



Legacy Tips & Tools Annual

~ 2010 ~

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Welcome To The First Annual Legacy Tips & Tools Online Magazine!

In his endorsement of my book *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies*, Dr. Weil wrote, "The ethical will is a wonderful gift to leave to your family at the end of your life, but ... its main importance is what it can give you in the midst of life."

To introduce you to legacy writing, let's unpack his words:

First, what is an ethical will? The ethical will is an ancient tradition in which fathers instruct their sons about their culture's ethical values.

Why did I change the name to a "spiritual-ethical will?" To indicate that this ancient patriarchal practice has a spiritual as well as an ethical dimension. My goal is to make this tool accessible to moderns and especially women (whose voices have been silenced in today's culture and by believing we have nothing noteworthy to preserve for the future).

Why do I describe this modern spiritual practice as "writing legacy letters?" Many are intimidated by the term "will." But we can all write a letter (even in this day of easily deleted emails and text messages). Legacy letters vary in length from a one-page letter to a series of letters, or a lengthier document.

How are these letters important to future generations? Legacy letters nourish the future with our words: to fill the gaps in their history, to connect them to their roots, and to provide them with values and blessings.

Dr. Weil says: "Its main importance is what it gives [us] in the midst of life?" In his book, *Healthy Aging*, he writes that the ethical will is pertinent to those of us "concerned with making sense of our lives and the fact of our aging." What I've found over time and in diverse situations guiding people to write their legacy letters is that the process addresses deep universal needs that we may not even be aware we have. They include: the need to be connected (belonging); the need to be known, heard, and remembered; the need to make a difference (make a contribution); the need to be needed; the need to bless and be blessed; and to celebrate life.

I believe it both a **privilege and a responsibility** to record, communicate, and preserve your family and community histories, document the legacies you received, and the experiences you've lived that make you who you are. Preserving your wisdom and your love establishes a link in the chain of generations, and passes on a legacy for those of tomorrow's world.

May all your legacies be blessings,

Rachael Freed

About Rachael Freed



Rachael Freed, founder of Life Legacies and Senior Fellow at the University of Minnesota's Center for Spirituality and Healing, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist. An inspirational lecturer and workshop facilitator, she provides legacy-related programs and training for health care, philanthropic and religious organizations, for public and non-profit corporations, and for diverse groups of individuals experiencing life transitions.

Freed is the author of *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies: Passing Your Beliefs and Blessings to Future Generations* and *The Women's Legacies Workbook for the Busy Woman: A Step-by-Step Guide for Writing a Spiritual-Ethical Will in 2 Hours or Less*. Her writing about Legacy appears regularly on DrWeil.com, The Huffington Post-Living, and LegacyConnect.com. She is currently working on: *Harvesting the Wisdom of Our Lives: An Intergenerational Legacy Guide for Seniors and Their Families*.

Freed has trained cardiac professionals internationally to support cardiac families. Her book and journal, *Heartmates: A Guide for the Spouse and Family of the Heart Patient* and *The Heartmates Journal: A Companion for Partners of People with Serious Illness*, are the only resources available to support the emotional and spiritual recovery of families coping with heart disease. For more information, visit Heartmates.

For more information, visit Life Legacies or contact Rachael at Rachael@life-legacies.com.

Reflection:

Getting back to basics, the 1, 2, 3 of legacy writing, is a refreshing and hopeful way to begin a **new year** and a **new decade**. It's more than a time to reflect on this past year's and decade's experiences (before they fade away as mere memories), to see if there are any particular **lessons** our experiences taught us that we can share as **legacies**.

From "At the End of the Year"

... We bless this year for all we learned,
For all we loved and lost
And for the quiet way it brought us
Nearer to our invisible destination.

~ John O'Donohue

Let's start at the beginning. Such reflection and writing (an ethical will or a legacy letter) lets us transmit what matters to us, the lessons that are most pertinent, to be **our gift to future generations**. When I reflect and write legacy letters to my loved ones, I deepen acceptance of my own limitations and my tolerance of others'. I find humor in much of what I have been so intense about and taken so seriously. I feel gratitude for the blessings I've received, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Beyond this, five additional **needs are addressed** as we write our legacy letters. They include our needs to: * belong, * be known, * be remembered, * bless and be blessed, and to * have our lives make a difference.

At the new year we feel the urgency of time, realizing that life is fragile, that we do not control the number of our days. We need to document our legacies to **help shape this unfolding new world**. Seniors especially feel the responsibility to transmit and preserve stories, learning and love as **each year and each decade seem to pass more quickly than the last**.

Both the calendar and our relationships are instrumental in shaping who we are. Because it may be difficult to know how and where to start, here is a step-by-step guide to help you begin:

Practice:

1. Bring your cup of tea or mug of coffee and your favorite pen and paper to your favorite, peaceful place to sit. Set your timer, reflecting and writing each time for no more than 15 minutes.
2. Take some time to review the past decade -- a hard one for many of us, and one that was often filled with national and personal loss and grief. The changes we've experienced this decade have been monumental.



Some were hopeful and exciting; others left us feeling lost, frightened, and powerless.

3. Make a list of at least three happenings this decade that impacted you personally.
4. For each of these three happenings, consider what exactly the impact was, what you learned from it, and how you see the impact and its lesson have changed you as you go forward.
5. Choose one of events and someone in your life you'd like to share this with (the other two events can be saved for future legacy letters).
6. The first part of the letter describes or tells the story of the event or happening to provide and preserve a context.
7. Then write a paragraph to express and explain how that event made an impact on you personally.
8. Next share with your reader(s) what you learned from the event and how it has changed *you*, your present and future.
9. Then write about your hope that your insight will be a gift to your reader.
10. Close your letter with a relevant blessing to your readers for *their* future.

As 2010 begins,
may your writing be a source
of insight and wisdom for you,
and a gift of blessing for those
who come after you,

~ Rachael Freed

www.Life-Legacies.com



Reflection:

Legacy writing addresses our need to belong, to be known, to be remembered, to have our lives make a difference, to know we're blessed and to bless others, and to celebrate life. Writing to bless others with our love is as healing for us as it will be a cherished gift of those who receive your **legacy love-letter**.

It's no surprise as the short dark days of winter begin yielding to more light, that we begin musing about spring, "the time when a young person's fancy turns to love." People of **every age** are warmed by hopeful thoughts

**"Love
is so much larger than anything
I can conceive.
It may be the element that keeps
the stars in the firmament."
- Maya Angelou**

of spring's births and buds, and our hearts open to express our love, to write "legacy love-letters."

These expressions of love are much needed in this world, slaking the thirst of those around us:

**"Age does not protect you from love.
But love, to some extent,
protects you from age."**

**- The French actress,
Jeanne Moreau**

family, friends, community. Yet for many of us expressing love directly may feel awkward, even foolish, in this sophisticated age. **Expressing love** is neither simple nor easy, but it may be the most important practice of our lives.

Knowing in our hearts that we love, we often believe that others know it without our taking the responsibility of expressing it.

**"For one human being to love another;
that is perhaps the most difficult
of all our tasks, the ultimate,
the last test and proof,
the work for which all other work is
but preparation."**

- Rainer Maria Rilke

"Love" is a verb, an action.

Love is complex. Built of compassion and caring, it can be conditional or unconditional, physical, romantic, platonic, passionate, and is different in each of our relationships. There's self-love, love for other people and species, love of nature and the earth,

**"Love and compassion
are necessities, not luxuries.
Without them,
humanity cannot survive."**

- The Dalai Lama

and love of God. Giving voice to and writing our love is **courageous** and **tangible**. By writing legacy love-letters, your love will be preserved, read and reread, nurtures our loved ones and lets them know they are cherished.

Practice:

1. Begin with an exploration of love as you see, understand, experience it in yourself and the world around you. I suggest free-flowing journaling for no more than 15 minutes for as many days as you find something to write.
2. Then make a list of people and things you love.
3. Choose one person on your list, and write a letter to her/him expressing your love with genuine recognition, appreciation, caring, and validation of your experience of them. You may want to thank them for their love too. You may choose to conclude your letter with a blessing for this beloved. (Again, write your letter in no more than 15 minutes)
4. Return to your journal, and write for five minutes about your experience writing; (I call this "Process Notes").
5. Mail or give this "legacy love-letter" to the person to whom it was written at an appropriate time, perhaps as a Valentine's Day gift.



Steps 3-5 can be repeated; expressing love as part of your legacy is significant for any special occasion (birthday/anniversary/graduation, etc.) and at all times of the year.

**May your writing be blessed
with love,
and may all your legacies be
blessings,**

~ Rachael Freed



Reflection:

Fast on the heels of receiving our names, our first **legacy** (that plays a role of shaping who we will become), comes another, perhaps even more influential: **time**.

In her powerful new book, *Time*, Eva Hoffman writes about how she was **severed from time** as she experienced it growing up in Communist Eastern Europe when her family emigrated. She found herself "on the other side of a great divide" where time informed being and consciousness entirely differently.

It was the first time I'd ever considered that *our perception of time is not universal*, but that how we understand time profoundly impacts who we are and values we unconsciously pass on to future generations. Consider common statements used in our culture: "Time is money;" "Time marches on;" "Time is precious; don't waste it;" "Time flies." We're less attuned to: "Take time to smell the roses."

"...our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness."
- Vladimir Nabokov

We do our best to **control time**: We manipulate time seasonally, changing our clocks to live by daylight savings time or standard time. We count as progress reducing the hours in the "work week." We sacrifice sacred time, the Sabbath, to have stores open for convenient shopping and for our economy.

We fly through time zones medicating our bodies to reduce "jet lag" when we tamper with our bodies' natural relationship with time.

Religions create their own calendars, marking time by the sun, the moon, or a combination, and celebrate the new year at inexplicable times from the perspective of our Gregorian calendar. Some traditions are concerned with "the end of times;" others teach letting go of the past and future to experience the eternal present - the essence of mindfulness.

Cultures respond to time constraints differently: consider our mores about punctuality and our judgments about those less concerned about being "on time." (Do you prefer train travel in Italy or Germany?) I recommend reading Peter Hessler's *fascinating Oracle Bones* to learn about time as experienced by the Chinese.

"Attitudes to time can have far-reaching implications for the ways we live, for forms of sensibility, and for the tenor and textures of experience."

- Eva Hoffman

Practice:

1. Begin with an **exploration about time**, using Eva Hoffman's challenge "to become more intimate with time, to ask how it shapes our lives, and what may be our happiest dealings with it; and also to discover--insofar as possible--what philosophical fortification may be gained against its invisible laws and inevitable passage." I suggest free-

flowing journaling for no more than 15 minutes for as many days as you find something to write on the topic.



2. Then read through your journal to **extract your "time stories,"**

stories that taught you something important.

3. Write a letter to someone to share your story and your learning about the **impact of time** on your life. (Again, write your letter in no more than 15 minutes.)

4. Return to your journal, and write for five minutes about your experience writing. (I call this "Process Notes.")

5. Mail or give this "letter" to the person to whom it was written at an appropriate time, perhaps when time is having an important impact on their life.

Steps 3-5 can be repeated as your awareness and learning about the legacy of time increases.

May you take time to reflect and write about time, and may all your legacy letters be cherished by your readers,

~ Rachael Freed



Reflection:

It's April - birds have returned from their winter migration and are chattering about the eggs they protect in their nests. Spring is a time of birth and budding for all of nature. For us it's a time of **rebirth, regeneration, reorientation.**

"The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their rightful names"
- Chinese Proverb

As we reflect on our beginnings we are reminded of the very first legacy we received: our names. **Names function as a compass** connecting us to our families and communities from generation to generation. Stories about how and why we were given our names give substance and significance to our names.

"A name is like the beginning of the ball of thread that will lead you through the labyrinth [of your life's journey]."
- Geraldine Brooks

Our **names** are a legacy we take for granted. We seldom realize their **significance to our sense of belonging.** When names are taken or lost as a political tool of disconnection, the historical wounds affect people for generations. Think about the **trauma of name loss** for African-American slaves whose family names were **supplanted** by the names of their 'owners'; Native Americans whose tribal names were **replaced** with 'Christian' names; Jews in the Holocaust whose names were **excised** and

subsequently identified by numbers carved into their forearms; most recently, thousands of minority Sunni Muslims legally change their names annually to protect themselves and their families from recognition, **persecution**, and possible death by the majority Shiites in political power in Iraq.

"Names are our way home. This first legacy connects us to our families, communities, and tribes from generation to generation."

- Rachael Freed

Our **legacy task** this month is to gather and **preserve our names** and the **names of our ancestors.** In earlier times, the family Bible was handed down through the generations. It included a list of family history: names, often accompanied by birth and death dates, information about marriages and their concomitant name changes, often recording back many generations. Few of us have such a treasure today, but we can recreate as much of that history as possible, and **pass it on as a gift to our families** for the future.

Practice:

1. Begin with a **list of names** of your parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. Go back as far as you can. Check with relatives who may have information beyond your own. Your request may open doors to long distant relationships. (Be sure to share your finished list with family members who may not even be aware that they too hunger for this information to connect them back to family.)



2. Write about **your name:** For whom were you named? What is his/her relationship to you? Why were you named after that person? What family stories go with your name? If you've had multiple names, write about them. Write about nicknames you've carried over your lifetime. Write about your feelings about your names.

3. Write about **names you gave** your children: for whom they are named and why; write the stories that go with their names and your naming experiences to give them the history of their names. Sharing about names with children in a legacy letter can be a cherished 'special birthday' gift.

4. Write 'reflection notes' in your journal about your experience writing about names.

May you enjoy collecting and passing down the names of your ancestors, the story of your names, and names of your family as a legacy to the future,

~ Rachael Freed



Reflection:

In previous years LegacyTips&Tools concentrated on various legacy strategies to make the May Hallmark holiday, **Mothers Day**, substantive and meaningful.

In May 2008 we celebrated our mothers with legacy **letters of appreciation**. In 2007 we reflected on **mothering as action**, something women do whether they have children or not. Women 'mother' children, aging parents, pets, gardens, trees, the whole earth. May 2006 was a memory bouquet. We gifted our mothers writing our **favorite stories** about them.

**As women, our
mothers remain not
just with us,
but in us.
Our connection with
mothers is stronger
than memory,
a kind of permeation
that
goes beyond
anything verbal.
- Edna O'Brien**

This year, 2010, our topic for May comes from the Biblical commandment: **to honor and revere our mothers** (and fathers). The Bible neither defines the words 'honor' and 'revere' nor does it explain how we are to do it. So in 2010 each of us, with our unique and complicated relationships with our mothers, has the privilege and the obligation to articulate our honoring and revering in a legacy letter.

Because the mother-daughter relationship is complex, often fraught with conflict and struggle, we are challenged to **speak our truth** and simultaneously step

into the shoes of our mothers. **Experiencing compassion** is possible as we step out of our old story and reflect on the relationship from a fresh perspective, a perspective of honoring and revering. Healing the life-giving intergenerational relationship is possible even if our mothers are no longer with us physically.

This may be a **dry lecture**, though one we all agree about. It would be good to honor and revere our mothers, but we're all busy, have barely time in our busy schedules to pick up a Mother's Day card. We think ... I'll file this away until some magical day in the future when I'll have time for such an exercise.

May I share with you excerpts from **real letters** that honored and revered mothers in ways that freed and healed the writers? Here's one:

Dear Mom, I think one of the most horrific events a parent could experience is outliving their children, so if that happens, I want you to know what legacy you have handed down to me.... Perseverance is a trait that I witnessed as you trudged through an abusive marriage that was filled with violence, blatant disrespect, infidelity and fear.

As I fell into the depths of drug addiction, your unconditional love never wavered and you are still my biggest fan. You have given me hope that love can conquer all things and that change is possible in even the darkest of moments.... I am sharing this with you because I don't ever want to wake up and have you not know how much I appreciate your love and guidance.

Other excerpts:

"Only when I became a mother myself did I understand how much you must have suffered in separating from me. Did you know you were dying?"

"When my little sister arrived [I was already a middle child] with health issues, I resented that most of your time and energy was given to her.... Even though we had differences, thank you for your gifts of love and freedom."

"An important thing I learned from you was that conforming was not essential....you planted a seed of independent thinking in me which waited quietly until it was safe to grow. I appreciate that you, the busiest mother, gave her daughter gifts for living."

"The past few years have been so emotional. I have often missed you and just wanted to pick up the phone and call you....I learned how important friends are by knowing all your friends who loved you. Thank you, thank you for being my Mom."

"I would like to go forward in our relationship more honestly. That means I need to allow you to be yourself, to have human weaknesses.... Perhaps we can continue to share our feminine wisdom and melt away the accumulated anger and resentment. Know that I love you today and always."

Practice:

1. Reflect on your relationship with your mother. Make a list of her strengths and limitations as you experience her.
2. Take time to 'step into her shoes' and see life and your relationship from her perspective.
3. Set aside 15-30 minutes to write her a legacy letter that honors and reveres her, maintaining your integrity and honesty.
4. Celebrate Mothers' Day, May 9.

May you deepen your integrity, honesty, and compassion as you honor and revere your mother.

Rachael Freed

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Reflection:

Last month I had the opportunity to facilitate an all-day legacy writing workshop in East Lansing, Michigan. There gathered 57 women and three brave men to reflect about their lives and values to communicate and preserve them for future generations.

We began the day **writing haikus to focus** our personal intention and purpose for the day. Haikus, short poems developed by the Japanese many centuries ago, may at first glance feel strangely different from our more diffuse, stream-of-consciousness style of writing.

古池や 蛙飛込む 水の音
fu-ru-i-ke ya (5)
ka-wa-zu to-bi-ko-mu (7)
mi-zu no o-to (5)

old pond . . .
a frog leaps in
water's sound

The structure of haiku: a poetic form of 3 lines (5 syllables in the first line, 7 syllables in the second, and concluding with 5 syllables in the 3rd and last line), perfected by the poet **Bosho** around the same time that **Benjamin Franklin** was publishing *Poor Richard's Almanac*, as a vehicle for his "wise sayings." Possibly the best known Japanese haiku is Bosho's "old pond."

Introducing the writing exercise, I found myself comparing historic compressed expression to our social networking world. Jack Dorsey created **Twitter** in San Francisco in 2006. What's twitter? It's a **microblogging** vehicle allowing communication in a structure with an outer boundary of 140 letters. The "tweet" has roots in language's history of concise and memorable communication.

The participants in the legacy writing workshop wrote their haikus, the ancient form of tweeting in less than five minutes. They were rich, varied, and deep. Here are samples:

If you think that tweets, aphorisms, or haikus are beyond your capabilities, you may be surprised to know there are more than **100 million users of Twitter** worldwide! Of course all the tweeters are not as **talented** as Ben Franklin, Bosho, or the East Lansing legacy writers, but their **purpose**: to express observations, feelings, wisdom and blessings, concisely and in a memorable style, is the same.

Learn to share my thoughts,
Preserving them for others
Strengthens my life, too.

Freeing my soul
Sharing long gathered wisdom
Baring my hidden heart

Heartsongs play softly
My drummer may not be yours
Grandson I give you my song

Embracing my life
Celebrating my journey
Passing on blessing.

I'm planning to **write daily haikus** this fall to record a life review/legacy journey I'm making: returning after 44 years to Tunisia where I served in the Peace Corps. The purpose of the trip is to reclaim memories and **to reflect** about a precious two year adventure, one of the transformational periods of my life, in which I gave much, received more, and learned about life beyond my Midwestern perceptions ... and also birthed my first child.

Practice:

This month's legacy writing is a challenge to experiment with and explore condensed writing. In a month full of celebrations and holidays (Fathers Day, and family life-cycle celebrations: commencements, graduations, weddings, and anniversaries) I invite you to send your own inspirational wise sayings and/or intergenerational blessings in ancient or modern form.

1. Begin by reflecting about the message you wish to send.
2. Spend no more than 5 minutes drafting a haiku, tweet or 'wise saying.'
3. Set it aside for at least 24 hours.
4. Return to your message to play with rearranging the words, edit, and make sure that the message you wish to convey is expressed. (I'm giving my great-niece a haiku with a copy of *The Synonym Finder* as a high school graduation gift - appropriate for a family of wordsmiths and an incoming university freshman.)
5. Find or make your own beautiful card to send or accompany a gift suitable to the occasion.

May your family cherish your
lovingly-chosen words as part of your
legacy to them,
~ Rachael Freed



Reflection:

Susan Griffin's astonishing and perception changing *A Chorus of Stones* clarifies the unavoidable and stark reality of how **world events shape our personal values and lives.**

I get it that in a moment everything I love and value can disappear in a cyclone, an earthquake, a tornado, a flood or fire. But Griffin's book is not about natural disasters. It is a powerful treatise illuminating the **interplay between private suffering and public tragedy**, the violence in families and in world wars. She writes:

“I have come to believe that
every life bears in some way on every other.
The motion of cause and effect is like
the motion of a wave in water, continuous...
so that all consequences,
whether we know them or not,
are intimately embedded in our experience.”

An example from my own life: It's **November, 1963**. I'm a young married woman, an English teacher in a New Jersey high school. It's 4th period, and I head to the teachers' lounge for coffee, thinking about the weekend ahead. The room is deserted except for a history teacher who tells me that President Kennedy has been shot. We leave the building to listen to her car radio. We return silently after hearing Walter Cronkite announce to the nation that the President is dead, assassinated in Dallas.

Etched into my psyche is my experience, neither unusual nor particularly dramatic -- **everyone** of a certain age **remembers** where they were when they heard about JFK's assassination, just as we are still telling the story of where we were on **9-11**, the day the World Trade Center was attacked.

“Perhaps we are like
stones;
our own history and the
history of the world
embedded in us....”

- Susan Griffin

But Griffin's point is that the **impact of world events radically transforms our personal lives**, and thus **our legacies** that impact future generations.

I couldn't agree more. Little did I know that the heartbreak of a nation beginning November 22, 1963, would **change the course of my life.**

In my personal grief, I vowed that I would act on Kennedy's inspiring words, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” I volunteered to **serve in the Peace Corps**. I spent two years in Tunisia, where I taught English and worked in a family planning project.

As in Robert Frost's poem, “The Road Not Taken,” I don't know who I might have been had JFK not died. But the naive Midwestern young wife and high school English teacher who I was - became a planetary citizen, a participant in a larger world, valuing peace and learning about diversity firsthand by living and working in a culture very different from our own.

Practice:

Exploring ways your private life has been shaped by public events:

1. **Make a list** of significant public events. Begin with the events of your own family: immigration, marriages, births, divorces, diseases, abuses, alcoholism, job losses, deaths. Then expand your list to world events: industrialization, scientific and technologic development, elections, wars, revolutions, civil rights, recessions and depressions ... you get the idea.

2. With recognition about the intertwined relationship between public events and private lives, **reflect and journal** about how world events have influenced *your* life and *your* values.

3. **Write a legacy letter** (or several, about different events and for different people) sharing your insights and vignettes of your life path's twists and turns...a letter communicating who you are and what you value relating your life to the larger world of which we are all integral parts.

(Editing Tip! Ask yourself: has what I have written accurately conveyed how my stories and the larger human story blend? Have I communicated my truth and deep human yearning for belonging and integrity, as well as how we are each related to the fate of others.)

**May your reflections and writings
expand your consciousness and
compassion
for yourself and for all others
inhabiting our planet.**

~ Rachael Freed



Reflection:

**Is clutter company,
comfort, distraction or sloth?
No matter - let go!**

This haiku, written in my journal this morning, originated from thoughts I've recently had that were less introspective, and more wondering about **my legacy**.

I've imagined dying suddenly, and watching from somewhere as my two grown children wander through the **morass of 'stuff':** paper, books, clothes. Not only is it an unfair burden to leave them, but it makes a statement about me. I ask myself, "How will they know the junk from the stuff with meaning? What might they conclude about their mother who holds on too long and too much? I imagine their resentment left to go through "so much stuff" because I didn't take the responsibility to leave life expressing what I say I value: **beauty, clarity, serenity.**

"I know that letting go leaves space for more to come. That's true of our relationship ... to all things Cleaning house—both literally and as a metaphor for life—is a great way to hit the Refresh button. When you look at your relationship to things—and the energy they contain—ask yourself if they promote joy, beauty, and usefulness, or are they burdensome?"

- Oprah

The last time I decluttered, about eight years ago, was when I sold my house and opted for life in a condominium. The **first things I let go of** were forty-two volumes of journals I'd written and shelved - about four volumes a year. I had literally to drag two large trash bags to the recycling. When I returned to the house, it felt like it was floating. I'd had no idea how heavy it was to shelve all that content.

The other thing I recall from that move was my daughter-in-law's reaction when she came over to help me pack. I had already taped closed a large carton; trying to move it and finding it very heavy, she asked what was in it. I responded, "Vases." She looked horrified. She asked me how many vases I had. My response: somewhere around thirty. She suggested I open the box and remove about half to add to the garage sale. We repacked the rest -- still many more than I needed.

"Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."
- William Morris

Well, I'm not moving anywhere now, but I owe it to myself to lighten my load, **to let go of the too much** that I have, and to live in

order and serenity. As a bonus, **my legacy of stuff** that I leave my children to make decisions about: what to keep and what to go into my last garage sale will be easier (hoping my daughter-in-law will help them).

Maybe the last five paragraphs were too much clutter and you'd have gotten the message for your own legacy by reading my haiku! (see above)

Practice:

Exploring ways your life is complicated by clutter:

1. Walk through each room in your home and compile a list of items or categories of things you determine to be clutter - those things you can let go of.

2. Reflect and journal your thoughts and feelings about your clutter of 'stuff.' Consider possible motives for holding on to things beyond their usefulness or beauty. (e.g. company, comfort, distraction, sloth) Imagine the value to you of letting go. Here for your consideration is Anais Nin on the subject:

"To change skins, evolve into new cycles, I feel one has to learn to discard. If one changes internally, one should not continue to live with the same objects. They reflect one's mind and the psyche of yesterday. I throw away what has no dynamic, living use."

3. Rather than write a legacy letter this month, commit to whatever level of decluttering fits for you and make it happen - let go! Reflect and journal about your experience and learning as you make an effort to simplify.

Action Tips!

1. Check out the declutter expert online for practical help. <www.flylady.net>

2. OHIO short for Only Handle Items Once.

**May your reflections, writing
and action expand your internal
spaciousness
and allow you to pass it on
to those you love.**

~ Rachael Freed



Reflection:

I'm preparing a personal **legacy journey**: to a land of friends, teachers and students, the heady aroma of jasmine blossoms, the musty odor of camels, the sound of the muezzin calling Muslims to prayer, harissa, blood oranges, safsaris, souks chocked full with all the necessities of life, the awe of ancient ruins - Roman baths, a coliseum, mosaics, and aqueducts. These are the memories, sounds, sights, smells and way of life of a people who welcomed me to **Tunisia** where I served in the **Peace Corps** 44 years ago.

"We
[22 family members from all over the world]
traveled to the Polish shtetl [village] of our
ancestors:
not as tourists, not as travelers,
but as pilgrims."
~ Carla Vogel,
Certified Legacy Facilitator and
Professional Storyteller

beauty and rich variety of cultures, art, food, and nature..."

All of us may not be able to travel to reclaim our roots, re-experience a transformative period in our lives, or capture family memories to pass on to future generations.

"The only journey is the one within." ~ Ranier Maria Rilke

The next best thing is to use the magic of **media** technology to call up any place on the planet in seconds. We can see images and maps, have history and traditions recounted and verified, the **next best thing to being there**. Traveling via technology, you still may recapture your experience and be inspired to review the period, place, and life-learnings to share as part of your history and legacy.

Preparation: If you can manage a journey in real time, use technology to jog memories, clarify purpose, and prioritize what matters most to see and do before you leave.

Preservation: Consider the myriad of possibilities to **capture, gather** and **remember** experience during the journey: Will you take still photos, shoot video, or write in a journal? ...Perhaps some combination of all three.

Some prefer fewer photos so the trip doesn't devolve into, 'what's the perfect shot?' limiting the journey as proscribed by what can be seen through a camera lens.

Perhaps a daily postcard with a memory or feeling recorded on the back while enjoying a coffee on a cafe's plaza is enough to capture the experience each day. Maybe it's sending a tweet or a photo accompanied by some words to Facebook as you rest weary feet and back in one of the wifi cafes that dot the landscape worldwide. Or maybe it's an old-fashioned journal inviting your reflections and feelings at the end of each day. Whatever your choice, think about how you can best capture your experience to recall

A section in *Women's Lives*, *Women's Legacies*, describes the purposes of such journeys:

"Many women travel not just for fun and relaxation, but as a way of **linking the present to the past**; they might trace their family histories and stand in the very places where their feminine ancestors once lived. Others travel to learn about the world, to **experience global citizenship**, to appreciate the

after you return home for yourself and for future generations. The **anticipation** and preparation is part of the legacy of your journey, whether your **purpose** is to **reconnect** with your roots, to know and **accept** your past, or **to open** to a new perspective about your life's meaning.

Staying open and present: At a certain age, we realize that **savoring the journey** in the moment with our older and wiser eyes may be most important.

It is good to have an end to journey towards;
but it is the journey that matters in the end.
~ Ursula K. Le Guin

Remember, legacy is a vital part of a life well-lived. Whether you travel by foot or by heart, **honor** the journey as an important part of your life & legacy.

Practice:

1. Begin with a list of places you've visited or sojourned, whether countries far away or the town next door.
2. Choose one place to write about. Gather photos, ethnic music, travel mementos, and use the web to evoke and enhance your memories.
3. What did you find deliciously different and comfortably common? What personal strengths and challenges did you discover about yourself on this journey?
4. Consider a return journey and how you can plan to make it happen.
5. Write a legacy letter to share your experience, story, learning from your journey.

"The journey is the reward."
~ Chinese Proverb

~ Rachael Freed



**Look for Legacy Tips&Tools
in your email in November
after my return.**

Legacy Tips & Tools

A Basic Legacy Review

October - 2008, Redux 2010

© 2010 Rachael Freed

"Each one of us has the possibility, probability, and privilege to be a rainbow in someone's cloud."

- Maya Angelou

Reflection:

In recent months Legacy Tips and Tools has focused its reflections and writing on specific legacy topics. During that time many new legacy writers have joined our elist, and may not have been exposed to the basic principles of legacy writing. Other writers have been writing for a long time and a review to refresh your commitment to legacy writing may be long overdo.

What I've tried to define as basic principles of legacy and legacy writing include the following:

- 1 Legacy writing is different from memoir, spiritual autobiography, genealogy/family history or scrapbooking in intention, not necessarily in content.
2. The intention (purpose) of legacy writing is to communicate and preserve your values, stories, and blessings for future generations.

Dr. Andrew Weil suggested in his endorsement of *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies* that, "The ethical will is a wonderful gift to leave to your family at the end of your life, but ... its main importance is what it can give you in the midst of life."

So why is that? Because as legacy writing "links you to your history, gives purpose to your daily life, and communicates your legacies to those you love" it also nourishes you. Legacy writing addresses universal human needs that include: the need to belong, to be known and remembered; the need to make a difference, to bless and be blessed, and to Celebrate Life.

After working with legacy over time and in many situations and circumstances, I find the term "ethical will" or even the softer "spiritual-ethical will" more difficult to get a

handle on and feel confident about writing than "legacy letters."

This has led to **principles of practice** that include:

1. Use the format of a letter (far less threatening than writing a document. We can all write a letter.) In this day of swiftly deleted emails and the horrible spelling of text messaging, there is something special, even sacred, about receiving a letter in a loved one's handwriting.
2. Time yourself, writing for 15 minutes, and no more. The limit will help you focus your intention and keep the idea of legacy writing from being an overwhelming task. (You can always go back to rework and amend your draft. Most writers find that the discipline of timed writing almost magically results in expression directly from the heart, a powerful message to your loved one.
3. As Marianne Williamson suggested, "we are all mothers of the planet" making legacy writing a privilege and responsibility for all of us. Legacy letters may be written to a family member, friend, colleague, co-worker, or community.
4. Use holidays and transitions as appropriate moments to write to those you care about.
5. Write "process notes" for no more than five (5) minutes directly after writing a legacy letter. Process notes are the mental counterpoint to your heartfelt letter. They provide a fresh perspective about the experience of writing the letter ... an invaluable reflection and opportunity to learn about yourself.

NEXT MONTH:

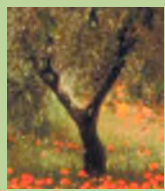
JOIN US FOR EXAMPLES AND AN OVERVIEW OF TOPICS AND OCCASIONS FOR WRITING LEGACY LETTERS.

May your reflection and legacy writing be a gift to yourself today and to those you love tomorrow.

Rachael Freed

www.WomensLegacies.com

Sign up for free Monthly Legacy Tips&Tools online
www.WomensLegacies.com/tips.htm



Reflection: (Practice follows on pages 2-3)

From a legacy perspective, we tell our stories for ourselves and as a gift to future generations.

How does telling our stories **benefit us**? We need to know and express our own stories. Difficulties arise not because we have a story, perhaps a very sad or painful story, but because we become attached to our stories & make them an essential part of our very selves. Telling our stories is not an end in itself, but to release ourselves from them, to evolve and grow beyond them. We tell our stories **to transform** ourselves – to learn about our history and tell our experiences to transcend them – to use our stories to make a difference in our world – to broaden our perspective **to see** further than – **to act** beyond a story that may have imprisoned or enslaved us – **to live** more of our spiritual & earthly potential.

“We cannot wish old feelings away nor do spiritual exercises for overcoming them until we have woven a healing story that transforms our previous life’s experience and gives meaning to whatever pain we have endured.”

~ Joan Borysenko

How does telling our stories **benefit future generations**? Stories connect the past and present to the future. Our stories and our learning from them honors and respects our ancestors and us. They can awaken future generations to their potential. They model a way to use their stories to release themselves as they connect to their history and to our values.

It felt strange for there to be so much light at the end of the dark corridor I remembered. I reached its end, turned right to knock on the door – there was no door – just a gaping opening – the light was not from my fondly remembered courtyard. There was nothing there!

What had been was in 2010 ... an open field filled with three-foot high weeds, some plastic bottles and other trash. The outer walls were somewhat intact surrounding this weedy lot and on them were markings where outer wall arches had once been. Not a tile, not a remnant of plaster sculpture, not a piece of marble. There were no remains.

I stood amidst the weeds – **stunned** – paralyzed into complete silence and disbelief. My memory held all these years, my beloved **Ben Mustapha home** of beauty and place of welcome to so many **was gone**. Collapsing into the arms of my fellow volunteer, friend and traveler, I wept.

Still trying to integrate the loss, grateful for the few pictures from 44 years ago, grateful for the memories yet in my heart and head, **I write**.

When I returned home, my closest friend listened to my story. She said it reminded her of what concentration camp survivors must have experienced when they returned home after WWII to find their old reality gone, just a memory. This **jolted me** to begin to put my experience into perspective. My **heart opened** beyond myself. I felt compassion as I considered the many millions over centuries who have lost their homes and way of life because of wars and catastrophes as recent as those in Darfur, in the Gulf after Katrina, in Port au Prince after the earthquake, from tsunamis and floods all over the planet.

I still feel my **personal disappointment**, but it now seems small – 14 rue Ben Mustapha was my home of the past. There are other traditional homes still in existence. I have a home, and I can preserve and **share my memories by writing**. My life is not significantly changed by this loss.

And what have I gained by sharing my story? – The ability to see beyond it. To notice that **I’m not the only one** who experiences disappointment and loss. I feel deeper compassion for those sustaining great losses. My respect for human resiliency has grown as has my commitment to help people who must start over completely after devastating loss: **rebuilding lives, homes, and hope**.

A story from my recent journey:

The first morning after arriving in Tunis, October 1, 2010, I and my two sister travelers ventured deep into the **Tunis medina** [ancient walled city] to visit my home there some 44 years ago. [New Peace Corps volunteers, my then husband and I ‘inherited’ this palace of a 19th century minister of the bey of Tunis from Peace Corps architects who’d lived there during their service. In our first week in Tunisia, September of 1966, with great naïveté and some trepidation, we made our way into the hills of the romantic blue and white Mediterranean coastal town, Sidi Bou Zaid, to negotiate a lease for this house with its owner, a shrewd old patriarch, Sidi Bahri. We were served tea, our new language skills were tested, and the rent was agreed upon – exactly what the old man asked for.]

“Stories -- and their telling -- create identity, relation to self, other, and land.”
~ Carol Ferris

The house: traditionally built – completely invisible from the street except for its tall, arched doorway and decorative door – its rooms designed on three sides of an interior courtyard – its arched plaster ceilings lavishly sculpted in plaster (like the Alhambra in Granada) and hung with ornate crystal chandeliers – the lower half of the interior walls encrusted with tiles set in colorful geometric patterns.

Its thirty square foot **marble paved courtyard** had its own well – walls tile decorated – windows to the interior rooms protected and ornamented in painted metal grillwork. This was a space made for entertaining and displaying its ancient Muslim architectural tradition!

Our **first ‘reception’** was a coffee and croissant breakfast for 80-100 on Thanksgiving morning of 1966. Peace Corps volunteers from Massachusetts, California, and those working in Tunis were invited along with the American Ambassador and other American officials to meet and greet young Senator Ted Kennedy and John Tunney, the boxer’s son and House of Representatives member, as they traveled North Africa.

Back from memory to my 2010 journey: A taxi deposited us on Bab Souika. We walked a short distance on rue des Arcs and turned onto my narrow unpaved street, rue Ben Mustapha. I found the huge door at #14 and entered its dark corridor that led to our door. My heart was racing – my long anticipated visit laced with fears: that the house had been left uncared for and had fallen to ruin, that no one would be at home to answer the door, that my long forgotten language skills would not be persuasive enough for us to be allowed in, or that the house in reality would not be as I remembered it.

Legacy Tips&Tools, November 2010 page 2
Legacy: Telling Our Story
Preserving Something Lost Through Legacy Writing

“Release...is experienced rather than ‘gotten,’ received rather than attained.

And so it does not work to tell one’s story in order to ‘attain’ release;

yet Release does emerge from the practice of telling one’s story....

The deeper release...is of *our* attachment to the chains that bind us.”

~ Ernest Kurtz & Katherine Ketcham

from *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*



Pictures
14 rue Ben Mustapha
Tunis, Tunisia
1966 - 1968

Practice:

You have many stories and perhaps one powerful story that you think best defines you and your life.

1. Write one of those stories. Take time to describe it vividly, with all its sensations and feelings. Take time to recall and express your thoughts about it.
2. Let the story sit for a day or a few days.
3. Go back to it, reread it, embellish it if more has come, and then write about your experience writing it and reading it after time.
4. Be alert for ways you can extricate yourself from it in order to learn from it and free yourself going forward.
5. Use the story and what you learned to write a legacy letter to someone you care about who may enjoy and benefit from it in the future.

May your stories enliven your memories;
may writing them free you from their bondage

~ *Rachael Freed*



Reflection:

Is it any wonder that in December, the darkest month of all, we **yearn for light**? The physical reality of long nights and shortened days reverberates through us affecting our emotional and spiritual states as well.

"The midwinter holidays originate in pagan rites to **seduce the sun** back from the underworld," Judith Levine pointed out in a *Washington Post* article. How can we moderns, legacy writers, bring in that light?

"Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light."

~ Dr. Albert Schweitzer

Before we can experience the light, we need to reflect about or through the darkness.

For each of us, that darkness connotes something different.

Sometimes **the darkness comes from outside**. All of us capitulate to the distractions of our world and our times. The pressures from our culture to keep moving with ever-increasing speed and disregard for the past covers with dark the sweetness of our memories, our history, the meaningful moments in our relationships. It takes courage, intention, and will to combat the power of that momentum: **to pause to recover that light**.

"There are moments when I feel like giving up or giving in, but I soon rally again and do my duty as I see it: to keep the spark of life inside me ablaze."

~ Etty Hillesum, Diarist
Died in Auschwitz, 1943

Sometimes **the darkness comes from within**: It may be "unfinished business" that keeps us filled with regret, sadness or fear. Or it may be old shame, or a family secret long held. Expressing it can **lighten** our psychic load, and opens a path to the light. It takes courage and discipline to look straight on at that darkness **to reclaim our light**.

In her *Pocketful of Miracles*, Joan Borysenko inspires us to that courage suggesting that the time of darkness literally turns to an expansion of the light in December, helping each of us individually to take on the task of **transforming** our own **darkness to light**. "December is the month in which all forces of nature are aligned to help us give birth to the Light within. Midwinter has cast a spell over the land, and all of nature sleeps....Solstice, Hanukah and Christmas beckon us to gather round and witness the birth of love within one another."

Practice:

There are two directions to take your legacy writing toward the light. The first is sweet memories long forgotten in the pace of daily life. The second is about darkness imprisoned within. Write about either or both. Increase the light as you share your words with those you love.

"There are two ways of spreading light - to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it"

~ Edith Wharton

1. Take yourself back in your memory to a time when you were very young. Recall a sweet event that includes an ancestor (parent or grandparent) that has been long forgotten. It may be a December holiday happening that connects you to him or her, or a value of theirs that still means something to you. Choose something that you want preserved and remembered because it adds light to your life and those you love.

2. Take a deep breath and turn the light on some "unfinished business" that you've protected in the dark. Spend 15-30 minutes in free-form writing about it. Once you've written it into the light, you may experience some insight or a fresh perspective.

"To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle"

~ Walt Whitman

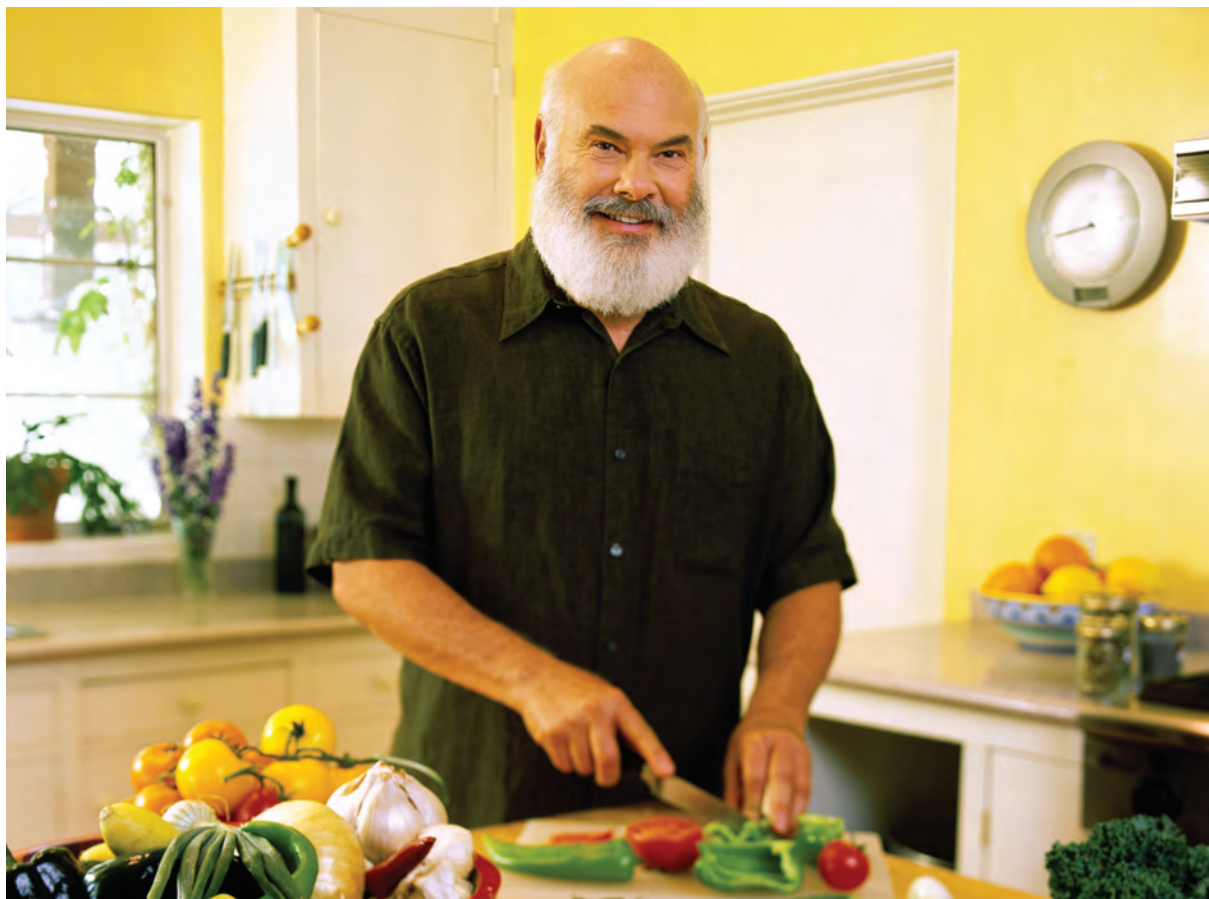
3. You may choose to share the light you gleaned from either or both your reflections in a legacy letter. If not, enjoy the new light space within.

May your reflections and writing add light in this season for you and those you love.

~ Rachael Freed



Dr. Weil on HEALTHY AGING



A premium website and online companion to Dr. Weil's bestselling book, *Healthy Aging: A Lifelong Guide to Your Physical and Spiritual Well-Being*, DrWeilOnHealthyAging.com gives members:

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