



Find out more:

The importance of legacy writing

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Legacies are the footprints we leave behind after we die. They prove that we were here: we lived, we mattered, we made a difference. Sometimes we leave tangible legacies like children, artwork, crafts, poetry, heirlooms, or gardens. Other legacies are financial including endowments, charitable donations, even corporations. But most legacies are the fruits of a life well lived. 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 the meaning of 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 not only preserve your legacy, but offer a special gift to loved ones: your spiritual-ethical will.

A spiritual-ethical will is not a legal will, which documents how your estate should be distributed after you die. It is a record of who you are—a gift to the present and to the future, offered 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 to preserve our personal, familial, and communal histories. We write 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. If our lives are to have lasting

meaning, we must use them as a sacred link, consciously connecting past generations to future generations.

Empowering women of every age to reclaim their voices and articulate their values gives them the opportunity to create their spiritual-ethical wills. In the past decade women representing all ages, races, ethnicities, faith traditions, education levels, and life situations have begun this important writing. They include seniors and new mothers, homemakers and professionals, grandmothers, single, married, committed, divorced, and widowed women. Immigrant women, abused women, incarcerated women, and women in all manner of personal transition, including retirement, loneliness, grief, illness, and death have found peace and acceptance of their lives through this writing. Few began believing they could write and many lacked confidence that they had anything significant to express.

Yet legacy writing seems a natural undertaking for women today. We are the weavers, the storytellers, the vessels of memory: those who gather, build, and sustain our communities. Regardless of our religious beliefs, legacy letters (spiritual-ethical wills) are a powerful tool for unleashing our voices, power, and purpose. At this precarious moment in history, we realize that life is fragile, that we do not control the number of our days. Many of us feel a sense of urgency, a need to document our legacies to help shape this unfolding new world. We have an obligation to record our personal values and family stories. In so doing, we strengthen the fabric of civilization.

Rachael Freed

(legacy writing for men and women)

"...elders are entitled to be cared for but that does not free them from the obligation to give to the family...and what are they to give? Elders owe the family their wisdom...they need to give their stuff, and they need to write their letters to their grandchildren....your book (*Women's Lives, Women's Legacies*) is extraordinary in capturing the importance of wisdom & legacy."

Terry Hargrave, Ph.D., *The Aging Family*

