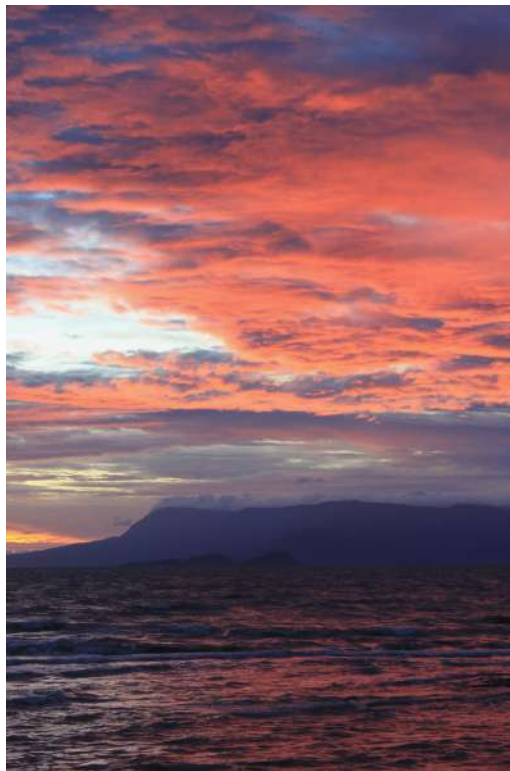


## Consider a Business Phone

More and more bloggers are using their phones for running key aspects of their blogs. Given your phone number may be key to changing account passwords and/or restoring accounts, it might be best to have a business phone separate from your personal phone.

The good news is that a business phone is likely tax deductible and you can probably sign up for a family plan to serve both business and personal needs. Talk to an accountant about how to handle this.

The advantage of a business line is that you can will this to your successor so he/she doesn't have to change the recovery phone number on all your accounts. Also, if the phone itself is willed to your successor, then he/she has instant access to your business accounts without having access to your personal accounts.



## Share Your Business Contacts



Who are the important contacts for your blog? Do you have an accountant, web designer, graphic designer, VA, videographer? Who has access to your social media? Who are the bloggers in your share groups? Make a list of the important people in your blog life. Include their telephone and e-mail contacts and why they are important.

When Joan died, we had to piece a lot of this together. Many of these people came forward and told us who they were but there were some people who asserted they were Joan's best friend and claimed to have much bigger roles in the blog than they probably did.

In our case, we had to rely on Joan's e-mail and Facebook messages to establish who was who and to establish if people were who they said they were.

I knew Joan was in the process of changing the *Chocolate, Chocolate and More* logo. She asked me for my opinions on two designs. But I couldn't find who the graphic designer was, whether or not the work was complete and whether or not she had been paid. I think I finally found the name in the back end of Word Press.

## Write a Blog User Manual

Do you have a document that outlines important things about your blog? Have you thought about what makes posts successful with your audience? What kind of things resonate on Facebook and Pinterest?

Joan had a wonderful document for guest bloggers that outlined what she expected in a blog post. She described her audience and what they liked. She indicated how long the post was to be, how many photos and how large the photos should be, what types of photos were off limits, and how many links she wanted at the end of posts.

She also had a page of blogs that she liked and blogs that were off limits for shares. Unfortunately, Joan didn't document the rest of her best practices so we had to piece them together for ourselves. Here are some things I wish I'd had in a document from Joan.

**A daily/weekly/monthly/annual task list.** How many Facebook posts per day? How many Pins per week? How many posts per month? We had to piece all these and more together by looking through old records. We also had to guess at how things changed during high and low quarters. Make a note now of the things you do so that someone else doesn't have to guess.

**Things to avoid.** Joan said very clearly that "healthy" was out on *Chocolate, Chocolate and More*. The more a recipe oozes with chocolate, sugar and fat, the better for our audience. She wasn't kidding. Healthy recipes, ones with odd ingredients, or ones that are too complicated flop with *Chocolate, Chocolate and More* readers.

Joan said that ingredients and process photos were also out. She knew her readers liked to see the finished product more than the process.

Joan told me once that all mentions of politics were also out. People come to our page to see desserts not political views.

Knowing these things helped us stay true to Joan's vision. She did leave some things out. As I said, there was a list of bloggers to share and bloggers to avoid. She didn't say why we should avoid those blogs. It was just a list. Knowing why would better help us know the characteristics of the bloggers she wanted to work with.

**Format preferences.** Do you have a standard watermark for your photos? Do you have a standard format for your videos? I'm not talking about .mov vs .mpeg. I'm talking about how you brand your videos, pins, photos, posts, etc.,

Is there a way you light your photos or do you have a preference for a particular background? What is it about your photos, videos etc., that says they are from your brand? Leave instructions for those qualities so the brand stays consistent.

**Short term/Long term business goals.** What are your goals today for the near and distant future? It would be helpful to share those with your successor if you want them to achieve them in your absence. What strategies do you plan to use to achieve those goals?

**Employee roles and responsibilities.** Do you have a VA? What does your VA do? What do you pay your VA? How do you communicate with your VA? Do you have other blog employees such as a videographer or accountant? What do they do? What do you pay them? How do you communicate with them? How about guest posts? Do you pay for them? How much?



## Final Thoughts

All this may be overwhelming to think about but it's important. If you have a successful blog, you are a pioneer. Very few people with successful blogs have died so my guess is not many have thought about what happens to their work after they're gone.

Most importantly, have your heart checked. Heart disease is the number one killer of American women. About one in five American women die from heart disease. Cancer and other terminal illnesses usually give you and your family some time to prepare. Heart attacks don't and often they're preventable.

The [symptoms of heart disease are different in women](#) than men so know the symptoms in women. I now know several people who have died from heart attacks. None of them had the classic chest pain and pain down the left arm. They all thought they had a stomach flu.

Women, you need to be insistent on getting your heart checked if you experience unexplainable nausea. Studies show [doctors fail to take heart disease seriously in women](#). Don't take "No" for an answer when it comes to your heart.

I wish you all many happy, successful years blogging about your passion. And, like great literary works, I hope your blogs continue to inspire readers long after you're gone.





