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SAMPLE LEGACY LETTERS

From *Ethical Wills: Words from the Jewish HEART* by Dr. Eric L. Weiner (2015):

- My last wish for successors and my prayer to my children: Take good care of your mother, beautify her old age, sweeten her bitter life, heal her broken heart; do not weep for me—on the contrary, remember me with joy; and the main thing—live together in peace, bear no hatred for each other, help one another in bad times, think on occasion of other members of the family, pity the poor, and when circumstances permit, pay my debts, if there be any. Children, bear with honor my heard-earned Jewish name and may God in Heaven sustain you ever.
- After my death you should always be together, be healthy and happy. Share equally all the money that is left for you.
- My wish is for each of you to accomplish something in life. Follow your dreams, never give up, and be happy along the way.
- I believe I've been open about the things that I've valued over time; I've tried to live my values on a daily basis. I trust that I succeeded much more often than I've failed. I now turn to the harder job of leaving to my children a set of principles that they should consider in living their own lives and in helping to shape the lives of their children. Do the right thing as often as you can.
- I plan to leave you with something of spiritual and material value that will help you become responsible and caring members of society. The world is yours to explore and in that exploring, you will come to understand and appreciate your place in the big picture of life. A loving heart, positive values, strong character, and a social conscience are far more important than material wealth.
- I would love to see you become responsible members of the community and philanthropists. To that end, I have set up a donor-advised fund as the main conduit for our philanthropic interest. This fund will give you and possibly your children the ability to make grants to worthy causes. I want portability so that you can direct grants to your own communities, as well as to national and international interests.
- We would like to pass on to our family and the community our commitment of caring, understanding, and giving. Our family's foundation is built on Jewish tradition passed on from our families before us. It is our hope that our children and their children will learn and grow from these traditions and preserve and perpetuate our heritage.

- Enrich your mind, exercise your body, and feed your spirit with music, art, meaningful work, friends, and helping the community at large.
- I hope that everyone can learn to get along. Whatever will happen will happen; one must learn to accept that and not control it. Forgive whatever misunderstandings or differences there are. Not all people can be the same. I hope, especially for my family, to get along in life and make a living for themselves.

From “Ethical Wills: The Gift of a Heart,” by Robert G. Alexander (Journal of Practical Estate Planning, April-May 2006):

- Have integrity. Your “yes” should mean yes; your “no” should mean no. Be the person you say you are. When you peel a banana, have you ever gotten anything other than a banana? That is what integrity is—being on the inside who you say you are on the outside. It is not always easy, but it is always valuable.

I have a great life. I have had fun, and I see my life as an adventure. Humor ought to be a large part of every person’s day. Every day there is a new mountain to climb. Some adventures are not much fun and do not turn out the way you want them to, but all of them shape who you are. I always make myself try to do new things because I swore never to get complacent and do only what is comfortable.

In the future I challenge you to always be willing to climb new mountains and greet new adventures. I want to see a future where you are happy, that you make supportive and provocative mates if you marry, attentive parents who challenge any children that come, supportive family to your extended family, and a loyal friend to those you choose to call friends.

- Some standard values that I have basically lived by throughout my life are that I have always believed in honesty and advocated truthfulness. I cherish the family with all my heart. I always felt that I gave of myself to everyone in the family. The satisfaction and gratification that I received in return is in the accomplishments of my children. No father could be as proud as your father is of you. Throughout your lifetime so far, you have more than exceeded my greatest expectations. You continue to move forward in a manner that makes me love you more and more...
- Thank you for allowing me to hold you in my arms and in my spirit for a short, precious time. Thank you for teaching me to be a parent and a better person, allowing me to grow through your growth. Thank you for your innocence that kept me from becoming jaded, gently urging me to look at the world differently, through your eyes. You helped me to see so much more. Thank you for your patience through my struggles to become the best I can be—best parent, best wife, best friend, best person.

Thank you for guiding me through the maze of inconsistency that was my constant nemesis and reminding me of what is really important. You may have taught me more than I have taught you...

I pray that some of my words found their way from my heart through sometimes deaf ears and a stubborn brain to your heart because that was where I tried to send them. My whole life of parenting I have struggled with an inner dichotomy of what is truly important...

Life is more about how you treat people and how you feel about yourself, learning how to be gentle with your own shortcomings, while striving to become better. Following the path to change who you have been for who you want to become can be difficult in the beginning, filled with potholes and setbacks. Just remember to be gentle and loving with yourself along the way. What you first attempt to practice will become second nature in time. So, celebrate your small steps in the beginning and know that everyone stumbles occasionally! And even though I may never come to terms with my dilemma, I pray that you might find that answer for yourself, in your lifetime.

I truly believe that each generation is meant to be wiser than the one before—an emotional, personal evolutionary process based on the experiences of those who have gone before and the new generation's conscious choice to follow certain beliefs, depart from others, and explore new ones. My sincerest hope is that you will use the foundation we have tried to provide and then take off to build a structure that has never been imagined before—uniquely you—that will blow the world's socks off!