

# Life Review

## How Would You Like to be Remembered?

We all want to know that our lives have meaning and serve a purpose. Taking the time to reflect on our life and share our stories with others helps us and our family and friends to know what we perceive as meaningful about our lives. Reflecting on these stories individually and sharing them with those we care about is our legacy.

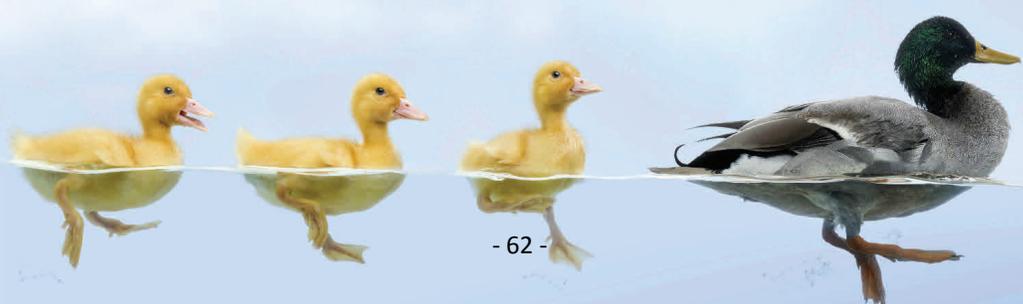
There are many creative ways to communicate your legacy. We've provided you with some questions to contemplate as you reflect upon your life. These questions may help you or your family and friends as you prepare your eulogy, obituary, epitaph, memoirs, or short stories shared during your memorial ceremony.

You may also consider sharing these stories with your family and friends while you are alive, either during a conversation or in writing, or you may wish to arrange for these stories to be given to special people after your death, perhaps during significant milestones in their lives. Some people choose to record their stories by video or by voice recorder, or by sharing their legacy in a photo album with captions or short stories.

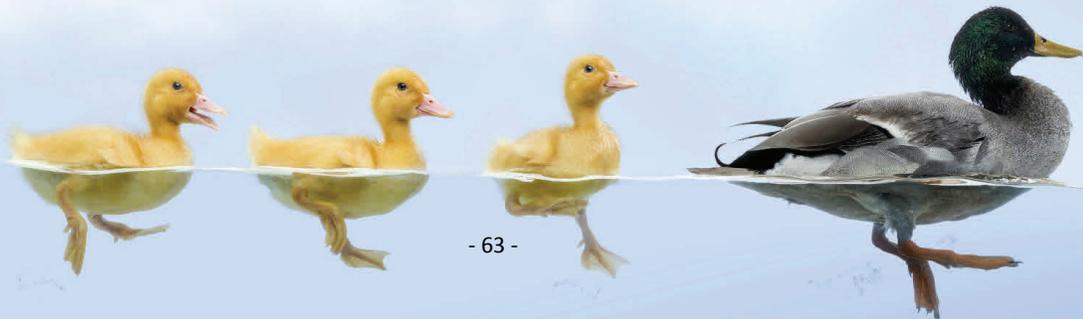
Whatever your chosen method of communication, taking the time to reflect upon your life and having a conversation with your family and friends can help create peace of mind for yourself and for your family members.

## Life Review Questions to Contemplate

On the following pages, we've listed some questions for you to consider as you contemplate your life review and reflect upon your personal values and memories. We understand that some of the questions may not be suitable for you. We have created this list of questions for you to pick and choose from based on what resonates with you and what you deem appropriate.



- ◆ How do I want to be remembered?
- ◆ What would I say is my strength?
- ◆ What makes me feel alive?
- ◆ What gives my life purpose & meaning?
- ◆ Who are my heroes? Why?
- ◆ What am I most proud of?
- ◆ How do I see myself now?
- ◆ What would I say are the strengths of my family, friends, and community?
- ◆ What do I value most about my friends?
- ◆ Are there specific things that I would like my family/friends to know about me?
- ◆ What/who is the greatest love of my life?
- ◆ What/who is the greatest teacher of my life?
- ◆ What is the quality that I most admire in a man?
- ◆ What is the quality that I most admire in a woman?
- ◆ What is the quality that I most admire in an elder?
- ◆ What is the quality that I most admire in a child?
- ◆ What is my idea of happiness?
- ◆ When/where was I/am I the happiest?
- ◆ At what time and place have I been most comfortable in my own skin?
- ◆ Is there something that I feel still needs to be said to my family and friends, or something that I would like to say again?
- ◆ If I had one day to say that I am sorry to someone before I died, who would I call?
- ◆ What people, places, things have inspired me?
- ◆ Do I have a particular religious or spiritual belief? If yes, what is my story of my religion or spirituality?
- ◆ What are the spiritual highlights of my life?
- ◆ How do I feel about dying and death?
- ◆ What is my greatest fear?
- ◆ If I had three months left to live, what would I give myself permission to do? Choose one for each month.
- ◆ If I were going to live my life over again, what would I do differently? What would I do the same?
- ◆ What is my greatest regret?
- ◆ What is my favorite occupation?
- ◆ Who is my favorite writer?
- ◆ What is my most treasured possession?
- ◆ What is my motto?
- ◆ What do I think happens to me after I leave this life?
- ◆ What do I value most about my physical and mental well-being?
- ◆ Who haven't I talked with in more than one year that I would want to talk with before I die?
- ◆ Are there things I wish I had done or said?
- ◆ What is my favourite story about me?
- ◆ What is one thing nobody knows about me?
- ◆ What have I done to heal my spirit?
- ◆ What have I done to show love to myself?



# Life Review

If I could live my life again, I would spend less time doing...

I would spend more time doing....

Behaviours or attitudes that held me back:

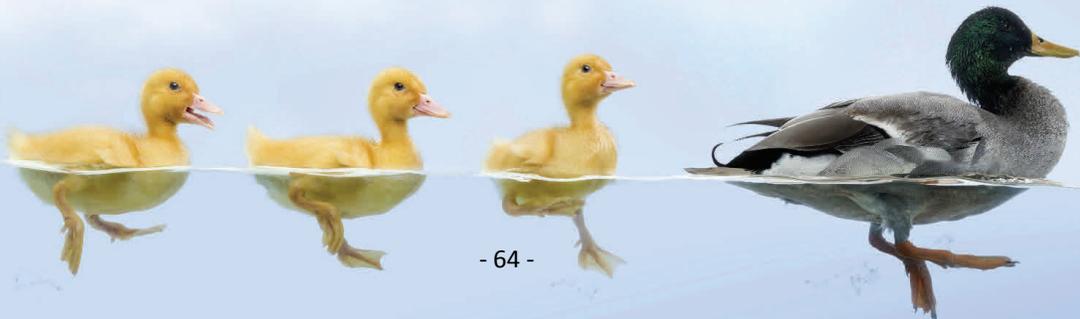
Skills or attitudes that helped me grow:

What I hope people remember about me:

What I hope for my family:

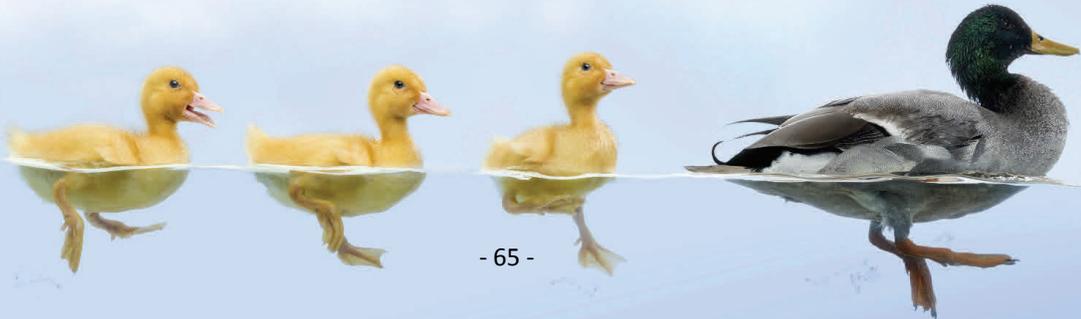
Expectations/hopes/fears I have for society:

Things I want to share with others:



**How I Want to Be Remembered:**

A large, empty white rectangular area intended for writing a response to the question above.



# Writing My Obituary

## What do you Want your Obituary to Say?

An obituary usually includes a short description of the person's life as well as information about their upcoming memorial ceremony. When considering your own obituary, you may wish to write a more detailed memoir of your life. Perhaps you may wish to have your story published as a news article before or after your death. You may even consider recording yourself reading it, using a voice recorder or camera, or self-publish your obituary in a booklet with photographs of your life.

You may choose to write your own obituary or arrange to have someone write it for you. The [My Story: The Facts](#) section of this guide will take you through the steps of recording the biographical details that you may want included in your obituary. You may also consider taking a look at some of the contemplative questions found on the [Life Review](#) page to help you get started.

There has been a recent trend towards creating unique and very personal obituaries. A well written obituary can be a true reflection of a life well lived, and can inspire laughter, tears and thanksgiving in those that read it after you are gone. We have included a standard obituary template below, to help you get started. If you would like to write something a bit more creative, try searching the internet for unique obituaries. You will find some pretty interesting examples that may inspire you.

***\*Please note that for ease of writing, a male pronoun has been used for this template. Feel free to change the details to suit your situation.***

[Full name (including any nicknames)], [age of the deceased], of [city and province where he/she passed away], passed away on [date of death], [cause of death (optional)].

The funeral service will be held at [time and date of funeral] at [place of funeral]. [Name of minister] of [name of church] will be officiating. Visitation will be held at [time and date of wake] at [name of church or funeral home]. Burial will follow the funeral at [name of cemetery] at [time of burial]. Funeral arrangements are being handled by [name of funeral home].

[First name] was born in [place of birth] on [date of birth]. [He or she] graduated from [name of high school] and continued on to receive a [type of degree] from [name of school].

[First name] was married to [spouse's name] on [wedding date]; they were married [number of years].

[First name] worked as a [type of job] for [name of company] for [number of years worked]. [He/she] enjoyed [hobbies and interests]. [He/she] was also actively involved in [any charities or organizations]. His family will always remember him as [special family memories of deceased].

[First name] is survived by [spouse, grandchildren, parents, brothers and sisters, children, nieces and nephews], and other family and friends.

[First name] is preceded in death by [names of family that passed away before].

In lieu of flowers memorial donations may be given to [name and location to send donations]. The family of [full name] wishes to thank [names of any significant organizations].

# Letters to Family and Friends

Are there people to whom you would want to write a letter or record a message, perhaps marked for opening at a future time?

Is there something that you want your family and friends to know or remember about you, or stories that you feel still need to be shared with those you care about?

Do you have any special memories or information about your friends or family history that you would like to record?

If you answered **yes** to any of these questions, you may wish to consider writing a letter to those closest to you. Consider special times with parents, siblings, grandparents, significant other, children, grandchildren, aunts, extended family, friends and caregivers. Perhaps there is someone with whom you've spent little time or whom you've never even met but who has left a positive and lasting impact on your life. You may consider writing to them as well.

## How to Write a Farewell Letter to Your Family and Friends

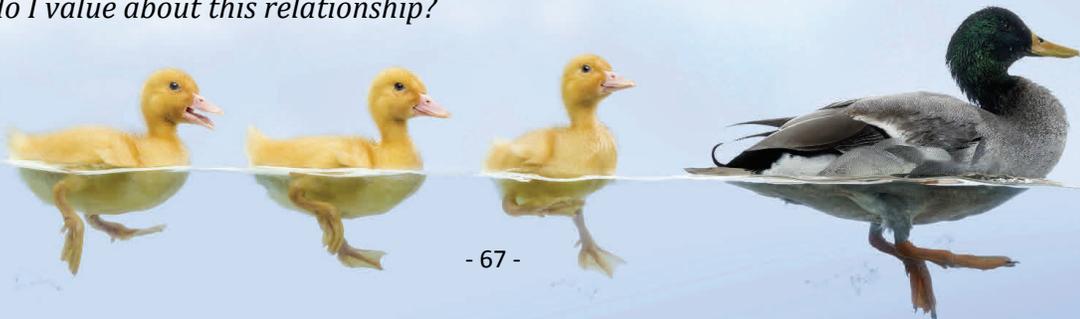
**So how does one begin?** For many people, thinking about writing a farewell letter to those you care about can seem like a daunting task, perhaps even a bit strange. While you may have written your share of birthday and thank you cards for others, you may not have considered writing a letter for your family and friends before your death or theirs.

There are many ways to communicate your message. Consider who you will write to, what you would like to say, as well as when and how you would like to send the letter. Your message can be addressed to several people or it could be written with just one person in mind. It can be short or detailed, composed as a song or a poem, narrated by you in a video presentation, arranged as a collage of words and images, or even organized into a photo album with short captions and stories – it's completely up to you.

This is your story for you to tell in your own way. While we've designed this section with letter writing in mind, you can use the prompts we've provided here to help you share your story in a way that suits your needs and abilities.

As you prepare to share your story, consider these questions:

- ◆ *How has this person positively contributed to my life?*
- ◆ *What have I learned because of this relationship?*
- ◆ *What do I value about this relationship?*



- ◆ *What am I grateful for about this relationship?*
- ◆ *What are some of the memories that I have when I think about our times together, times apart, holidays, and traditions?*
- ◆ *What are my hopes and dreams for this person?*
- ◆ *How would I like this person to remember me?*

### **Some Steps To Consider As You Write Your Letter...**

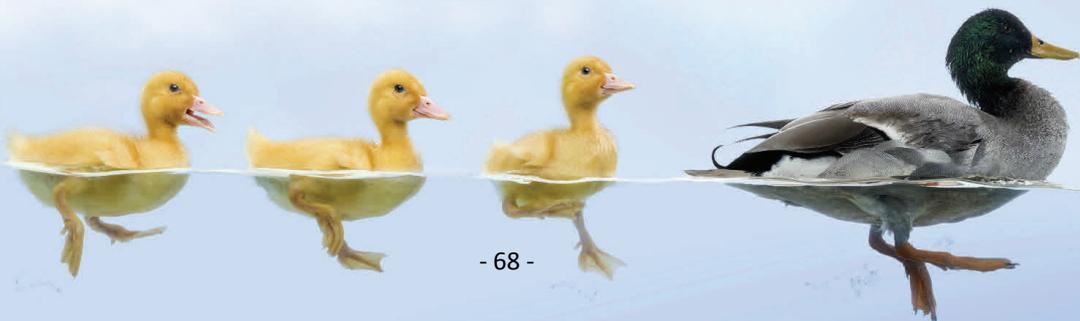
While we've provided some prompts to help you get started, there is no set "way" for how to write a letter. Let your heart and creativity guide you. Feel free to skip a step or skip all of them. This is your story and only you can choose the path that you need to take to tell it.

You may have an idea that requires some extra help from someone else. Reach out to your family and friends or a professional for support. Should you choose to research letters written at the end of life, you will find an assortment of beautifully written and touching letters available online that may inspire you as you consider how to write your own letter.

If it's possible, find a quiet and peaceful place to write your letter. Allow yourself the time and space to collect your thoughts and create your letter at a pace that feels comfortable for you. Maybe you will choose to write your letter in one short sitting. Maybe it will take a few sessions, or maybe it will take you months or years to write. Give yourself the freedom to create in a way that honours your needs. Remember to save your drafts as you go along and store them in a safe place.

### **Step 1: Setting Your Intentions**

As you begin to write your letter, think about why you feel drawn to write a letter to this person. Jotting down your thoughts on a separate piece of paper may help you to move through this process. You may consider beginning the letter by sharing your reasons for writing. If you feel less drawn to words, you may also consider working with pictures to process your feelings, either by drawing your feelings as images or by cutting out images from a magazine that resonate with you and pasting them onto a board. Is your intention to express love, admiration, regret, forgiveness, an apology, or to resolve unfinished business? Is your intention to tell the story of your life, to pass on your family history, to pass on wisdom, or to share your spiritual memoirs? Step 1 helps you to become clear about your purpose for writing your letter.



## Step 2: Reflecting On Memories

What memories do you have of this person? Does a particular moment come to mind that you would like to share? Were there moments you wished you'd been able to share with someone but never had the chance? If you have a lot of memories to sort out, you could list some of your memories on a separate sheet of paper and choose a few items that you feel drawn to share. Write a few words or sentences about these moments you shared together, or ones you wish you had been able to share. Here are some examples:

"I remember when I was a young child baking bread with you in your kitchen..."

"I remember when I found out I was going to have you in my life..."

"I remember the moment I fell in love with you..."

"Remember that night when we were kids and we stayed up really late talking about..."

"Remember that day when you listened to me talk about ... while I was crying and feeling scared. That was a really important moment for me."

"Looking back, I wish I was there for you on your wedding day and when your children were young..."

"I wish I had been there for you when you really needed me..."

## Step 3: How These Memories Make You Feel...

Take some time to think about how you felt during that moment and how you feel now. Did you feel joyful, touched, satisfied, or a different emotion? What needs were met or not met? Did you feel a sense of connection, nurturance, support, acknowledgement, belonging, closeness, compassion, or love? What about you changed? What did you learn about yourself? Maybe it helped direct you to a certain path in life or to realize something important about yourself. Here are some examples:

"You listened to what I needed to say, and made me feel at home with you."

"You supported me when I was scared and reminded me that even in difficult moments you would be right by my side."

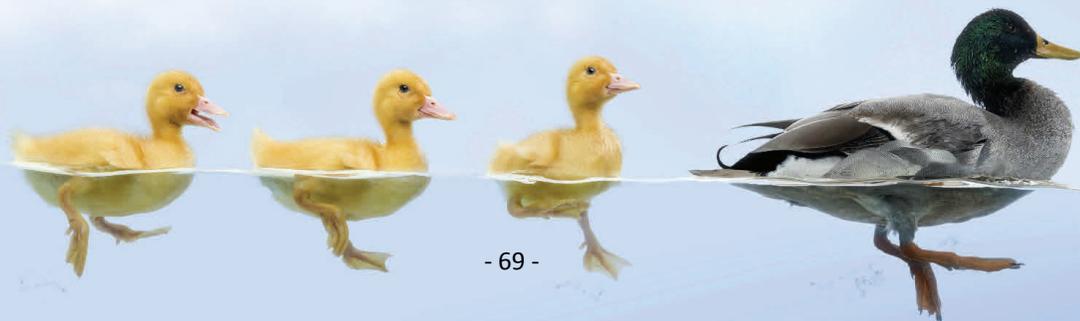
"You gave my life so much meaning. Thank you."

"You gave me the enthusiasm and support that I needed to find my direction in life."

"I'm so proud of you."

"I'm sorry."

By going through this process of recalling memories and exploring what they mean to you, it will help you clarify the important things you want this person to know.



#### Step 4: Bringing Your Letter to a Close

Even though a letter cannot say everything that you may wish to express to those you care about, taking the time to send a letter sends a message that the recipient matters to you. It acknowledges your love, recalls memories and evokes emotion in your reader, perhaps more than you'll ever know. It's a piece of your legacy and a way that your family and friends can feel close to you long after you're gone.

You may consider ending your letter by sharing important things that have been left unexpressed. Perhaps you may want to list qualities that you admire about this person and things they have taught you about yourself. For example, "I will always remember your sparkling eyes and warm spirit", "You have always believed in me", "You have always been there to cheer me on", "You are my best friend." Or you may want to end with something humorous and affectionate such as an inside joke or a favourite saying or phrase they will recognize.

#### Step 5: Reflecting on Feelings and Needs

You may wish to reflect on what feelings arise in you while writing the letter and upon completing it. How do you feel? What needs of yours have been met? A need for spiritual and/or creative expression? A need for connection? A need for authentic communication? A need to matter and to belong? If you need help identifying your feelings and needs, you can visit the [Center for Non-Violent Communication](#) website for additional ideas to consider.

#### Step 6: Making Arrangements to Send Your Letter

After your letter has been written, how do you wish to deliver the letter and when will you send it? Perhaps you may consider giving the letter to the recipient while you are both still alive, either in person, by sending it in the mail, or by recording yourself reading it to them. You may even consider making arrangements to have the letter sent to them at a future date, perhaps during a significant milestone, or as a series of letters sent on important dates after your death. Perhaps you wish to read your letter to your family during some kind of ritual that is significant for you. If you make arrangements to have the letter sent at a future date, ensure that you communicate with someone you trust regarding your intentions and let that person know where you've stored your letter(s). We suggest that you store your documents in one safe location or as few locations as possible to ensure that they are easy to locate. The [My Story: The Facts](#) section of this guide provides a place to record who you've written letters to and your arrangements for sending the letters after your death.

If you are interested in creating a photo album of your life with captions and stories, there are many online Canadian photo book companies that can help you organize your pictures into a cohesive bound booklet. They will professionally print your photo albums, complete with captions and short stories and ship them directly to you or your family members.

Here are some Canadian photo book companies that may interest you:

- ◆ [Photobook Canada](#)
- ◆ [Snapfish](#)
- ◆ [Elephoto](#)
- ◆ [My Picture Book](#)
- ◆ [Treasure Book](#)