



wellnessworks  
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## sustainable wellness

### Inside this Issue...

Sustainability and the  
University of Minnesota - p. 7

Learning Communities: A Key to  
Sustaining Intellectual Wellness - p. 12

A Gift to Future Generations:  
The Spiritual-Ethical Will - p. 18

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University community.

# A Gift to Future Generations

## The Spiritual-Ethical Will

*Rachael Freed – senior fellow, Center for Spirituality & Healing*

### Leaving a Legacy

In the flurry of everyday life, rarely do we have an opportunity to reflect on the legacy we wish to leave. Often it takes the death of someone close to us to set us thinking about what we want to leave behind.

In general, legacies prove we were here: we lived, we mattered, we made a difference. Sometimes we leave tangible legacies like children, artwork, or heirlooms. Other legacies are financial, including endowments or charitable donations. Most legacies, though, are not ones we think enough about. They're found in every tree we've saved by buying recycled paper, every friend we've cheered with our jokes and laughter, and every stranger to whom we've shown kindness.

An individual's contribution to the world, whether large or small, is always significant. But unless you document your unique legacy, one day your stories and values will be lost forever, buried in the dust of history. By putting your values into words, you preserve your legacy and offer a special gift to loved ones: your spiritual-ethical will.

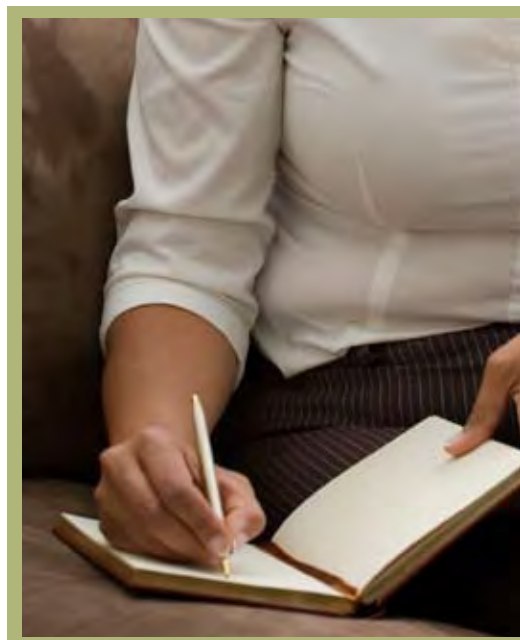
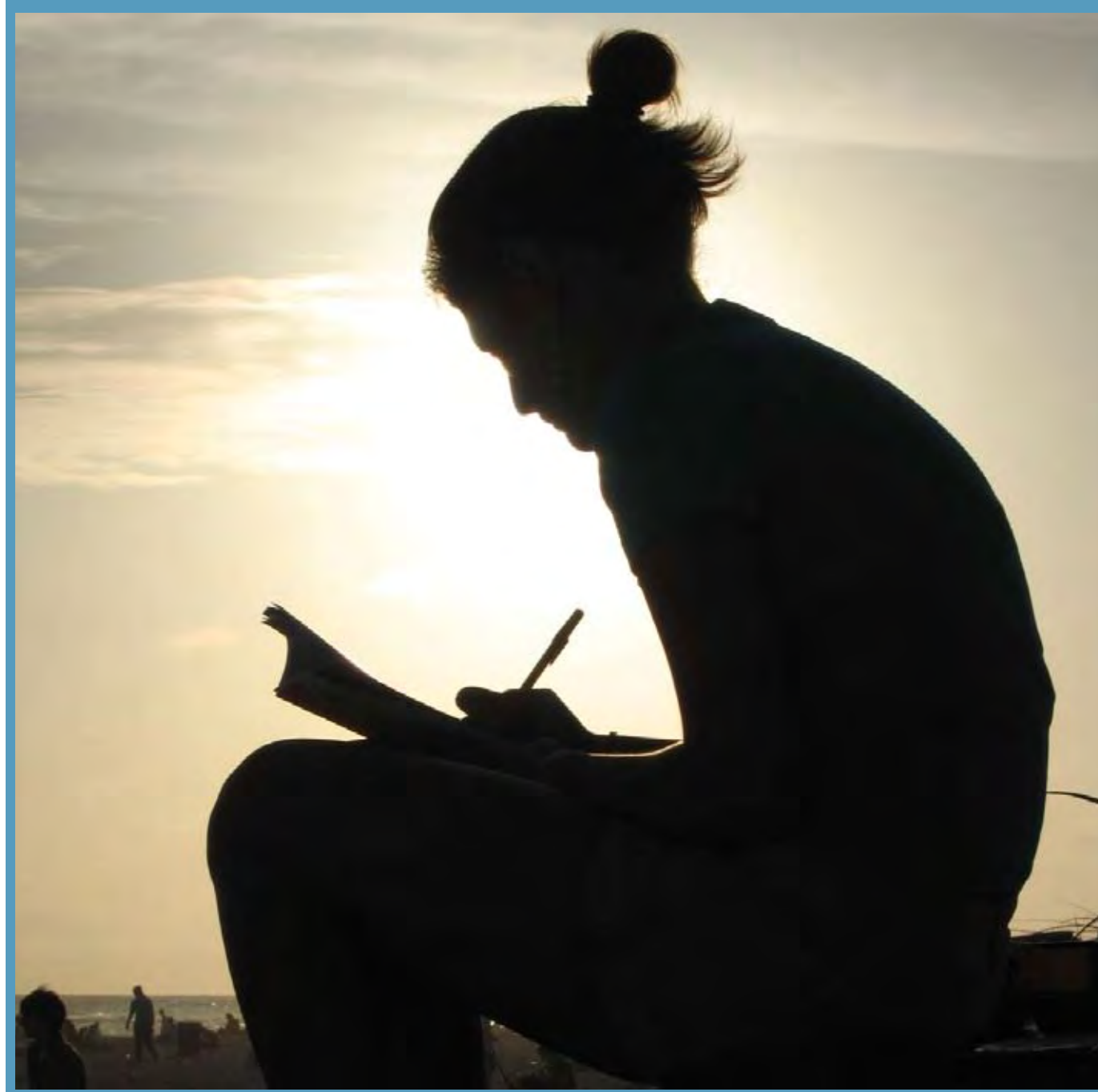
### A Spiritual-Ethical Will

A spiritual-ethical will is not a legal will, which documents how your estate should be distributed after you die. Instead, it is a record of who you are—a gift to loved ones while you're still alive. Your spiritual-ethical will is an opportunity to articulate your values, impart your wisdom, bless your loved ones, and express how you hope to be memorialized after your death. One day your descendants will hold this document in their hands and know who you were, how you lived, and what you contributed to the world. This may be the most important writing you will ever do.

Legacy writing differs from autobiography, memoir, life review, and genealogy not so much in content, but in intent. We write our spiritual-ethical wills to preserve our personal, familial, and communal histories. We write them to express who we are and what we value, to mark our place in the world, to be witnessed by others, to build community, to be remembered. We write to bless those who come after us with our love and wisdom.

### Taking the Plunge

The University's Center for Spirituality & Healing offers one-day introductory legacy writing workshops for women. There, participants reclaim their voices, articulate their values, and learn to create their spiritual-ethical wills. While participants in the workshops—who have ranged from seniors and new



mothers, to home-makers and professionals, to incarcerated and abused women—may initially believe they cannot write, and many doubt they have anything significant to express, they soon find peace and acceptance of their lives through legacy writing. They also learn to embrace their role—the role of many women today—as the storytellers, the vessels of memory, those who gather, build, and sustain our communities. Regardless of religious beliefs, spiritual-ethical wills are a powerful tool for unleashing our voice, power, and purpose, and sustaining our legacy. And by recording personal values and family stories, we ultimately strengthen the fabric of civilization.

*For more information about upcoming Legacy Writing Workshops for Women, visit [www.csh.umn.edu](http://www.csh.umn.edu) or call 612.626.2395.*



## faces of wellness

**Janet Hagberg – lecturer and adviser, Master of Liberal Studies Program**

For me, wellness is the capacity for resilience in body, mind, and spirit. My spiritual practice defines my day. For instance, I start and end my day with quiet and prayer, and take a break at mid-day to get back to a grounded place, often reflecting on the grace in my life. Working in domestic abuse, with refugees who've been tortured, with women in prison and with the homeless—these are all arenas in which you burn out easily if you don't have a deeper well from which to drink. I could never find the courage or hope to do the work I do without my connection with the Holy. It feeds my soul.

## Legacy Love Letters

Love letters are tangible, can be read and reread, and allow loved ones to feel deeply nurtured. Rachael Freed suggests five steps for creating "Legacy Love Letters":

1. First, free-write daily for approximately 15 minutes about love as you understand and experience it internally and in the world around you—for as many days as you have something to write about.
2. Make a list of people and things you love.
3. Write to someone you listed, expressing love with recognition, appreciation, caring, validation.
4. Write in your journal for five minutes about the experience.
5. Mail or give your legacy love letter to the intended recipient at an appropriate time.

explore meaning and purpose in human existence