

HOW TO LEAVE A

Loving Will

What is a Loving Will?

A Loving Will is a collection of stories, thoughts, feelings, wishes, dreams, history, prized possessions, favorite memories and blessings that you want to personally pass on to your loved ones as individuals.

You do not need to wait until death to provide these gifts of loving legacy. You can choose a special birthday or a holiday to hand down these highlights from your heart. (Ex: Create a booklet that tells the story of a grandparent for your grandchildren who never got to meet them). It can also be done at the 11th hour when unforeseen circumstances or illness necessitate urgency to communicate feelings of regret over the loss of connection in a family and the desire to heal that broken connection, thus completing “*unfinished business*”.

Where To Begin

To begin creating your **Loving Will**, schedule a time where you can bring to mind those people who have shaped you. This could be people that are both kind and unkind, but they are people who played a significant role in your life. *If you need help, talk with a loved one about the project and ask them to be your helper on this journey.*

Organize: Put all of the people and things you’ve thought of into a list and create an envelope, folder and/or computer file, label it appropriately. This is your collection spot, where you can place or list special messages, items, objects and treasures. *Ask yourself what is one thing you want them to know.*

How To Share: Determine how you want to share your **Loving Will** with these special people. Many items will dictate how that will be done, but because of technology today, you have a choice to write, video or audio record your personal sentiments, messages, observations and hopes for them.

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Prepare Yourself

This can be an emotional experience, so take your time and think about each item you list or the person you reflect upon and try to capture “the good” you see in them. Many people suffer from “*not good enough*” syndrome throughout their lives. Hearing what you thought was good in them can help them see a side of themselves they may have never acknowledged before.

What do you want them to know?

We have created a list of some things to do and questions to ask yourself, to help you begin.

1. Reflections About The Special People In Your Life: _____

Feel free to start out with one word descriptors like kind, generous, protector, clown, etc. It doesn't need to flow perfectly in a sentence. Speak from your heart about the potential you see in them.

- Put down your favorite memories, or moments that have touched you about them.
- What has their presence meant in your life?
- Describe them in their own unique way.
- List all the qualities that you have loved and admired in them.

Choose one person to start with and begin writing what you feel about them.

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2. Precious Objects: _____

Passing mementos down to loved ones can be very powerful for the recipient. Including a short story, or memory about how these objects came into your possession, or the unique meaning they have to you, can make the special treasure even more meaningful.

- Is there a story about a ring that was specially created for you?
- Are there handmade items, like a grandmother's quilt, that you want to hand down?
- Did that poem you have framed in your office hold special meaning?
- Tape a note on the back of the item or put it on a list.

This list can be long, but start with the one you think is most precious and write its' story.

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3. Legendary Stories:

We have all sat around a dinner table with family members after a loved one passed and listened to incredibly funny stories that should be captured and passed on to future generations.

- Stories about how you or your ancestry persevered through challenging times. Struggles/Achievements/Lessons Learned
- Funny stories that uplift and inspire.
- The stories that you don't want to be lost.

There are going to be a lot of stories, so pick one to start with and write it here.

□ *This list continue on another sheet of paper.*

4. Favorite Books/Authors/Music:

These works of art can be lovely trails to leave behind for loved ones to follow, re-visit and enjoy because they are linked to you.

- Was there an author or artist that shaped your outlook in life?
- Was there a particular poem or poet that gave you hope during a particularly challenging time?
- A scripture or sacred text that helped you cope?
- Was there a favorite musician, album or song that you listened to when you fell in love?
- Did you keep a journal that you don't mind sharing with family that might help them as they move through life?

Start writing your list out here and choose some songs to play while you go through this process.

□ *This list continues on another sheet of paper.*

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TIP: Genealogical search companies like *ancestry.com*, may be a resource to you to find old family photos and to connect with long lost relatives.

5. Photos:

Nothing is more treasured after a loved one passes than pictures of family members.

- Collect loose family photos and label them with names, dates and places.
- Collate photos into groups based on an appropriate criteria that works for you. Label it all.
- Take lots of pictures on your next trip and have them made into a photo book. There are a number of companies out there that you can download images to, straight from your computer. Snapfish.com, Shutterfly.com, Mixbook.com are some. *This might be a great place to enlist the help of a younger family member.*

Write here where you've stored your photos.

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6. Favorite Recipes:

Family traditions are closely tied to memories of specially prepared foods. This is an opportunity to pass on the favorite recipes that have fond memories associated with them.

"How did mom make those raised, glazed, sweet potato doughnuts we always had at Easter?"

- Is there a family cook book?
- Do you have a card file with special recipes earmarked for special occasions, friends and/or family
- Who gets the secret recipe for that salmon rub?

Write here which recipes go to whom.

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7. Regrets/Unfinished Business:

There are so many ways we experience misunderstandings in families. A wrong word, a heated debate, not having all the information... Here is your opportunity to build those bridges. To communicate those things that you've wanted to share, but didn't know how to until now. It seems that often instead of leaning in to the situation to try and understand one another we assume, judge, blame and walk away from each other.

This process was used by one patient with a terminal illness. A short note was written from the patient to her brother (who had been estranged from his family for his lifestyle). As part of her Loving Will and as a dying wish, she wanted to let her brother know that if she could do one last thing, it would be to walk on the beach with him, to apologize for all the misunderstandings that had happened in their lives, and to hold him again and tell him how much she loved him. The message was delivered by a sibling and by asking for that forgiveness she found a true sense of peace.

Receiving the gift of a *Loving Will*, in which ever form it takes, will be something of rare value that will make a meaningful difference to your loved ones. The time you take for the creation and dissemination of these gifts will benefit you and your loved ones for years to come!