Axel Hacke
Why we're here

Walter Wemut's Practical Guide to a Successful Life

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This is a book about what we might make of our lives, a book for people who happily spare a thought for such matters. It is a book without instructions, a book about doubts and queries, about good fortune and bad luck and all that lies between – that is, almost everything.

"Birthday celebrations are not really my thing. I'm more at home with obituaries, when it's all over. That's what I do; that's where I come in. The newspaper has given me my own page, for me and the dead people. But not just celebrities, also quite normal dead people."

Walter Wemut has been writing obituaries for 30 years. Now he's been asked to give a speech at a friend's 80th birthday party, all about her life and what it means to live well. He reflects and his thoughts wander: to friends present and past, to his barber Tarik, to the newspaper seller Kaczmarczyk, to the woman who berated him on the street for no apparent reason. To the fellow student who failed early in life, to the sports teammate he lost sight of and then found again – a friend in need with no job or fixed abode. What constitutes a successful life and what doesn't? And who decides? Can you be happy in unhappy circumstances? With curiosity and insight, referencing the many lives he has documented, Wemut sheds light on destiny, draws on literature and personal reflection, and mixes them all in an impassioned monologue.
After his bestseller on decency and living with others, Hacke turns to another important question: how we live with ourselves.

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