

EXAMPLE LETTER

Dear Anna,

I have never been shy of saying how much I love you. I hope those words always mean something to you. This letter is my way of expressing the depth and meaning of my love for you.

One thing I've always believed is that there are no accidents in life. A short while ago I met someone who told me about his life's work: encouraging fathers to write what he calls a "Legacy Letter" to his children. The timing of our meeting was no coincidence. I had been searching for a way to express many thoughts and feelings to you, but I was struggling to find the right approach. This seems like a great start.

I am so blessed to have your PopPop as my father. Sure, he made mistakes – but I never had to wonder if he loved me – even when I fell short. To this day he still teaches me valuable lessons and shares his wisdom. I have never once doubted he'd be there for me. It's so important that you know the same thing – that you can depend on me to love and support you throughout your life – unconditionally.

My favorite advice from PopPop is a little saying he has – his secret to happiness:

"Always have someone to love, something to do and something to look forward to."

What does that mean? Love – it can be your family, a husband or wife, your children or a friend. Something to do – have a passion. A career, a hobby, helping people. Something to look forward to – it can be as simple as a planned get together with a friend, a project or a trip. But it should be something that helps you get through a rough day, or a slump, or a time that just doesn't seem so exciting.

It's great advice. I wouldn't change a thing about it. I hope to build upon it for you and add my own lessons and wisdom. Someday you'll be able to do the same for your children.

Just as important as me sharing important lessons for your life, I want you to know that you have taught me so much. We never stop learning. And perhaps the best lessons in life are the ones that children give their parents.

Some of the hardest lessons too. There were times when I fell short as your father, or as your mom's partner. There will be more. Regrets are a difficult part of life because there is nothing you can do to change them. But you can grow from them.

I am sorry for the times where I lost my temper and raised my voice at you. It's not the best way to confront a problem and it's certainly not the best way to show my love for you. I have worked to better communicate when I'm upset with you about something, and I've tried to learn what is most effective for you. Because you are an individual with a unique heart and mind.

I am sorry I didn't play with you more. I love playing with you. Sometimes I get wrapped up in things that aren't really that important – like watching TV, or cleaning the garage, or doing

errands. The good thing is it's never too late to spend more time together, and that goes forever. Whether you're 12 or 22 or 42 – I'll never not want to spend time with my Anna.

I am sorry for not always treating your mom the way I'd want your life partner to treat you. I can be biting with my words and say things that hurt, even if I don't mean it. It's called "fighting dirty". I love mom and regret those moments when I failed at disagreeing respectfully and communicating constructively. At times I tend to look for someone else to blame when things don't go my way, instead of looking in the mirror or realizing in the moment that nobody's to blame.

I regret not becoming more financially responsible at a younger age. I'll tell you more about that later in the letter when I provide advice on growing up and living your life.

"I love you. I'm proud of you. I believe in you."

Sounds simple, right? I think the "I love you part" is simple. I loved you from the moment we locked eyes about 30-seconds after you were born, and I'll love you just as deeply for eternity – unconditionally. That means through ups and downs, wins and losses, triumphs and failures. That love never changes. I hope you've always known that.

The other two are a little more complicated because there may have been times when you've wondered if I'm proud of you or if I believe in you. The answer is that I'm always proud of you and I have never stopped believing in you. I'm proud of YOU, not your accomplishments. Proud to have you as my daughter simply for who you are. I believe in you – to live the life you want to live. That is important. That is success. And I believe in your heart and your soul to find peace and purpose in your very special life.

There were two moments after your transplant where I said to myself, "I don't know how we're going to get through this." One night at the hospital you screamed and screamed that you would not take a shower because the water stung your wounds so badly, and the process took so long and you were so, so tired. The other time was when your feeding tube came out for like the tenth time and you dreaded the process of having it reinserted. Despite the pain and suffering, you endured and conquered a challenge that very few people would be able to overcome. YOU taught me about never giving up, about fighting for tomorrow. A small example of why it's so easy to believe in you. I will always believe in you, Anna.

You've taught me so much about being a parent, appreciating life and being resilient (RESILIENT is probably my favorite word). I hope to share some wisdom with you that you can use to help guide your life, while holding on to the traits that make you unique and special.

"The sooner you accept that life is not always fair, the happier you'll be."

You should know this better than anyone. For three years you battled – through chemo, a transplant, isolation, thousands of medications and pain. It wasn't fair. It sucked. But you

never asked, "Why me?". Use that. Forever. Remember how you overcame such a tough time in your life and apply that to whatever problems you face. Nothing will ever be that hard. Feeling sorry for yourself accomplishes nothing. Know that you can stare an unfair moment right in the eye, accept it, and move forward.

"Live in the moment, plan for your future."

One of the most important ingredients of happiness is peace. Peace is found by being present, in the moment, and feeling connected to yourself, those around you and God. It's much easier said than done.

Technology can have an enormous impact on living in the moment. We're all guilty of becoming buried in our phones. Without lecturing you, I'll say: set limits for yourself and intentionally put your device away to find peace every day. Here's an example of a moment where I found complete peace and happiness in being present:

Remember our first trip to Disneyland? The whole trip was memorable and fantastic. But the one memory I have that is as vivid as the day it happened was our ride on the teacups in Alice's Wonderland. It was just me and you. The sun was shining through the trees. We sat across from each other, laughing and smiling ear to ear. It's a precious snapshot of a day where we wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else, with anybody else. Live each day like that and I promise you'll be happy.

Money can be a source of tremendous stress in your life. You can never be too young to learn about financial responsibility. The most important advice I have when it comes to money is to not spend what you don't have. I made the mistake of opening a credit card when I was in college and it took me years to catch up. Save a little every month. You'll be surprised how quickly it adds up and how grateful you'll be to have that nest egg when life's big moments come-a-knockin'. Learn how to manage your money. I'm always available to teach you about finances, if you want to learn from someone who learned the hard way.

"Travel, explore and be spontaneous."

Some of life's happiest moments come from the unplanned moments. Traveling and exploring the world provide some of the best surprises you'll experience. Before you were born, Mom and I traveled to Italy for two weeks. We had a general plan, but mostly we wanted to figure it out along the way. I cherish those memories. We shared a sense of adventure, met many interesting people, and learned about a different culture. The spontaneous moments in life provide one of life's most precious gifts – laughter. Mom and I had many laughs on that trip. So why do we save money? For things like trips to Italy! It's a big, interesting world and I encourage you to see as much of it as you can. You'll find yourself refreshed to face the "real world" again and appreciate things that might seem boring. I hope to share the gift of travel alongside you many times over the years.

A valuable way to self-reflect on life's adventures (and the day-to-day mini-adventures) is to write. Writing helps you stay in touch with the YOU of today and the YOU of the past. You'll always be YOU and writing helps those different versions of Anna be good friends. It can be a diary, fiction, letters to friends or your life's biography – but everything you write will be a little piece of your soul on paper... to share with the world, or just yourself. Trust me, it does wonders.

"Be passionate about your career and be passionate about something for yourself."

I can't tell you how lucky I am to do something I love, to earn a living every day. It makes me feel like I've hardly worked a day in my life. To get out of bed ready to attack the day because I have a passion for my job is a wonderful thing. Over the years, what I love about it has changed. I started working in the NFL and I had to pinch myself to be able to create content about a sport I love... and get paid for it! But as the seasons passed by I found what I really love is leading people towards a common goal. It's the relationships I cherish. So, if you love the work you're doing that's great. But if you love the people you see for more than half your day and you're working to accomplish something together... you've hit the jackpot.

Here's the tricky part. No matter how much you love your work, you can't let it run your life. Find a hobby that gives you complete, unplugged happiness. Travel, hiking, yoga, photography, painting... it doesn't matter. It's something that you have a passion for that you can enjoy throughout your entire life.

And just as important as focusing on your own happiness – helping others. I can't tell you how many times in my life I've found myself down or depressed, and the simple act of doing something kind for someone else has shaken me out of my funk. Besides the personal fulfillment helping others gives us, it's our duty as Christians to look out for our fellow human beings the way Christ did.

"Don't let anyone but YOU create your identity."

My dear Anna, all of the feelings and wisdom I've shared with you in this letter are meant to be a sort of compass for you. A guide. But YOU and ONLY YOU can decide which paths in life to take. Don't let anyone – friends, family, social media or a boyfriend – tell you who you should become. Allow your identity to become how you see yourself and how you want to see yourself... not the way others see you.

I'll leave you with one last thought on how to keep it simple when you're searching for answers:

"Live every day guided by passion, love and God... and nothing is impossible, including your own happiness."

Your loving father, always.

Daddy

PS: I cannot believe you're turning 12. Time flies.

EXAMPLE LETTER

Dear Jason,

I don't know when my last day on earth will be, but I don't want that day to come and to have never shared with you the things I'm going to tell you in this letter.

I hope after I'm dead you'll still have this letter to pull out and read it again, and remember me and know how I felt, what I thought and some useful advice.

I've been meaning to write this letter since I had my will and revocable trust set up in 2013 but have put it off, not sure what to write. A few months ago, I heard a presentation at Asbury by a guy who had gotten a letter from his Dad when they were on a family vacation. Unfortunately, his Dad drowned on the vacation. He shared how important that letter from his Dad was to him. He has made it his mission to help other Dads write letters, he calls "Legacy Letters", to their kids so they won't die without having told their kids things they want them to know. I thought I could use the help, so I registered for his class.

First of all, I want to apologize for not being a better dad to you and ask for your forgiveness. I wish I had done better, you deserved more than I gave. I regret I didn't tell you I loved you and how proud I was of you when you were a kid. At the time I couldn't seem to say the words. It was only well into my adulthood and after spending time in therapy, did I realize I still had deep unhealed wounds from my Dad, and I had inadvertently done the same thing to you. I'm so sorry.

I did the best I could, but I know it wasn't good enough and I don't think I shared my love for you in a way that you needed. Verbal communication has always been a weakness for me, I've always struggled at expressing my thoughts and feelings. I regret not verbally communicating more with you. That's my fault not yours.

I regret not teaching you more of the things I learned from my Dad about cars and Do-It-Yourself projects.

The most important thing I want you to take from this letter is to know I love you unconditionally. I have from the day you were born, and I will until the day I die. I'm sorry I didn't tell you I loved you when you were a child, I should have.

We were living in Kingwood when you were old enough to start little league baseball. You wanted to be a catcher and finding you a left-handed glove was a bit challenging, but we did. I was so excited that you were going to play baseball, and the same position I did as a kid. It gave me so much joy to teach you what I had learned, practice with you and watch you play.

I want you to know I'm proud of you. I may have told you at times, but probably not enough. I remember when we came to pick you up after a week at Kamp Kanakuk and watched the award presentations for your teepee you received the "I'm Third" award. Once they explained what it meant: God first, Others second and I'm third, I teared up, I was so proud of you. I was going through a divorce workshop two years after Mom and I divorced, and in our small group we were asked to share about ourselves and our families. After I talked about my sons, the others told me they could see how

proud I was of you.

Once you decided on something you wanted to do or to accomplish you have always been determined and driven, putting in the hard work to make it happen. When you wanted to make the hockey travel team you put in the practice to get better so you would be accepted on the team. I remember you practicing your shots in the garage for hours to get better. There were a few shots that missed the goal and I still have the dents in the laundry room door and sheetrock to remind me. You were energetic then and still are today, never seem to get tired. As you got older you developed into a friendly person, warm and sociable. When you were finishing high school and deciding where to go to college, ultimately choosing Denver University, I thought it was a good fit for you. It was a smaller private school, and you had been accepted into their leadership program. A good decision on their part in my mind. When we dropped you off to start your freshman year, I thought my first born was ready to spread his wings and leave the nest.

In high school and college, you showed how responsible and tactful you were taking on some big jobs, like co-chair of the DU homecoming. One of my favorite and fun trips was in July 2002 when you and James were working at Whitewater Rafting in Glenwood Springs, CO. On your day off the three of us kayaked down the river and hung out and talked. When you were working, on your raft guiding a group down river, I followed you onshore taking pictures. I realized you were becoming a man.

Once you reached adulthood, I saw how adaptable you are. A semester in Durban, then all the places you traveled after finishing at DU and before starting at Georgetown. You amazed me and sometimes worried me with your adventures. Since graduation from Georgetown, you've lived in Niger, for a brief time, Ankara, Bangkok, Afghanistan and now Hong Kong. To say you're adaptable is an understatement. I'm so proud of you.

Whatever your goals in the future, I believe you'll reach them. You've done it your whole life, I've no reason to think any differently now.

Now for some fatherly advice:

I tried to teach you that life is not going to be easy or fair. You don't always get what you want, life will have its highs and lows, but you can get through them. There are things I should have told you when you were younger that may have been helpful as you were growing up. But that ship has already sailed. So, I'll share some things now that I think are important, which I was fortunate to learn from others, or from my own experience. I think they will still have value to you the rest of your life.

Do the best you can, but know that some days 'your best' will be better than other days. I learned this tidbit from one of my therapists.

Be kind and respectful, this may be hard at times, sometimes it is for me.

Life isn't fair, but do what you can to make it so. I'm trying to.

Shit happens beyond your control, accept it, deal with it as best you can. Learn from it and move on to the next thing.

Actions speak louder than words. Since I wasn't that good with words I tried to do and model what I wanted you to do rather than just tell you what I thought you should do. I've always respected someone's actions more than their words.

Stop and smell the roses. My Dad told me this as a young adult when he thought I was working too hard on my career and family responsibilities and not enough fun time. So, to have some fun we did family ski trips. I really had fun on those trips together, getting you involved in a sport that I really love. I watched you get older and more proficient and finally more skillful than me. I did appreciate you and James being nice to me, skiing some runs together and not complaining I was holding you back. But, after a while I was glad to turn you guys loose to ski the blacks and double blacks and meet in the bar at the end of the day.

Money - we all need it to live on, but don't put it above everything else. I do recommend you save for the future. Take full advantage of any matching savings plans your employer may have and don't leave that company until you're vested in their share so you can take it with you when leave. My Dad always told me to pay myself first before spending on anything else, i.e., save.

Be independent, my Dad raised me to do it myself because that's what he'd done. But it's ok to ask for help at times if you need it, we all can use it now and then. I spent many hours in a therapist's office to help me hold it together and keep me sane once I realized I needed help.

It's okay to say NO. I found out the hard way not saying no and not setting my boundaries led me to getting overcommitted, overwhelmed and then resentful.

Tell your kids you love them when they are young and don't stop. I waited too long to tell you. My dad didn't tell me until I was an adult. Unfortunately, I did the same to you.

Take time for your kids, be present in their lives, just showing up matters a lot. My dad was present for me, teaching me to play baseball and coaching some of my teams. He taught me how to use tools, make repairs on cars and things around the house. I tried to be present and spend time with you, teach you some things, and do my best to keep you headed in the right direction.

Take time for your wife, work on your marriage, learn her love language, let her know yours. I had a failed marriage I don't want you following me here.

Help others who need it, they will appreciate it and it will make you feel good too. It does me when I help others in need. I volunteer with the Home Improvement Ministry, a group of men that do odd jobs for the widows of the church that need some help.

Learn to forgive, nobody's perfect. That does not mean you aren't hurt if someone has wronged you, or that it's acceptable for them to do that. This was hard for me. But if you do not forgive and continue to hold a grudge it poisons you, not them. I just accept the fact that the other person may not be capable of anything different, but I forgive them. However, I see no benefit to allowing yourself to get hurt by someone time after time, after time.

Distance yourself from negative people, they'll bring you down, ruin your joy, and it's not healthy for you. Find positive people to surround yourself with.

Enjoy the outdoors, get your kids outdoors, it's good for your health - mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Please limit your kids screen time and social media. Studies are showing too much of it is not good for them.

Pay attention to your health, work at staying healthy and exercise. Eat real food, minimize food like substance (processed food). If you're in poor health, it's harder to help the ones you love. My mother always told me it's better to have your health rather than wealth. I think she was right. Get you PSA checked when you turn 40 years old and get a base line. Then check it periodically as your doctor recommends. Prostate cancer in runs in our family, which puts you at higher risk of getting it. Early detection is key to getting treatment and to keep from dying from it.

My Spiritual Journey: My mother took me and Jerry to Will Rogers Methodist Church as a kids, we lived close to the church. When Carol was born, we needed another bedroom, so we moved to different part of town, but my mother still stayed a member of Will Rogers Methodist and kept taking us there. I went through confirmation classes and was baptized at 12 years old. After the move I attended Edison Jr. High School and made friends there and had no friends in the area where we used to live, which was the area that attended Wilson Junior High. So, when my mother took us for Sunday School class, I would cut class since I had no friends in the class, and go to the worship service in the sanctuary, but she never knew. In college I stopped going to church and I guess became agnostic for a while. Once I married your Mom and we started a family I went back to church so we could raise you in the church, but I can't really say my faith was that strong. We went to the Methodist church in Midland and Kingwood, but when we moved to Tulsa Mom and you knew people at Northside Christian Church, so we joined there, it made no difference to me. After the divorce I didn't go to church but started back after attending a divorce workshop at Christ United Methodist to help me heal from that. My faith was not that strong really, until I got 'gut punched' with a cancer diagnosis. In dealing with cancer I came face to face with my own mortality, but I had a lot of people supporting me and praying for me. That's when my faith grew tremendously, the strongest it's ever been and can say I'm a believer now. You were raised in the church, but it seems that it's not part of your life now. As I just told you, I drifted away too, but I ask that you consider going back and taking the kids. I hope with this letter I can make amends for some of my mistakes and shortcomings as a father, and make it perfectly clear how much I love you, how proud I am of you and confident you will continue to be successful in the future. I don't want to die without having told you these things. I always tried to do the best I could, but now know I didn't have all the skills I needed to be the father I wanted to be.

My desire was for you to grow up to be good man, who I think you are. But I believe God had to have a hand in it too. I couldn't possibly have done that well with my all my flaws and the mistakes I made.

I raised you to be independent and take care of yourself. Now you have a family and life of your own. I would like to stay involved with you, my daughter-in-law, my grandkids and great grandkids if I live long enough to have any. I would like to pass on family stories and any knowledge or wisdom I've learned over these many years, just ask and I'll share it

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with you. If I don't know I'll tell you so. I've never been big on giving unsolicited advice, that's something I got that from my Dad, I'm not sure if that's good or bad.

Plan for the future, but live in the present and enjoy that time. It goes by faster than you realize.

I love you, Always,

Dad

A Legacy Letter is about hope for you and your loved ones. Hope is the belief that a thriving future is possible and you have the power to make it so.