

Writing Legacy Letters Syllabus

Instructor

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Course Overview, Fall Session 2023-24

A legacy letter or document is a work you create that tells the people you love the most what you want them to know about your life: your values, your stories, and your advice/hopes for them. It can be as simple as a one-page letter or as complicated as a collection of short written pieces, photos, and official documents. “It is a non-legal document that passes on important information about you and your ancestors to your loved ones and descendants,” writes Beth LaMie in *Legacy Letters from your Heart*. Also called an ethical will, the legacy letter began as a Jewish practice over 3000 years ago. The initial practice was an oral tradition passing along information about lineage and family history. More recently Stanford geriatrician and palliative care doctor VJ Periyakoil, MD started a written tradition with her patients and their family members to express forgiveness, thanks, and love. You will write the foundation of a Legacy Letter in this class, with help from Stanford Legacy Letter worksheets, Elderwriters’ suggestions, Rabbi Steve Leder’s books, and writing prompts. No writing experience or expertise is required, only enthusiasm for your own legacy! We will write both in and outside of class. You will share your writing only if you wish to.

If you have taken this class before and not finished a legacy letter to your satisfaction, you may want to take the class again. I’m always looking for and using new resources.

Required Materials

Stanford University Legacy Letters Project,
<https://med.stanford.edu/letter/about.html>.

The Who Matters Most letter template from the above website

David Brooks articles on The Life Report

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/28/opinion/brooks-the-life-report.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/25/opinion/the-life-reports.html>

Optional Course Materials

- Elderwriters: Celebrate Your Life, A Guide for Creating your own Personal Legacy Document. Sue Barocas*
- Legacy Letters from your Heart. Beth LaMie
- The Beauty of What Remains, Steve Leder*
- For You When I'm Gone, book and journal, Steve Leder*
- For My Grandchild: A Grandparent's Gift of Memory, AARP

*I'm especially fond of these three resources.

Resources

- Instructor will provide additional templates and exercises to get our creative juices going.
- Writing you may want to share.
- Writing from prior class participants.

Course Schedule

Week	Subject	Practice Opportunities
Week 1, September 21	Introduction to Legacy Letters Review of course process	Look at the Who Matters Most Legacy Letter template 7 Life Review Tasks Writing assignment: List your recipients (Task 1) Who are the easiest/hardest? Why? Does this suggest anything to you about yourself or them?
Week 2, September 28	Important Questions to Ask Yourself	12 Questions from For You When I'm Gone

Week	Subject	Practice Opportunities
		In class: Remember important moments, Asking granting forgiveness (Task 2-4)
Week 3, October 5	More Steve Leder, Questions of Yourself	Writing, Sharing: Expressing gratitude, love (Task 5-6) Leder's legacy letter to his children
Week 4, October 12	Thinking/writing about yourself	Character Life lessons Things that are important for you to say Status check: What have you got? What are you missing/what do you need?
Week 5, October 19	Formats for Letters	Who, Why, What (story), Reflection (Learning), Love (Blessing) Writing: Saying Goodbye, I love you (Task 7) Instructions for week 6

Week 6, October 26

Stories from our own Legacy Letters