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# LEAVING A LEGACY:

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*Benefits, Process, Types, and Strategies for Others to Help*



*Ashland County Historical Society*



# LEAVING A LEGACY

## *Benefits, Process, Types, and Strategies for Others to Help*

June 26, 2018

**Hosted by:** Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland Co. and Hospice of North Central Ohio

**Partners:** Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, Inc., and Ashland County Historical Society

### Description:

Leaving a legacy is a precious gift for those whom you leave behind, offering a permanent expression of love, wisdom, insights, feelings, thoughts, values, and what you want to be remembered for. However, making efforts to leave a legacy is not just for someone who is approaching death. Sharing yourself, the creative process, is also beneficial when you are not at the last stages of your life. Starting to share your legacy can be done at any time in your adult life; e.g., when you are at a “crossroads” in your life, when you are ready to “share your story.”

### Objectives of Legacy Writing Workshop:

1. To learn about the benefits, process, and therapeutic value of leaving a legacy, focusing on legacy writing.
2. To be informed about strategies that others can use to help those engaged in efforts to leave their legacies.
3. To learn about the FIVE WISHES document, a unique type of living will, and to be better able to identify what you want your “loved ones to know” as the WISH 5 section is completed.
4. To engage in writing exercises that will provide a stepping stone to proceed with legacy writing, addressing different themes or topics.
5. To engage in an interactive process with presenters and other participants, in which experiences and ideas can be shared.
6. To be provided with useful information about proceeding with legacy writing, about multiple ways to leave a legacy (e.g., orally), about recommended resources, about tips for “helpers.”

### Agenda:

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| ❖ Welcome and Introductions                          | Steve Stone           |
| ❖ Information about materials                        | Hillary Wertman       |
| ❖ Leaving a Legacy: An overview                      | Diana Spore           |
| ❖ Writing Exercises                                  | Diana Spore           |
| ❖ Helping those engaged in efforts to leave a legacy | Kailey Bradley-Thomas |
| ❖ Break for lunch                                    |                       |
| ❖ Share your legacy with your voice                  | Chris Box             |
| ❖ Five Wishes  | Susan Montgomery      |
| ❖ Therapeutic value of leaving a legacy              | Kailey Bradley-Thomas |
| ❖ Spirituality, Death, Dying and Grief               |                       |
| ❖ Closing Comments                                   | Kailey Bradley-Thomas |
| Completion of Evaluation/Interest Form               |                       |

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES FOR CO-PRESENTERS:**

**Diana Spore, Kailey Bradley-Thomas, Susan Montgomery & Chris Box**

Diana Spore Ph. D. received her Master's degree in Gerontological Studies from Miami University, and earned her PhD in Human Development and Family Studies, with a concentration in Aging, from Penn State. She completed postdoctoral training at Brown University. Spore's areas of expertise include mental health and aging, long-term care, psychotropic drug use and inappropriate drug use among older adults, and caregiving. She is a former Board Member of the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County (MHRB). Currently, she is an Older Adult Consultant at the MHRB, writing articles for a local newspaper about topics of interest to seniors. She has expertise in addressing the process and benefits of different forms of writing for recovery, self-empowerment, emotional well-being, and healing. She has co-facilitated workshops on creative writing for recovery, journaling for caregivers, and legacy writing. She is a member of the Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition (OABHC). Spore helped her 90-year old mother in her efforts to craft legacy letters, to engage in legacy writing, and to share her life story. Her mother, Virginia, passed away in March 2018, and was unable to finish developing a memory box to pass on to future generations. Diana is relying on recall and notes to ensure that the box includes everything her Mom had wanted to leave as a gift, a medley of cherished memories.

Kailey Bradley-Thomas received her Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Ashland Theological Seminary. She is a licensed professional clinical counselor (LPCC) in the State of Ohio. Bradley-Thomas is coordinator of bereavement services at Hospice of North Central Ohio, and specializes in grief counseling and grief education. As a counselor, she is interested in the power of narrative and has worked with all age groups on the benefits of therapeutic story-telling. She has facilitated groups on addiction, anger management, self-care, grief/loss, depression and anxiety. Bradley-Thomas is a Board Member of the Ashland County Council on Aging, and is a member of the OABHC, the Ashland County Trauma and Resiliency Collaborative, and the Suicide Prevention Coalitions in Ashland and Richland counties. Bradley-Thomas serves as a facilitator for a caregiver support group for the Alzheimer's Association, and is a member of the University Hospitals Bio-Ethics Committee in Ashland. She has presented on issues surrounding children's grief, legacy writing, and end-of-life. Currently, Bradley-Thomas is working towards certification in thanatology. She loves living with her husband, Stephen, and their golden doodle, Scout, in Ashland.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES FOR CO-PRESENTERS CONTINUED:**

**Diana Spore, Kailey Bradley-Thomas, Susan Montgomery & Chris Box**

Susan Montgomery has 23 years of non-profit experience with the Area Agency on Aging (AAA), working directly and indirectly with the aging population. The AAA is a non-profit organization funded by local, state, and federal dollars. She works closely with many other non-profits and for-profits in the area. Montgomery is responsible for speaking on behalf of the AAA regarding available services for senior citizens, fraud and scams against elders, and caregiving. Recently, she traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with legislators about issues facing our aging population. Montgomery is a Board Member for Mid-Ohio Habitat for Humanity (Richland and Crawford Counties) and is President-Elect for Rotary International (Galion Chapter). She is a Richland County Leadership Unlimited Class graduate and graduate of CU Lead of Crawford County. Montgomery resides in Galion with her husband, Ron, and loves to travel to Columbus to visit their son, Jake, who is an Ohio State University student.

Chris Box In 2007, Chris was appointed to the position as Director of Operations for the Ashland County Historical Society. Under her direction, the historical society campus has grown to become a cultural asset to the community and was crowned as the 2014 winner of the Chamber of Commerce Culture and Recreation Award. A published author, Chris has written two books on the history of Ashland; "Images of America – Ashland" and "Postcard History of Ashland". In 2016, her attentions were drawn to the leadership role for all events related to the 2015 Ashland Bicentennial. In 2016, Chris was awarded as a Woman of Achievement for Ashland County. She is a member of the Ashland Symphony Board of Trustees, Trinity Lutheran Church Council, Convention and Visitors Bureau Steering committee, Ashland Chamber of Commerce Board of Trustees and Chamber Ambassador. Born and raised in Ashland, she is married to Tony Box - they have one daughter, Sydney.

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## Section 1

# LET'S GET STARTED....



Description: This section will help you to get started with legacy writing by engaging in list-making exercises. Sometimes it can be difficult to kick off the process of sharing your story, and leaving your legacy. Making lists provides you with the opportunity to express yourself, to think, to reflect, and to respond simply and quickly, without aiming for perfection. You can write single-word responses, write what are basically bullet-points, or create more eloquent, extensive responses. It's up to you!

The exercises will become more complex -- requiring more thought and challenging you to write detailed, elaborative responses -- as you work through the workbook. Please keep in mind: we all have a valuable story to share, have a unique legacy to leave, and can make a difference in the lives of others by sharing what we write and create.



Describe yourself at this stage of your life. (Do these adjectives differ from what characterized you in the past?)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

How would you describe your life -- overall – in five words....

\_\_\_\_\_

1

2

3

4

5



List who or what you are most grateful for.....

1.

2.

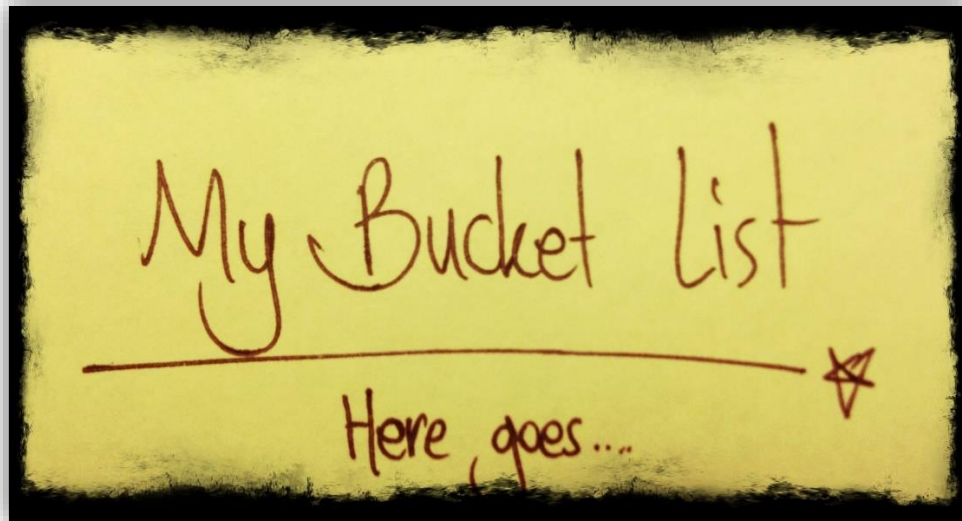
3.

4.

5.



Write a short bucket list – What would you like to do before the end of your life, if anything was possible, within reach.....?



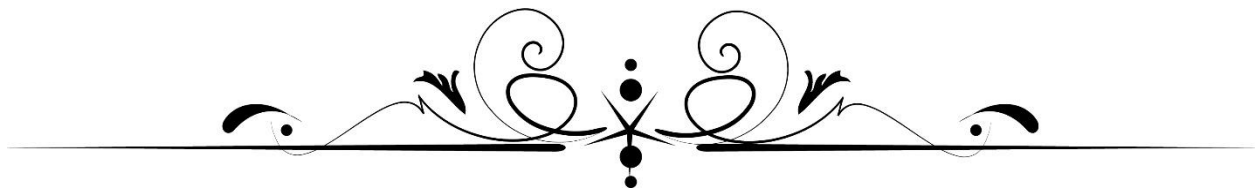
1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



List what lessons you have learned during your lifetime....

1.

2.

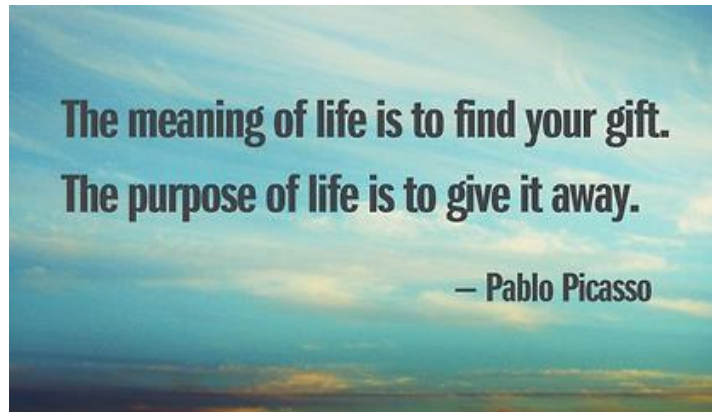
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## Section 2

# MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LIFE



**Description:** When you engage in legacy writing, make efforts to share your legacy, you can express what you have learned throughout your life, your thoughts and feelings, what you want your family to know and remember, what you want to share so that you can make a difference in the lives of others by providing advice and more. Journaling can serve as a starting point, with the initial goal to simply write. Your journal can basically be a chronicle of experiences – at this time and in the past. A simple way to start the process is to respond to sentence starts, prompts, or questions.

One of the topics you may wish to write about in “sharing your story” is what has brought meaning and purpose to your life during different earlier stages of your life as well as currently. For example, if you are at advanced age; dealing with physical problems and disabilities; perhaps relying on professional or nonprofessional caregivers; facing decreased independence – what brings purpose to your life, what are you doing to ensure that you continue to “make a difference?” What is in place to leave the door open, what kinds of supports/services do you need, what blocks you from doing what you want to do? Addressing these issues in your journal can help to clarify your thinking, help you to make decisions about what you need to set in motion, and more.

List the accomplishments that you are most proud of – as a child, as a young adult, as a middle-aged person, and/or as an older adult.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

When I look back at everything I have done or have had the opportunity to do, I feel I made the greatest difference in the lives of others by....

When I look back at my life, consider the decisions I have made, the directions I have taken, I regret.... And I wonder: would I have done anything differently....

When I look back at my life, I am most grateful that I was able to....

As you have aged and dealt with physical and functional limitations, to what extent have you felt like a burden to the one(s) who care(s) for you? What have you done to find continued purpose and meaning in your life, to realize that you still have much to offer?

How do you maintain “social connectedness” in your life, to continue with relationships and to develop new ones?



What were the goals you set for yourself in the past, ones that were achieved? What goal(s) do you still have for yourself?

## Section 3

# WHAT YOU WANT YOUR LOVED ONES TO KNOW AND REMEMBER



*I hope they  
remember...*

Description: Later sections will address “what you want your legacy to be” and how you can ensure that no message is left unsaid to those you love, particularly by creating sincere legacy letters. In this section, you engage in writing exercises that will help you begin to reflect and write about what you want your loved ones to know and remember about you, your treasured memories.



I most want for my family, friends, and neighbors to remember me for...

I most want my family to know.....



Memories of times shared that I most want my family members to remember, to hold in their hearts are.....

What have you cherished and valued the most when you look back at your life?

What do you want your loved ones to know about what has made the biggest difference in your life, what has brought you strength to keep moving no matter what? If you could convert these thoughts into words of wisdom or advice to those whom you will leave behind, what would you say?

I remember the following turning points in my life, ones that influenced the course of my life, my priorities....



If I was limited to expressing only three things that I most want my family to learn from me and my life, what insights I have gained, I would say.....

The FIVE WISHES document, provided in your packet, addresses the following: (1) “the person I want to make care decisions for me when I can’t;” (2) “the kind of medical care I want or don’t want;” (3) “how comfortable I want to be;” (4) “how I want people to treat me;” and (5) “what I want my loved ones to know.” In the FIVE WISHES document, you provide information needed by the individual(s) who will make decisions on your behalf if you cannot do so or who will follow your wishes after your death.

Express your thoughts about the following:

- What message do you want to send to the individual(s) responsible for following your medical care and final wishes even when others do not agree with what you have requested?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- When your eulogy(ies) is/are presented, what would you most like to be said (e.g., what is most important to you)?

## Section 4

# WHAT YOU WANT YOUR LEGACY TO BE



Description: Legacy writing provides you with the opportunity to share your wisdom, insights, and values that you hope will be passed down to future generations. You can address the lessons you have learned throughout your life, what has served as the foundation of your life, the principles that have guided you. In addition, leaving your legacy can be of a financial nature – distribution of assets upon death and on a longer-term basis, a philanthropic contribution. Your efforts to start leaving a legacy can be done at any point in your adult life.

The exercises in this section will help you to reflect on what you want your legacy to be, a gift for those you will leave behind -- family, friends, and those truly unknown to you. As you consider what your legacy will be, think about how you might make a difference in the lives of others -- via your advice, words of wisdom, and more.

What are your personal values that you would like to see carried on in future generations?

What words of wisdom or advice would you share with others, based on a lifetime of experiences in which you have faced challenges, joys, heartbreaks, and more?

Yesterdays

*Memories*  
are tomorrows  
*Treasures*

If you looked in the mirror and saw yourself at the age of 21, and you could interact with your younger self, what advice would you share?

If you could share one message to others about the principles that have guided you throughout your life, what would you say?



What do you want your legacy to be in terms of distribution of monetary assets and other forms of tangible resources? Ideally, how would you like your assets to be used?

What do you want your spiritual legacy to be – in terms of belief in God or some Higher Being, how best to express your religious beliefs, your views of the impact of spirituality and religiosity on your life?

List what grounds you, what characterizes the foundation of your life.....

1.

2.

3.

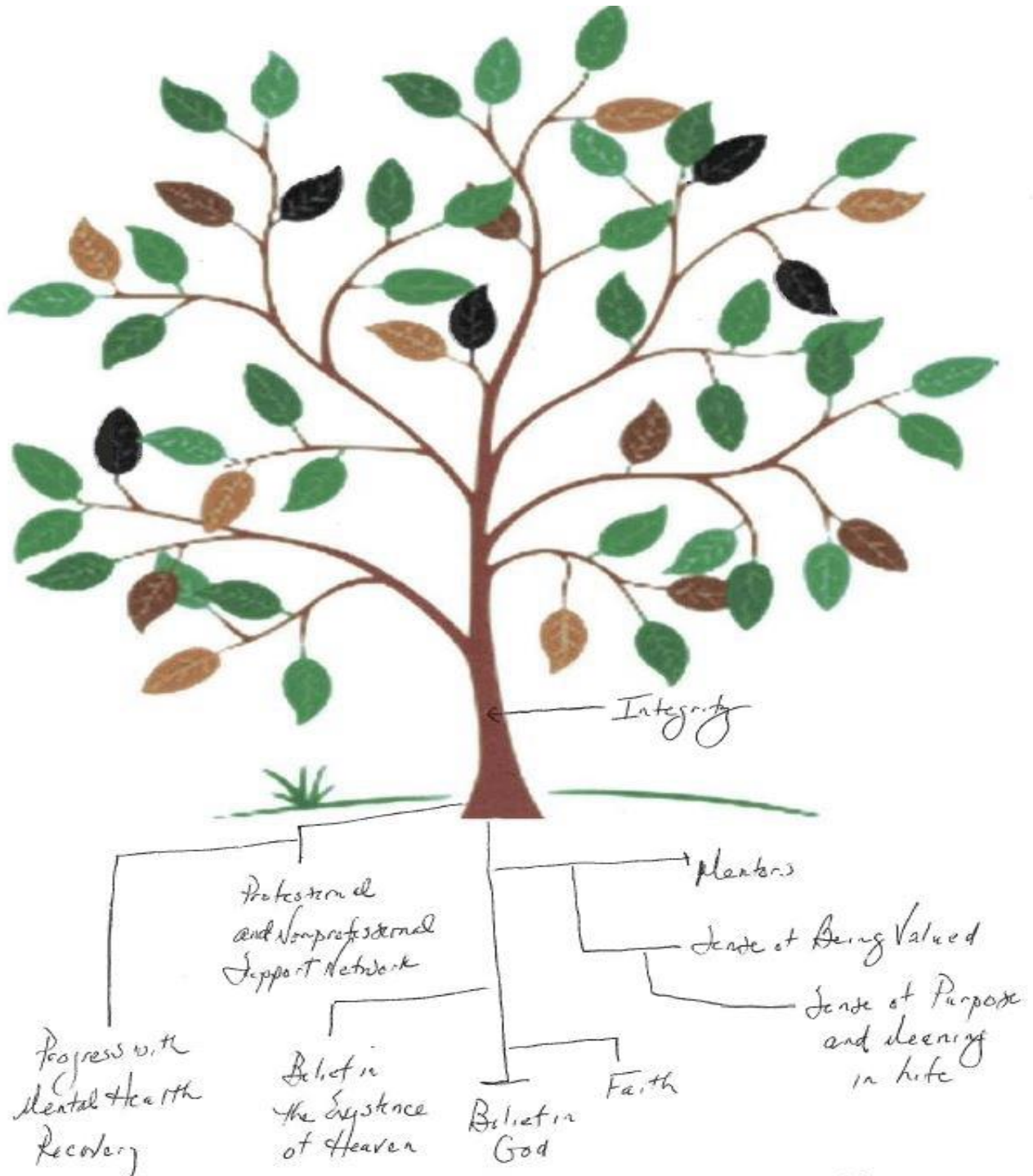
4.

5.



# Exercise - MY LEGACY

1. Draw Roots
2. Add Descriptors of Roots – “*WHAT GROUNDS YOU?*”
3. Identify the “*Living Force*” that rises from the roots to the tips of the leaves  
– “*VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES*”





## Section 5

# MESSAGE NOT TO BE LEFT UNSAID

## *Crafting Legacy Letters*

*The love of a family  
is life's greatest blessing.*

Description: Writing sincere and deeply felt legacy letters provides you with the opportunity to indicate what you want your family or specific family members to know while you are still alive or after you pass away. You can share personal stories and treasured memories; wish him/her/them well; provide advice; express your love; reflect on challenges faced, disagreements, and significant decisions made. You can express your thoughts about what you value based on what you have learned throughout your life, and indicate what you most want to be remembered for, as well as what you hope those you leave behind will remember always.

By completing exercises and reflecting on what you have learned in presentations included in this workshop, your thinking has been stimulated, you have laid the groundwork for what you might want to express in letters to ensure that no message is left unsaid. Letters can be limited to one or two pages, and written in an informal style as if you were having a conversation.

There are different types of legacy letters, six global types have been identified in this section. Seven examples of legacy letters have been embedded

When you complete these exercises, start by developing an outline, noting key points that you want to address and emphasize, or even writing an informal draft. Keep in mind that you can always revise or even toss away what you have created.

Please review the types of letters suggested here, and decide which one you want to start with:

1. You can create a legacy letter that is directed to your entire family, addressing any of the content suggestions provided in the Section 5 description.

### **Legacy Letter Example #1:**

To be provided upon my death to my three beloved children – Mary, Megan, and Michael

Dear Mary, Megan, and Michael:

Fortunately, I had time before I became very ill to reflect on what I want you to know and remember.

I love, respect, and am proud of all of you. Like your father and me, you have traversed the path toward higher education, academic success, and a professional career. Integrity, transparency, and professionalism were cornerstones to success in the career side of my life. It is my hope that now that you are established, you will find the love of your life, will consider getting married and having children, and will find balance in your life (time for work, play, and relaxation). Your father and I were fortunate to have been able to pay off the house, to purchase dream cars, to provide funds so that you'd secure college educations without being overloaded with long-term debt. However, what most brought happiness to my life was your father's love, the three of you, our dogs. I was blessed by the love that our family shared constantly, despite periodic disagreements, arguments, and challenges faced that created internal struggles for all of us.

What I hope for you: a life filled with happiness, adventures, love, meaning, and purpose. Make the most of every moment in every day. Find a way to make a difference in the lives of others. Consider letting God back into your lives – He will hear you. Spend precious time with friends, colleagues, and peers. Create a strong support network. Reveal your creativity and imagination. Enjoy the simple things in life. Have fun, my beloved children, who like me are workaholics (no, you are so much more!).

Your father – who passed away much too young -- was the love of my life, my anchor, my inspiration for how to live a life well. The three of you were the lights of my life. I love you, wish you the very best, and will see you again.

All my love, Mom

2. You can write a letter to a son, daughter, grandson, or granddaughter, indicating what you love most about him/her, what you hope his/her future holds, what you most remember about times shared with him/her, what specific memories you treasure.

### Legacy Letter Example #2:

May 26, 2017

Dear John:

As you know, I am approaching my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. I have had time to think about the memories I most treasure and what I want to be sure to say to those I love. At the outset, I want to reassure you that, while I have many medical problems, nothing that I am facing is life-threatening or is an indicator of impending death.

I want you to know how much you mean to me, how much I love you. When I look back at my life, I realize that some of the best moments of my life were times that I shared with you. I remember you helping me make fudge (you were an emerging chef!), going places with me (remember the time we went to ET?), spending time at our home and sharing meals, and working with your grandfather on his garden. I remember the love you shared with Thumper; even when she moved into our house, you were the one that brought her the greatest joy, her tail would wag so fast that it was a blur to watch.

You spent so much time with your grandfather before he passed away, going with him to physical therapy appointments, helping him complete exercises, giving him every reason to smile and laugh. You always let him know how much he meant to you, and made him an important part of your life. And I remember the beautiful eulogy you presented at his funeral, the lovely song you sang with Megan.

I know that you have had some difficult and challenging times during your life. You have shown great strength, dedication, and commitment in everything you do. You have become a wonderful husband and loving father; your loving manner will surely be passed down to future generations.

I am hoping the best for you as you journey through life – a life filled with joy, happiness, accomplishments that make a difference in the lives of others, and strong family relationships. If I was granted one wish for you, one that would come true – I'd wish that your family remains strong and cohesive, that you are surrounded by deep and abiding love. You are the joy of my life. I love you. You are my #1 grandson!

Love,

Grandma

3. If you have faced unresolved conflict with a specific family member and want to make peace with him/her, you could write a letter in which you indicate what you regret, what you have learned and want for him/her to understand, what you most want for him/her, and what you want to be forgiven for, if applicable.

### **Legacy Letter Example #3:**

Decision to provide letter will be made at a later date, would be provided after death if decide to do so.

Dear Susan:

You are reading a letter that I asked to be provided to you upon my death. I wish I would have had the strength and diplomatic skills to share these thoughts with you while I was still alive.

You were our first child, our first daughter. While you know that you were conceived out of wedlock, there was never one moment that we wished that this had not happened. Your father and I loved you so dearly, watching you grow from an infant to a toddler, become a lovely child and forthright teenager, and then blossom into a beautiful woman. You had four children, were a loving mother and wife, juggled a job with family demands, and kept your family strong even when money was tight.

I regret that you and I never found a way to resolve our differences, to heal, and to become friends. I regret that I did not know the words to say that would make you know how much you were loved, the extent to which your father and I “saw” your intelligence and drive. We failed to help you understand why we couldn’t meet all of your hopes and dreams. I fear I failed at being the type of mother you would have wanted and needed. It is not “enough” to say that I did the best I could. I know that I tried, and hope the day will come that you will look back at your life, and come to realize how much you were truly loved. I am sorry for what I did not do or what I did that made you pull away.

You told me that, upon my death, you did not want anything from me. You asked that I put that statement in my will. And I followed your request. However, I want for you to consider accepting something from me now, something that I’d like for you to provide to your daughter at a later date. I have only one very treasured belonging. I would like for you to accept the opal earrings that my mother, your grandmother, wore on her wedding day. They are primarily of sentimental, rather than monetary, value. I know you loved them; I remember the day that you were playing “dress-up” and wore them with your head held high.

Please know that I have always loved you.

Love,

Mom



4. Write a letter to the one(s) who are responsible for following your final wishes, as are addressed in the FIVE WISHES document or other form of living will. Reflect on what you most want to be remembered for, write about what you want your entire family to know, remind him/her/them to follow your wishes even if other family members disagree or want things to be done differently. Finally, consider thanking him/her/them for attending to the final requests that you are making of him/her/them.

#### **Legacy Letter Example #4:**

May 27, 2017

Dear Lynne:

Some time ago, you read my will and we talked about my instructions for my funeral and burial. With regard to the former, there will not be any surprises for you when my will is read. You know that you will be executor, will be making the decisions about how to keep or sell my home, and will be responsible for providing any of my mementoes or assets to other family members. You are already prepared to deal with the fact that there will be hostility or anger displayed by other family members, that unreasonable requests or demands may be made. I am asking you to make every effort to be fair and to share those items that you truly know other family members want or need, or that will help them to remember me with love. Family conflicts have been the norm, and I ran out of time to resolve differences. I place my trust in you.

You know that my instructions for my burial and funeral were not included in the will, particularly since the reading of the will may take place after plans need to be set into motion. It is my wish to have an open casket at visiting hours open to anyone who would like to come, to have private graveside services at which only family members are present. I would like for music to be played at the visiting hours, and for Hillary and Steve to either sing as a duo or as soloists during the graveside services. I would like for Hillary to sing Amazing Grace. I would like for Lee to do the prayer; for Doug to deliver the eulogy; and for Steve to say a prayer, make comments, and provide a more personal eulogy. I would like for Jen to read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and my final legacy letter written to all of you. You know where to access all of my legal documents, where you will find this letter that I wrote with your help some time ago. I already asked you to make contact with the following people and ask that they consider serving as pall-bearers. Please go to them now and say that I have died, and that they are needed. Please ask Steve, Jeff, Mark, Howard, Roger, and Doug. Please be sure to let them know that I have always loved them dearly, and appreciate that they have agreed to do this. When planning and preparing for my funeral and burial, please try to leave the door open so that other family members can share their ideas about what they'd like to "see happen."

However, I am leaving it in your hands to ensure that my wishes are followed. When writing this letter, I knew how difficult all of this might be for you, but am asking you to stand strong, to make the decisions that align with my wishes, even if absolutely everyone else disagrees or makes your life a living Hell. Please remember how much I love you. My hopes for you are to live life well, to be happy, to find someone to share your life with, and to find a way to have our family heal. Thank you for everything and for taking on these final tasks. Love, Mom

5. Write a letter to a family member or members about challenges faced, choices or decisions made, some of which affected the course of your life.

### **Legacy Letter Example #5: Option 1**

To be provided to my daughter, Stephanie, upon my death.

Dear Stephanie:

One of the greatest challenges we faced together was making the decision about if and when I should be admitted to a nursing home on a long-term basis or permanently. You knew that I wanted to stay at home, sometimes jokingly saying “until I am carted out.” However, problems arose that were out of our control.

For a very long time, you served as my primary caregiver. You coordinated my doctor’s appointments so that I’d receive quality of care, you managed my medications, you made the decisions about when I should be transported to the emergency room by squad and, when the need arose, would insist that I be transported to a larger hospital in another city. You couldn’t help but observe me going through a revolving door, in which I went to the emergency room, then was hospitalized, then was placed in a nursing home for short stays. You stood by me, taking care of me at home to the extent that was possible. You cared for me during the long time period when I suffered from c-diff and was extremely ill. You stayed with me when others were afraid to come near me. You met challenges that escalated in intensity and severity as time passed. But the time came when I looked in your eyes and saw utter exhaustion, knew that caring for me was making you ill, knew that I was being hardest on you in comparison to your siblings. I knew that the decision to go into a nursing home would affect what all of my children would inherit. And yet, I was aware that it was time to give you a long-term break so that you could care for yourself, knew that decisions needed to be made that would place the house and other assets at risk. The day came that I knew it was unfair to expect you to give up your life for me, for you to deal with my incontinence routinely, for you to lift me, for you to attend to my personal care. I couldn’t stand the thought of being a burden, even though you never said that I was.

It was difficult to make the transition from being at home to residing in a nursing home. Initially, I felt alone even though I was surrounded by staff and other residents, even if you came to visit me. I didn’t want to go to activities, didn’t want to go to the dining hall, missed my dog desperately (and was ever so happy when you brought Sylvia to visit, who cuddled beside me on my bed). I never told you but I cried about the move at the outset. But I settled into my new lifestyle, made friends, found happiness in a place that I had not wanted to come and stay.

Stephanie --- it all worked out and I was content and comfortable. Please never blame yourself for not being able to help me meet my dream – of being able to age in place until I passed away. I have always loved you, and have appreciated everything you did for me.

We did the right thing. I have no regrets. Love, Mom

## Legacy Letter Example #5: Option 2

To be provided to my son, Ryan, upon my death.

Dear Ryan:

When our family discussed my decision to receive palliative/hospice care, you were adamantly opposed. We spent a lot of time talking about the choice I made as I entered the last stage of my life. You came to understand and to accept the path I was taking.

For so long, Ryan, I agreed to invasive tests and procedures, dealt with medical conditions in an aggressive manner. And then, I stopped and listened to what my primary care physician was telling me about risks and benefits, about what I wanted out of the remainder of life, about what I expected at the age of 90. It's not that I gave up, or wanted to die. I listened to two surgeons talking to me, making it clear that they were opposed to operating on me for a brain stem lesion, which was severely pressing on my medulla and cervical spine. For the longest time, I could tolerate the pain and experienced no serious symptoms. And then, the pain became more severe, preventing me from being able to concentrate, to live life fully and happily, to function at the level I wanted to. Other symptoms, unrelated to the brainstem lesion, developed and resulted in an increased lack of independence. All reflected a combination of changes associated with diseases, with medical conditions and symptoms, and with aging.

Palliative care helped me to tolerate the pain, without my mind becoming jumbled, without me becoming so "out of it" that I could no longer function, vegging out to the point that I just sat/laid and stared. Rather, managing the increased pain provided me with the opportunity to spend part of my final days reflecting, writing, talking with the ones I loved, making time to write letters or compose messages to the ones that I would leave behind. I have no regrets about stopping the fight, which had guided me despite risks that grew by leaps and bounds. I lived my life fully in entirety, found happiness to be in reach, was able to find a sense of peace about some of the poor decisions I made along the way, came to accept the inevitability of death, and envisioned possibilities associated with a painless afterlife filled with beauty. In short, I made the most of my final days, appreciated your ultimate acceptance of my decision and your willingness to stand by me no matter what. I was surrounded by love, support, and compassion.

Be happy, Ryan, and make the most of every single day, hour, and minute. I have always loved you, have cherished the times we have shared, have been so very proud of you. I wish you the very best, make the time to be happy and to find joy in simple, special moments.

Love, Mom

6. You may want to write a letter to family member(s) addressing your views of death and dying, the meaning of your life, and how you want him/her/them to handle grief so that he/she/they can move on, find peace and healing.

### **Legacy Letter Example #6:**

To be provided to my only daughter, Susan, upon my death.

Dear Susie:

As I approach death, I find myself reflecting on the best things that happened in my life, on what I have been most grateful for, in what ways I was able to make a difference in the lives of others. My life has been filled with joy, as a wife, mother, and grandmother; as a mental health professional; as a writer..... You brought sunshine into my life each and every day. I do not fear dying, have no regrets about choices that I have made throughout my life, and believe that death is only the beginning, that Heaven exists.

Please remember the precious times we shared together, the traditions our family followed, the love that filled our lives (even though we argued now and then!). I know that you tend to isolate yourself when you are in pain, when you are working through how to handle changes that have been out of your control. I am asking you to let others into your life during a time that may be especially difficult for you –dealing with your divorce and my death -- reach out to friends, colleagues, those who will support you, those who truly love you. You do not have to walk alone, you can lean on someone else if the need arises even though you have always been strong and independent. If tears should blur your eyes when you think of me, take a cleansing breath, and think about moments shared – ones in which we laughed together, ones which brought us happiness, humor, serenity, and joy.

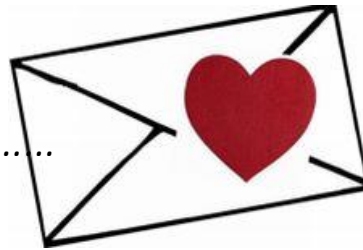
When you think of me, remember how much I love you, want the best for you. And remember, I will always be with you, as long as you hold cherished memories of us in your heart. The message I most want to leave with you now – Susie, be sure to take care of yourself, to accept love, to seek help and support from others, to build relaxation into your daily life, to see the magic in your life, and to be happy. I want you to make the most of your life. Don't let time and precious moments slip away. My darling, know when to let me go.

All my love, Mom



*You have engaged in a variety of writing exercises, given thought to what you want others to know and remember. Now, what message would you want to express that should not be “left unsaid” before you pass away? Who would you direct this message to?*

*Legacy writing is an expression of love.....*



## Section 6

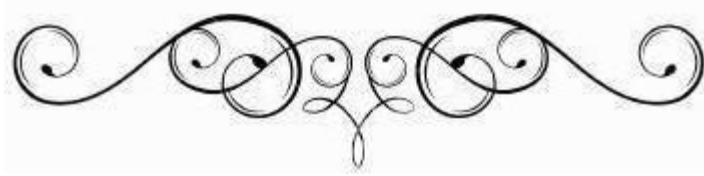
# *SPIRITUALITY*



### Description:

Spirituality is an important aspect of our lives. Reflecting upon your spiritual journey, your religiosity, and your relationship with God or some Higher Being provides the opportunity to heal, to forgive, and to find meaning in your life. You may find it helpful to examine whether or not your spiritual journey has been strengthened, weakened, changed in nature, or undergone major transitions over time. You may wish to share your views about religiosity and spirituality, and explore what you want your spiritual legacy to be.

Exercises in this section will help you to explore (1) what spirituality and religiosity have brought to your life; (2) how your beliefs have evolved over time; and (3) how these insights can be used to bring hope and peace to others. You may want to lay the groundwork for passing down your spiritual legacy to future generations.



When I was a child, I viewed God or some Higher Being as. I have found that God or some Higher Being has brought several things to my life across time, including..



As I have aged, I find that God, spirituality, and religion have. As I enter the last stage of my life, my views and beliefs focus on. My views have evolved across time in the following ways....

If applicable, my religious education and upbringing as a child and young adult emphasized. I learned that....

When I look back at my life, I realize and feel that I would like to or need to be forgiven for, to forgive. I need this to happen in order to find...



A spiritual timeline creates a structure, a picture of how spirituality/religiosity has changed over time and with advancing age. It helps me to visualize what experiences have made the biggest difference in the spiritual/religious side of my life, in identifying time periods in which my relationship with God was strong, weak, or nonexistent (if applicable).

Example of a spiritual timeline:

[illegible]

This spiritual timeline reflects childhood experiences focused on religiosity and Catholicism, followed by young adulthood in which prayer and regular, organized church attendance were the norm. During the time period in which education was prioritized, attention was turned away from God and organized religious practices. When aged around 36, life was destroyed in every possible way, experienced anger and questions about where God was, why He allowed so much to go wrong. At the age of 52, a way back to God commenced. By age 59, God and faith were prioritized, allowing Him to help direct my life.



Please reflect on what your spiritual timeline would consist of and create it, keeping in mind that you may wish to come back and revise it:

If you were to share your words of wisdom about spirituality, religiosity, and faith - with a family member, friend, or other loved one – what would you say to bring him/her hope, peace, and understanding?

## Section 7

# DEATH AND DYING



### Description:

Our Culture does not encourage one to talk about or contemplate issues related to death, dying and grief. This section may be difficult to go through, so be gentle with yourself as you work through the exercises. Issues may arise as you complete this section, ones that you might decide or want to talk about with family members, a clergyman, a therapist, or your doctor. The exercises in this section are geared to facilitate end-of-life discussions.

My feelings about death and dying have changed over time. As I approach the end of my life, the message I want to send about my current beliefs is....

Write three or four sentences about how you want to make your final days as meaningful as possible. If your health and other factors would permit you to do anything, what would you do?

You have already created your bucket list of what you'd like to do before the end of your life. Now, write a bucket list of what you would like to be able to do during that final day, that final hour.



What did you (perhaps in collaboration with other family members and/or professionals) consider when you made the decision to proceed with hospice or palliative care (if applicable). If you dealt with conflicts from others, how did you resolve them? What would you say to someone who is considering proceeding with hospice care or palliative care, and the timing for doing so?



What message do you want to say to family members and other loved ones about how you want them to view your death, to help them heal from grieving for you?

After my death, I want my family to....

As you approach your death, in what ways, would you like for your comfort to be addressed – physically, emotionally, and spiritually?

As you enter the final stages of your life, to what extent is pain management a concern for you and your family?

As you enter your final weeks and days, write about what most concerns you (e.g., how to resolve family conflicts, reflecting on your life and considering whether or not it was meaningful as well as having “made a difference”).

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Baines, Barry K. **Ethical will: Putting your values on paper**, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 2006.

Barucus, Sue. **Elderwriters: Celebrate your life. A guide for creating your own personal legacy document**. 2013.

Bly, Stephen and Janet. **The power of a godly grandparent: Leaving a spiritual legacy**. 2003.

Campbell, Richard et al. **Writing your legacy: The step-by-step guide to crafting your life story**. 2015.

Cassells-Paramore, M. **Dear family: A legacy of love**. 2015.

Cofield, Melody A. **The gift of love: A handbook for writing legacy letters and ethical wills**. 2017.

Franco, Carol et al. **The legacy guide: Capturing the facts, memories, and meaning of your life**. 2006.

Freed, Rachel A. **Your legacy matters: Harvesting the love and lessons of your life: A multi-generational guide for writing your ethical will**. 2013.

Healy, Carolyn B. **The most important letter you will ever write: A guide to leaving your legacy**. 2012.

Marshall, Carl et al. **The book of myself: A do-it-yourself autobiography in 201 questions**. 2007.

Polce-Lynch, Mary. **Nothing left unsaid: Creating a healing legacy with final words and letters**. 2006.

Spence, Linda. **Legacy: A step-by-step guide to writing personal history**. 1997.

Taylor, Daniel. **Creating a spiritual legacy: How to share your stories, values, and wisdom**. 2011.

Watts, Robin M. **Writing for keeps: Creating a life review book**. 2013.

Zaiman, Elana. **The forever letter: Writing what we believe for those we love**. 2017.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES Continued...

### Grief memoirs:

- Biden, Joe. **Promise me, Dad: A year of hope, hardship, and purpose.** 2017.
- Bowler, Kate. **Everything happens for a reason: And other lies I've loved.** 2018.
- Hood, Ann. **Comfort: A journey through grief.** 2009.
- Kalanithi, Paul. **When breath becomes air.** 2016.
- Levy, Ariel. **The rules do not apply: A memoir.** 2018.
- O'Rourke, Megan. **The long goodbye: A memoir.** 2017.
- Pausch, Jai. **Dream new dreams: Reimagining my life after loss.** 2015.
- Rupp, Joyce. **Fly while you still have wings.** 2015.
- Starr, Mirabai. **Caravan of no despair: A memoir of loss and transformation.** 2015.
- Taylor, Cory. **Dying: A memoir.** 2017.
- Vaudrey, September. **Colors of goodbye.** 2016.

### Resources about death, dying, and hospice:

- Anderson, Megory. **Sacred dying: Creating rituals for embracing the end of life.** 2003.
- Egan, Kerry. **On living.** 2017.
- Gawande, Atul. **Being mortal: Medicine and what matters in the end.** 2017.
- Harrington, Samuel. **At peace: Choosing a good death after a long life.** 2018.
- Mannix, Kathryn. **With the end in mind: Dying, death, and wisdom in an age of denial.** 2018.
- McEntyre, Marilyn. **A faithful farewell: Living your last chapter with love.** 2017.
- Neumann, Ann. **The good death: An exploration of dying in America.** 2017.
- Nouwen, Henri. **Our greatest gift: A meditation of dying and caring.** 2009.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES Continued....

### Great gift to give to grandchild:

Zenkel, Suzanne. **Memories for my grandchild: A keepsake to remember.** 2010.

### “Toolkit” for creating and sending legacy letters to grandchild:

Redmond, Lea. **Letters to my grandchild: Write now. Read later. Treasure forever.** 2015.

### Sets of cards that can be used to help build your legacy (on display):

Caring cards: **Bridging generations through conversations.** 2013.

Grandparent talk: **Connecting generations with conversations! A fun way to interact with your grandkids!** 2013.

Personal legacy advisors, LLC. **Life legacy cards.** 2015.

## NOTES