Your values and stories, *for the people you love.*

Prompts and space to draft an ethical will, also called a legacy letter: a letter that passes on values, stories, gratitude and hopes, not property.

Not a legal document

An ethical will cannot leave money or property, name a guardian or appoint an executor. Keep possessions out of it, so it never seems to disagree with your legal will, which is best made with a qualified professional where you live.

Before you write

Who is it for? one letter to everyone, or one for each person: write their names

The form ☐ Typed letter ☐ Handwritten ☐ Audio ☐ Video ☐ A mix

A moment to share it in person a wedding, a birth, a big birthday, a holiday meal

Gather for a week or two

Jot down stories, sayings and values as they come to you, before you write a single sentence of the letter.

Notes as they come

Tell stories rather than state principles

“Be generous” is easy to skim. The story of the night your father drove three hours through snow to bring a neighbor’s daughter home says it better, and it is the line the family will repeat.

Values

What three words would you like your grandchildren to use to describe how you lived?

Which value did you learn from your own parents, and how did they teach it?

What belief of yours has changed over the years, and what changed it?

Stories

Describe the kitchen table of your childhood: who sat where and what was said.

What was the bravest decision you ever made, and what did that day feel like?

Which story do you tell at every family gathering, and why that one?

Gratitude

Who believed in you before you believed in yourself?

What small kindness from a stranger have you never forgotten?

What do you love about each person who will read this?

Blessings and hopes

What do you wish for each child or grandchild, by name?

Which family tradition do you hope continues when the next generation takes over the cooking?

What do you hope the family does whenever it is all together?

Practical wisdom

What do you know about money that you wish you had known at 25?

What is your advice about choosing a partner, a friend or a job?

What is the best way you have found to make up after an argument?

Family history

Where did your family come from, going back as far as you know? How did they end up where you grew up?

What family story has been told a hundred times at the dinner table?

What's a saying or phrase only your family uses?

Shape your letter

One page is enough. Draft quickly in your own speaking voice, and fill these in as an outline.

Opening who it is for, and why you are writing

A story that shows what you value

What you are grateful for

A blessing for each person, by name

Closing

Step by step

- [ ] Gather material for a week or two.
- [ ] Decide who it is for: one letter to everyone, or one for each person.
- [ ] Choose a form: typed, handwritten, recorded, or a mix.
- [ ] Write a first draft quickly, in your own speaking voice, without editing.
- [ ] Read it aloud, cut anything that sounds like a lecture, and add one more story.
- [ ] Date it and sign it, and decide when and how you will share it.

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