

Sacred Departure  
presents

# *Creative Legacy Projects*

(AND WHY YOU NEED  
TO BUILD ONE NOW!)



KERI-LYNN TURNEY

# CREATIVE LEGACY PROJECTS

(AND WHY YOU NEED TO BUILD ONE NOW)

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L-R: My mom, Cynthia Turney and I with our fresh haircuts, 1983

# INTRODUCTION

"We all die. The goal isn't to live forever, the goal is to create something that will."

~ Chuck Palahniuk, American Novelist

When my Mom died at age 47 it was a shock, despite the fact she smoked several packs of cigarettes a day. It was a shock because we weren't ready. She hadn't made any type of peace with her mortality. Neither had we. I don't think we even knew that was possible.

In contrast, when my mother-in-law died, she had long-since not only accepted that she was nearing death, but had embraced it as the final, sacred transition. Now granted, she was 83 years old when she knew her time on Earth was coming to an end, but the big reason it wasn't a shock was because we were ready. Helen did not only take care of things such as writing her will, pre-paying for her funeral and choosing her pallbearers, not her! She talked about how she wanted us to remember her. And in hindsight, it was perfect.

She also made video recordings of herself with her daughter's help, telling her life stories. They were death vlogs, if you will. Before you think me morose, please realize this: **Contemplating one's life, and how we want to be remembered, is one of the most life-affirming things we can do!**

Sometimes it can take a real kick in the butt like a heart attack or an accident to get us to wake up and realize how very important every moment truly is. If we examine what we want our life to mean, we must face our mortality, and in doing so we can create not only a loving legacy for our families, but also take some of the fear out of dying and death. For us and for them.

It is my hope that these pages will help inspire you to consider your life and what you want to leave behind. I offer ideas for legacy projects: creative and beautiful ways to ensure your story lives on and on.

KERI-LYNN TURNEY

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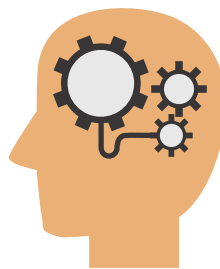
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## Chapter 1

# WHAT IS A LEGACY PROJECT?

For our purposes here, a legacy project is a creative way to show your loved ones what your life meant. It tells your story, right from the main character's perspective. A creative project is by no means the only type of legacy, but it is one of the most intimate ways to allow others to truly see us, because when we are creating we are our most authentic selves.

So think now, how do you want to be remembered?





# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DO?

A legacy project is a way to allow the people we care about to still feel a connection to us after we are gone. It is there to be studied and loved and shared. But it is not just for them. It is for us as well, to achieve symbolic immortality. "Symbolic immortality" is a term coined by Harvard psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton, MD, referring to what remains from our lives after death, and in a sense, is a way of living on. It also encourages us to examine our lives, develop more appreciation for the good times and the good people, as well as teach us to **live as we want to be remembered.**



L-R: My daughter, Winnie; my sons,  
Benjamin,  
Tristan and Cody



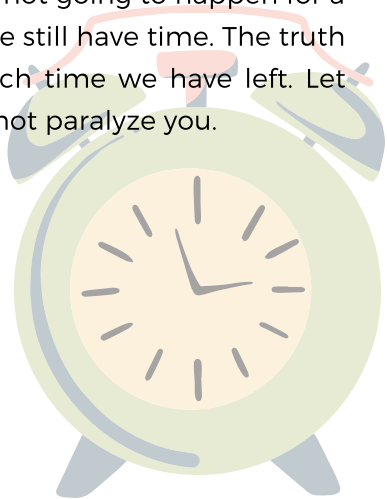


# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DO NOW?

We need not be on our deathbeds to create something special that will impact our loved ones and future generations. We all want our lives to have meaning. Working on a legacy project now helps us prioritize what is important to us, and allows us to make future choices in line with those values.

While a creative legacy project can be started at any stage of life, and could potentially be a life-long exercise, doesn't it just make sense to start it while we are well enough to do so, and early enough to have it propel ourselves towards living our best life? (And by extension, dying our best death.) We do not know how long we have on this Earth, and that is more evident to us all now than ever before. So then, why wait?

My husband's father used to say that one of our greatest blessings is that we don't know when we are going to die. In most cases we don't know (the exceptions being suicide and assisted suicide), and for some it gives us a false sense of security (read: immortality!). We go along as though we will live forever. We might be too scared to think of our demise. Maybe we think it's not going to happen for a really long while and that we still have time. The truth is, we don't know how much time we have left. Let that thought mobilize you, not paralyze you.



## Where does the time go?

### Top Photo

My son, Cody and I when I could still pick him up

### Bottom Photo

Cody at 18 just after voting for the first time in the Federal Election



# HOW DO I GET STARTED?

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Before you even decide which medium you will use to share your legacy, consider these questions, perhaps as if you were being interviewed for a newspaper article about your life. Reporters want to cover the 5 W's:

Who

What

Where

When

Why

And then add in How

## WHO

Who are you? In being introduced in the imaginary article, who would you like the writer to say you are? A loving father, a caring teacher, a philanthropist? Think of the nouns and adjectives that describe you.

## WHAT

Then move on to the verbs, the "action" words. What do you do? Do you garden, foster dogs, bake the best pies in your town? This of course, can include what you do for a career, volunteer work, hobbies . . . anything you feel you'd like to share.

"What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us."

~ HELEN KELLER

## WHERE

The "where" of you (perhaps you stayed in your hometown your whole life, or lived abroad for school) can be interesting to our families, and aid in a sense of familial connection, even for those who never get to meet us. If you traveled or moved frequently, I'd bet your loved ones would be thrilled to have some sort of record of this. It might even send them off on an adventure to walk where you once walked! Remember that band trip to Europe in high school? Where all did you go? What did you see, smell, touch, taste and hear? Have you saved photos? Have you kept any momentos?





## WHEN

“When” allows us to set the stage. By this I mean not only the date and decade (and with it the culture and science of the times) but also the time-period within our lives we are presenting and preserving. Don’t limit yourself to only the milestones.

What was the fashion in your younger years? What music did you listen to? How much was a movie ticket, a litre of gas or a record album? If you attended school dances, did you do The Cabbage Patch or The Running Man? Maybe you’re older and did The Twist. Perhaps you’d like to share what the political climate was like, or other issues that matter or mattered to you.



## WHY

The “why” in your project doesn’t have to be stated necessarily, but instead can be left for the intended audience members to figure out on their own.

***“Aunt Rose was very thrifty because growing up her parents didn’t have a lot of money.”***

But you may want to offer the “why” in your project.

***“I moved to Canada to follow my dreams of owning my own business.”***

Often, though, your loved ones will come up with their own conclusions, based on their memories and the legacy you leave behind. How we lived our lives gives clues to the whys we did things, and vice versa.

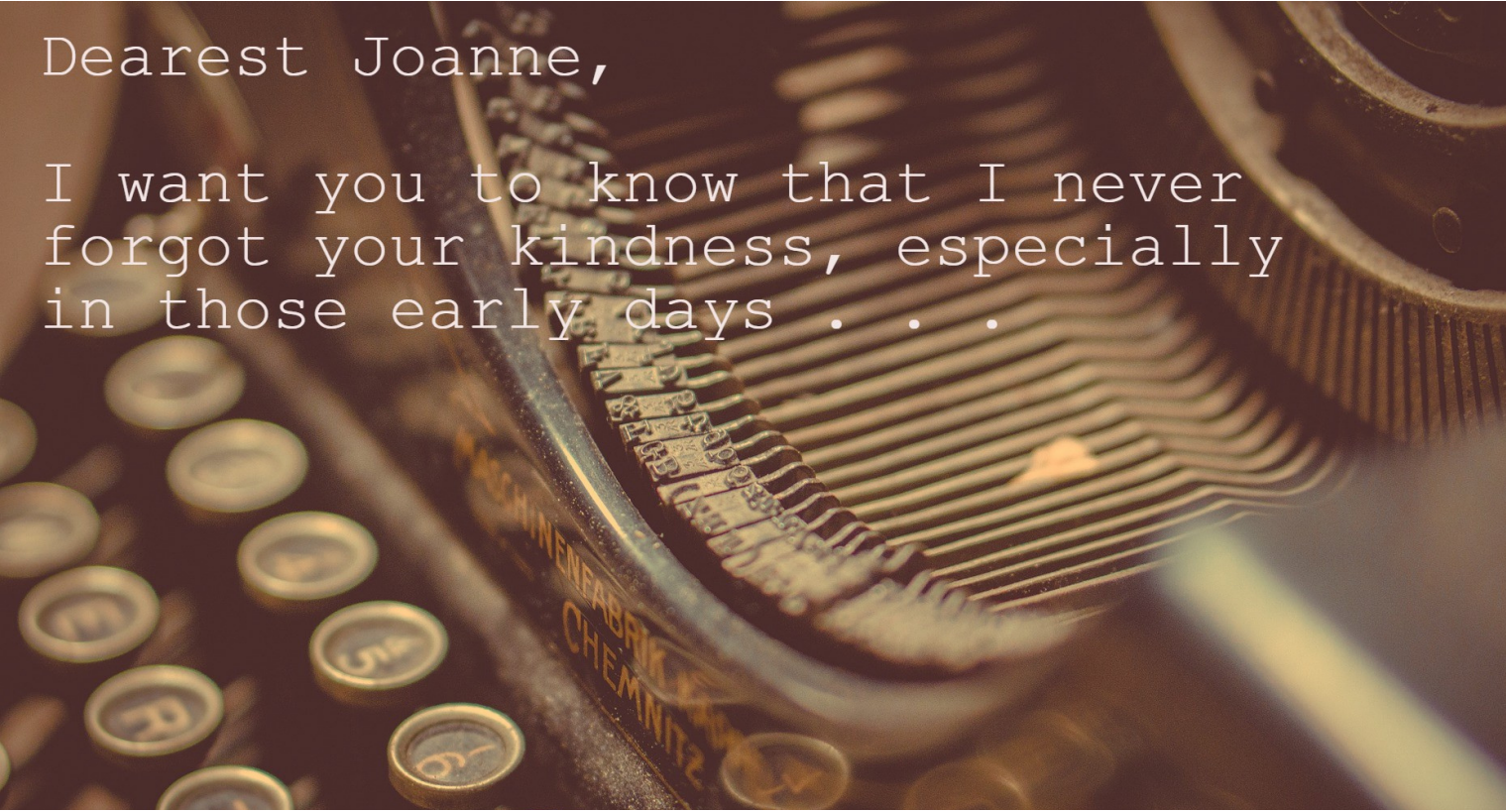


## HOW

How have your life experiences shaped your life? How have you come to be the person you are now? How did it feel when you came to North America? How does it feel to be a parent? How did you make it to the top? How did you get through trying times?

How do you feel now, thinking about creating this project? Perhaps it will give you closure. Might it bring you peace? Have you expressed all you have wanted to in your life to the people who matter to you?

Sharing vulnerabilities is a way of showing up for yourself and your loved ones, and can deepen connections.



Dearest Joanne,

I want you to know that I never forgot your kindness, especially in those early days . . .

# LETTERS

## Chapter 2

Especially now, in the computer age, a letter is something extra-special. Consider writing a letter to each of your loved ones, perhaps reminding them how you feel about them or telling them for the first time! A letter can answer questions and fill in blanks. It can help us ask for forgiveness as well as give it. In a letter we can take accountability, share wisdom and offer comfort.

Perhaps we could share our favourite poem or quote. We might pass along the best advice we've ever received or our Grandma's apple pie recipe. What wisdom can we impart for those loved ones? Or the ones yet to come? What do you think they need to know? What has been hard to share that you want to make sure is not forgotten?

To make your letter an even more beautiful legacy, try handwriting it on fancy paper, or learn calligraphy (you might be able to hire someone to write it for you). Another option is using an old typewriter, or putting your letter on a scroll. My sister, Trisha plans to decorate a box to put her letters in. How lovely!

Spend some time thinking about those who have gone before you—what would you ask those people now if you had the chance? Answer these same questions, big and small, for your loved ones. Arrange to have your letters mailed upon your death, kept with your will or in a safe deposit box. You may choose to give them out now.



You may have one of those families who records everything, from first steps to Grandpa's 95th birthday. If so, lucky you! Cherish those clips of family history and leave them behind for future generations. There are other types of videos we can create and save. Consider creating a vlog, or record yourself telling stories and jokes, or playing guitar and singing a song. Some people like to record "how-to" videos, such as lessons on the "proper" way to make spaghetti or tie shoelaces (or maybe tie a fly!). This could mean so much to a child in your family, or a teen, or a new bride/groom/parent when they are really wishing you were there to talk to. Hearing your voice, and being able to do so long after you are gone, can provide comfort in the midst of grief. And how amazing for future generations to be able to hear you!

These how-to videos can be anything every-day tasks and life hacks, to bigger issues, such as choosing a mate, making a marriage last, starting a business and so on. Other videos could include messages for loved ones or for future generations, offering stories or advice, medical histories, genealogy, quotes, life lessons, or scripture. Consider having a family member interview you on video. This way the interviewer can ask you things family members would love to know, as well as be involved in your project. More on family involvement later.

My mom-in-law's video legacy, "It's My Story and I'm Sticking to It" gave us her first-hand account of her life. Who better to tell these stories than Helen herself? In our family, we all know the story of how she went to the driver licensing office with her dad and got her license when she was 12 years old and living in Juliaetta, Idaho. She told that story over and over again, each time laughing at the part when the employee asked if she could drive, her dad giving a resounding, "Yes!" and she had her license, just like that, with no test. When her dementia was getting really bad, our kids would ask her to tell the story even though they knew it by heart. She couldn't remember what she'd had for breakfast, but she recalled that story with amazing detail and always with a sparkle in her eye. It brought her joy, and therefore brought us joy. While it seemed to us for a long time after Helen's death to be too hard to watch these recordings, now they are a joy to watch. I just viewed these videos again to help in writing this book, and my heart is overflowing.

It may be that the DVD format becomes obsolete at some point, so we will have them transferred to the latest formats as they become available. Most formats are still kicking around somewhere. We still have a VHS player and I'm sure we aren't the only ones. As new formats become available, look into getting the transferred. If you have a video camera to record yourself, great, otherwise phones nowadays can be used to record short videos that are anywhere from decent to awesome, depending on the phone.



### **Some ideas for how-to videos:**

- How to change your oil**
- How to tie your shoes**
- How to cook a special dish**
- How to sail a boat/set a sail**
- How to balance your checkbook**
- How to memorize your times tables**
- How to get to the old hideout/fort**
- How to shave your face/legs**
- How to propagate a plant**
- How to tie a tie**
- How to tie a fly**

A book, written by you (or with help if you don't fancy yourself a writer!) can easily be passed down and down again. You might choose to write an autobiography or memoir, and there is a difference.

# BOOKS

## Chapter 4

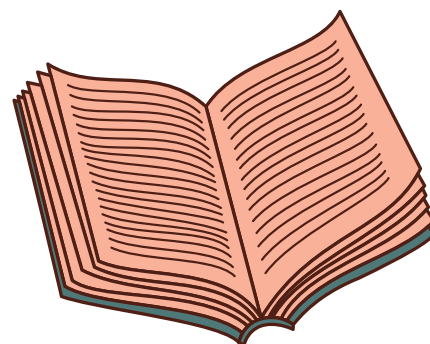
### AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIR

An autobiography is a factual history of your life, written by you (whereas a biography is also a history of your life but written by someone else). You can go back as far as you want, tell as many stories as you'd like. Generally it's like a timeline of life events, with key information such as when and where you were born, your education, career, achievements, births, deaths and challenges faced.

As this is written by you, your "slant" on things will come through (a biography written by someone else might be more objective, but if this is something you are leaving for loved ones, it makes sense for it to be subjective as what you are offering is essentially a piece of yourself). That said, autobiographies provide information, and maybe explanation of the "why's" of a situation.

"End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain-curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass, and then you see it."

*J.R.R. TOLKIEN*



A memoir, on the other hand, offers reflection, a look inside, rather than just how the story unfolds. You might prefer to write a memoir. This is also written by you, but focuses more on a specific event or events, and how the event(s) affected you. A memoir generally only offers chronological tidbits if they pertain to the story. This type of work can be filled with emotion, really allowing the reader to connect with you and your human experiences, whether they are shared or not. It is much more telling and personal, rather than just a timeline.

You can choose to include photos or not, but of course some photos add to the piece by offering visuals to support the work. Check online for companies that offer beautiful printed books of your stories and photos. You just submit your work to them and they do the rest. The result is a professionally printed and bound book. These company's website offer software for creating your book, as well as tips and tricks for putting it all together. Even some drugstores that have a photographic department offer these services, but for a lower cost.



Photos, recipes, hand-written notes and various keepsakes can be combined within the pages of scrapbooks



# SCRAPBOOKS\*DIARIES\*JOURNALS

Back to Helen for a moment. When she was born, the occasion was marked by a simple journal entry: "Helen born". Some of us provide a bit more detail! My own grandmother kept diaries for 25 years, and my cousins lovingly and painstakingly typed out each and every passage and then had them put into spiral books so we could each have a copy. It is fascinating to read what her day-to-day life was like way back when, and how very different it is compared to how we live today! I don't make 3 or 4 pies in a day, and in the same afternoon wash and wax the floors, and go to the neighbour's for cocktails after preparing dinner for my husband and kids. These amazing, detailed records also give me glimpses into what my mom and aunt were like growing up, and how grandma felt being a mama and wife. This legacy, this treasured gift that she left for her grandchildren, that was made into a whole new wonderful gift put together by my cousins, is close to my heart. I will pass it down to my children and hopefully they will pass it down to theirs. And to Grandma I say: thank you, thank you, thank you.

# DOING IT TOGETHER

## Chapter 5

There's nothing to say a creative legacy project needs to be tackled alone. In fact, enlisting help from loved ones can be rewarding for you and them. It gives us not only time to share stories, but also affords us another chance to say things we might want to say, for others to do the same and also to ask questions and express fears. It can be a wonderful bonding project, where you and your loved ones can learn about each other and hopefully develop new appreciation for each other.

You might find these moments spent together present the perfect opportunity to express the things you want to make sure are said, and begin end-of-life discussions. Don't wait.

"Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming "Wow! What a Ride!"

HUNTER S. THOMPSON, JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

**L-R:** My mother-in-law, Helen and I in Hawaii





# BONUS: WRITING PROMPTS

1. Create a personal mission statement.
2. What three major things have happened that changed your life?
3. What is your philosophy on life?
4. Who has been the most influential?
5. What is something you know now that you wish you had known earlier in life?
6. What are the most important qualities a person can have?
7. What is the best advice you have ever received?
8. Do you have any regrets?
9. What is something about yourself that your loved ones may not already know?
10. What do you admire about your loved ones? What makes you proud? What do you hope for them?
11. Introduce yourself to future generations. What life advice do you have to offer?
12. What have you done that you are proud of yourself for?
13. What was it like when your children were born? When you met your spouse? When your parents died? How did these events shape you?
14. What challenges have you gone through in life? What did you learn?
15. Think about the adjectives that describe you, or whom you aspire to be. Journal about things you can do to live these truths every day.





# WRITING PROMPTS

16. Who have you counted on to be there for you?

17. Do you have any fears for your family or future generations?

18. Would you like to make any predictions?

19. Do you have advice for future generations regarding the craziness of 2020, if similar things were happen to them?

20. What have you learned about people in general and about yourself during this time?

21. What things are going on in today's world that you hope carry on? What things do you hope will not?

22. What do you believe happens when we die?

23. What are your religious or spiritual beliefs?

24. What is the scariest thing that has happened to you or your loved ones? What was the outcome? How did you get through it? How did it affect you?

25. What were the happiest moments of your life so far? What made them so special?



Online courses coming soon!  
<https://www.sacreddeparture.com>

