

Legacy Moments Last FOREVER



LEGACY TOPICS

These are just a few questions to start brainstorming the story that makes your life unique because ***this is all about you.*** (Please note: Your list will cover many more and different topics and be much longer than this as you prepare to record your legacy.)

1. Home

- a. Where were you born?
- b. Where was your childhood home located?
- c. Did you have a favorite pet growing up?

2. Family

- a. What were your parents like, your Mom and Dad?
- b. Where are you in the line-up of your siblings?
- c. What are some special family memories?

3. Marriage

- a. When / where did you meet your spouse?
- b. How long did it take you to know he / she was 'the one'?
- c. Share some stories of how you prepared for your wedding and the actual day of your wedding.

4. Career

- a. What was your first job like?
- b. What did you like / dislike about your career?
- c. What did you do to change from one job to a career that you love?

5. Education

- a. Where did you go to school?
- b. What was your favorite topic in school?
- c. Which teacher left a lasting impact on you, positive or negative?

6. Wisdom

- a. Any pearls of wisdom to share with your family?
- b. Anything that you can't hold in anymore to set the record straight?
- c. How did you handle a difficult lifetime event that caused you to get beyond survive to thrive?

7. Military

- a. Where / when did you serve your country?
- b. When did you decide you wanted to serve in the military?

8. Travel

- a. What is your favorite story about your favorite place to visit?
- b. Did you start a collection of

9. Spiritual

- a. How did your faith in spiritual things express itself in your life?
- b. What do you remember about the time when your faith became real to you?

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Creating a Life Legacy

What is a life legacy?

A legacy is something that we leave or give to others, something that will last beyond our lifetime. For many people, this means giving money or possessions to others in a will.

But there is another kind of legacy. Legacy can also mean passing on things other than money and possessions that have great value for those with whom you have caring relationships. These things could include your life story, lessons you have learned, your values and beliefs, or your hopes and dreams for your loved ones. This kind of legacy is called a **life legacy**.

Rachael Freed, in her book *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies*, writes about life legacy in this way:

Legacy work is different from autobiography, memoir, life review, and genealogy not so much in what is written, but in our 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.

One of the nice things about leaving a life legacy is that anyone can do it. As you think about creating a life legacy, don't judge yourself or let others judge you. A life legacy is a creation from the heart. Perfection is not the point. Expressing your thoughts and feelings, saying what you want to say, is what is important.

Your life legacy may include memories of family members and others who are no longer living, or of places that no longer exist in the way you once knew them. It may include historical events and how you experienced or were affected by them. What you create can become a part of your family or community history. Your legacy is a link in a chain that connects generation to generation.

You can create a life legacy at any time in your life—or even several times in your life. However, it is often best to do it when you have the time and energy to dedicate to it.

How do I create a life legacy?

A life legacy can be done in a number of ways. Some of these ways are fairly simple. Others may take a bit more thought and planning. In this booklet you will find some suggested ways to create a life legacy. Feel free to choose whichever one (or ones) seem best for you. You can also do it in a way that's different from the ways suggested here. It's your life legacy, so do what makes sense to you.

Creating a life legacy can seem overwhelming if the project is very big, such as telling your whole life story. If you feel overwhelmed consider one or more of the following ways to make creating your life legacy more manageable:

- Think about the most important things you want to include. For example, instead of trying to tell your whole life story, what are the parts that carry the most meaning for you and others?
- Break down the project into parts and work on one section at a time. For example, if you want to tell your life story, concentrate on one part of your life at a time, perhaps starting with your childhood. Or, if you want to write different letters to a number of people, start with just one.
- Take some time to plan what you want to do. This can help you feel more organized and make your project feel more meaningful.
- Know that you can change direction if you need to. If you start down one path and find that it isn't working for you, take time to pause and reflect. You can do something else that better fits your needs.

If you would like to create a life legacy but have limited energy, others may be willing to help you. Think about what would make it easier for you to do what you want to create. If one or more people have offered to help you in some way, this might be the perfect opportunity to take them up on their offer. If you do ask for or accept help, be sure to choose

someone who is a good listener, someone who will help you create what you have in mind. Remember, this is your life legacy, and it should be what you want it to be.

Here are some suggestions for creating a life legacy. Read through them to get a sense of what you would like to do.

Write a letter

This is one of the simplest ways to create a life legacy. You can write a letter saying the things you would like the other person or persons to know. You can give the same letter to a number of people, or you can write separate letters to different people. You can give letters to be read now or letters to be opened and read some time in the future. For example, you might write a letter to your young child or grandchild with instructions to open and read at a specific time in the future (such as a particular birthday) or on a future occasion (graduation, marriage, birth of a child). The letter can be as short or as long as you want it to be. It can express your love and appreciation for the person it is addressed to, your hopes and wishes for him or her, or some special memories. A letter can also be written to tell your life story.

Write an ethical will

Another way to create a life legacy is to make a document called an "ethical will." This can be more formal than a letter. It usually includes such things as the writer's life story, values, and lessons learned—whatever life wisdom the writer would like to pass along to others. You can use a booklet that asks questions and includes space for you to write your answers, or you can just write your own ethical will, including what you want. At the end of this booklet is a list of places where you can get more information about ethical wills, including resources for writing one.

Create something for others

A life legacy can be created in any number of artistic ways. You don't have to be an artist. People with any level of artistic ability can do this. Use a skill you already have, such as quilting, cross stitch, or drawing, to make something that says what you want others to know about your life story or your values. Even if you don't think of yourself as talented in art or crafts, it can be very meaningful to express yourself in these ways. What you make may not be great art, but it may still be a priceless treasure to someone who knows and loves you.

Here are some examples of things you might make for others:

- If you love to cook, make a collection of recipes of your favorite dishes. You could also write memories of treasured times that you associate with particular dishes to go along with one or more recipes. For example, you might have a recipe that was passed down to you by a beloved relative. You could write down some memories or stories about that person and include it with the recipe to give to family members. You might include one or more recipes that were used at special occasions, such as holiday gatherings. Along with those recipes you might write some memories from past holidays.
- If you play a musical instrument or sing, record something for friends or family. You can also write or say something about the meaning of the music to you. Perhaps the music is something that reminds you of a time shared with someone. Even if you don't sing or play an instrument you could still make a recording of music that has meaning for you and share that meaning or the memories it brings back for you.
- If you are a collector, give something from your collection, along with a story or memory that would be meaningful to a loved one.

- If you like to take photographs, take pictures of places, things, or people and include some writing about what they mean to you. You can also use photographs you already have and write stories about them.
- For someone who likes to quilt there are many possibilities, including using fabrics with meaningful connections and other personal items such as buttons or beads. Write or record something about these connections or the theme behind the quilt.

Record an audio or video

Another way to create a life legacy is to make an audio or video recording. You can talk directly to the person or persons you have in mind, or you can just talk about your life or whatever else you want to say. If you don't want to be seen, you can record audio only or use a video recorder and talk off-camera while the video camera records things about your life, such as your home, favorite places, photographs, or other things that have meaning to you.

If you are uncomfortable about talking while the camera is rolling, consider these tips:

- Think ahead about what you want to say.
- Practice your lines.
- Have someone on or off camera ask you questions that you have written in advance.
- Use notes, reminders, or cue cards.
- Do it over until you get it the way you want it.

Create a legacy with a special focus

Some people choose a focus for their life legacy that is especially meaningful to them. For example, a spiritual life legacy might include what has been spiritually meaningful to you in your life, how you feel about and express your spirituality, or important spiritual experiences or lessons in your life.

Another example of how to do a life legacy with a special focus would be to use an interest or passion in your life to talk about what you want to say to others. If you are a gardener, think about what you have learned from gardening and express your thoughts and feelings using gardening terms and concepts. For example, what do you know about taking care of a garden that also applies to nurturing relationships, setting priorities, or accepting what life brings?

If you are a musician or music lover, use your musical experiences and knowledge to express yourself. How is life like a particular piece of music or musical style? What can music teach us about life?

Perhaps you are an avid sports fan, traveler or movie buff. How might you use these or other interests and passions to communicate a life legacy to your loved ones?

If you would like to create a life legacy with a special focus, but aren't yet clear about what your focus should be, consider these questions:

- What kind of work do (or did) you do in your career? (Remember, being a homemaker is a career.)
- What hobbies have you had?
- What are some of the things that have given you pleasure in life?
- When you've had time off or gone on vacation, what have you done?
- What are you most proud of in your life?

Ask others to contribute

You might consider asking others to contribute to your life legacy. It can be enlightening to learn what others have to say about you. Ask friends or family members to comment on your life or share favorite memories. You can also ask them to answer specific questions or talk about particular topics that you

give them. Here are some examples of topics and questions you might use:

- What do you remember thinking about me the first time we met?
- What are some of your favorite memories of our time spent together?
- What have you always wanted to say to me but haven't?
- What do you wish I had done differently in my relationship with you?
- What is the most important thing I've done for you?
- What have you learned from me?
- What have you most valued about our relationship?

Use Ira Byock's "Four Things"

In his book *The Four Things that Matter Most*, Ira Byock lists four basic messages that you might choose to convey in your life legacy. These messages are:

1. "Please forgive me." What are the things you would like to ask others to forgive you for? What regrets do you need to express?
2. "I forgive you." Giving forgiveness can be very healing for both you and others. What forgiveness do you want to give to others who may have hurt you?
3. "Thank you." What appreciation do you want to express to others? While you may think that others know that you appreciate them, expressing it clearly and directly to them can be a real gift.
4. "I love you." Again, you may think that others know how much you love and care for them. But expressing this to others may well be something that they will treasure.

Make your own book

There are many user-friendly websites that allow you to make your own book. You can drop in text and photos as you wish. You can order one copy or as many as you want. Cost varies, depending on the choices you make about size, type of binding (hard cover versus soft cover), and number of pages. Some online printing services occasionally offer special discounts. On some sites you can create your work, then wait to order until the site offers a discount.

The type of book you decide to make is entirely up to you. You can tell the story of your life and illustrate it with personal photos. Or you can write down your thoughts and beliefs and illustrate them with thematic images. For example, if gardening has been a passion for you, you could create a book using photos of plants and gardens.

If you would like to try making a book but are uncomfortable using computers, this would be a good time to take someone up on an offer to help you.

Getting started

In the pages that follow you will find a number of possible topics and questions to help get you started creating your life legacy. You don't have to limit yourself to these topics and questions. They are only meant to raise your awareness of what's possible and to stimulate your thinking.

Most people have had painful or unhappy times in their life, and some of the topics and questions that follow may bring up difficult memories. You must decide whether you want to include such memories in your life legacy.

There are many more topics and questions offered here than one person is likely to use. Read through them and choose the ones you want. Or just use them to generate ideas about what you might want to say.

Topics and Questions for Creating a Life Legacy

Lifespan questions

Early years

- What were you told about your mother's pregnancy?
- What were you told about your birth?
- If you were adopted, what do you know about your birth parents and the circumstances of your adoption?
- What have family members and friends said about your early years (before you have memories yourself)?
- What are your earliest memories?

Childhood

- What was your childhood like?
- Did you have a childhood nickname? If so, how did you come by it? And how did you feel about it?
- Who were the people most important to you as a child (family members, family friends, childhood friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, others)?
- Who raised you?
- What did you enjoy doing as a child?
- Did you have favorite toys?
- What were your most favorite and least favorite foods?
- Where did you live as a child (house or apartment; urban, suburban, or rural setting)?
- Did you ever move from one home to another? If so, what was that like?
- Did you have pets?
- Do you remember a favorite item of clothing?
- Did you have a beloved blanket, toy, or other item that you were very attached to?
- Do you remember your first day of school?
- What do you remember about elementary school (teachers, friends, how you got to school, most and least favorite subjects, most important thing you learned that wasn't taught in the classroom, etc.)?

- What holidays did you and your family celebrate?
- Did you grow up in a faith tradition? If so, what do you remember about it and how has it influenced your life today?

Teen years

- What do you remember about junior high or middle school (teachers, friends, most and least favorite subjects, sports and other extracurricular activities, most important thing you learned that wasn't taught in the classroom, etc.)?
- What did you do during your summer vacations? Did your family take trips? If so, what were they like?
- What do you remember about high school (teachers, friends, most and least favorite subjects, sports and other extracurricular activities, most important thing you learned that wasn't taught in the classroom, etc.)?
- Did you learn to drive as a teenager? If so, what was the first car you drove or owned?
- What's something you are really proud of during your teen years?
- What's something you would change about your teen years?
- Did you date as a teenager? What were the highs and lows of your teenage romantic life?
- Did you have training (vocational school or college) after high school? If so, did you live at home or move somewhere else? How did you decide on your major or specialty? What were the most important things you learned outside of the classroom? Did you ever change the focus or direction of your schooling?

Adulthood

- What have you done in your career?
- Have you changed fields or careers?
- Are you satisfied with what you've done, or do you wish you'd done something different?
- Did you marry or have a life partner? If so, how did you meet? What was it that attracted you to

this person? What have you learned from your spouse or partner? What does or did your spouse or partner value most about you?

- Did you have children? What do you remember about the birth or adoption of your children? What do you value about your children? What are you most proud of as a parent? What would you change about the way you have parented? If your children have reached adulthood, what was their leaving home like?
- What friendships have you developed as an adult? How are they different from friendships you had in your childhood or teen years?
- If you have experienced middle age, what were these years like? What brought you satisfaction? What would you have changed?
- How have you expressed your spirituality as an adult? Have you been part of a faith community? What does spirituality mean to you?
- Do you believe in an afterlife? If so, how does your belief influence how you live your life? How does it influence how you feel about dying?
- What is your life currently like?
- What health problems have you had in your life? How have they changed your life? What have you learned from them?

Later life

- If you have retired from work, what is your life like now? Is your retirement what you had planned or hoped for? What has surprised you about your retirement? What is the most important thing you have learned since retiring?
- Looking back on your life now, is there anything you wish you could change? If so, what?
- Looking back on your life now, what things do you value the most?
- How have your life experiences changed you?

Relationship questions

- Who are the most important people in your life?
- What do you value most in your relationships?

- What are you most proud of in your relationships?
- What regrets, if any, do you have about your relationships?
- How have you been hurt in any of your relationships? What have you learned from these hurts?
- What have been your greatest joys in your relationships?
- What have you not told someone that you really want her or him to know now?

General questions

- How would you describe your sense of humor?
- What makes you laugh?
- What makes you cry?
- When were you happiest?
- What was the hardest time in your life?
- What helped you to weather the storms in your life?
- What would you like to do over in your life?
- What are you most proud of in your life?
- What have been your greatest losses? How have they influenced you?
- What have been your greatest joys? How have they influenced you?
- Have you traveled in your life? If so, what have you learned from your travels?
- What possessions do you most treasure? Why? What meanings do they hold for you?
- Who are the people who have most influenced your life?
- What things have you learned “the hard way?”
- Do you have any secrets that have influenced how you have lived your life or the decisions you have made? If so, is there anything you want or need to do about those secrets now?
- What moments in history stand out for you? What impact have these historical events had on your life?
- What have been your greatest fears?
- What gives you the most peace?
- What do you want people to remember most about you?

Spiritual legacy questions

- Who or what is sacred for you?
- What is holy for you?
- What does God mean to you? How do you picture God?
- What gives you a sense of mystery, something you can't explain?
- What is your greatest spiritual strength?
- What has God called you to do or be?
- When do you feel closest to God?
- How does your spirituality or faith comfort you?
- What symbol is spiritually most meaningful for you?
- Do you have a favorite passage from sacred writings?
- Do you have a spiritual mentor or someone you admire spiritually?
- Do you have a favorite prayer or way of praying?
- What spaces are sacred for you?
- Do you have a spiritual ritual that is especially meaningful to you?
- Do you have a spiritual object that has special meaning for you?
- Have you ever experienced a spiritual awakening?
- Have you ever felt spiritual ecstasy?
- What opens your heart?
- What touches your soul?
- For what are you most grateful to God?
- What do you believe happens after death?
- Have you had any communications from loved ones who have died? If so, what meaning does this have for you?
- How has your faith or spirituality helped you during the hardest times in your life?
- When and where have you felt most alive?
- When and where do you feel most at peace?
- When have you felt most inspired?
- How would you like your funeral or memorial service to express your spirituality?
- What would you want people to say about you at your funeral?
- What would you like to have read aloud at your funeral?
- What songs or hymns would you want to be sung?

For more information

Books and articles

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www.life-legacies.com

Information on life legacies by Rachael Freed.

www.dyingwell.org

Information on death and dying by Ira Byock, MD.

www.thelegacyguide.com

Website companion to *The Legacy Guide: Capturing the Facts, Memories, and Meaning of Your Life* by Carol Franco and Kent Lineback.

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About the author

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