

ered my gaze and tightened my hold on my purse and she said, "Look at me, I'm a human being." I wrote about how that reminded me to be willing to see the humanity in others. That was the story. Then I wrote, "I wish compassionate eyes for you." That was the blessing.

Q: Can you suggest other topics worth tackling?

A: Write a letter that gives the history of your own grandparents as you knew them. Where they came from, the details of their lives that are just gone if you don't record them. Someday your readers will want more than the genealogy of dates and birth, death and marriage certificates.

The hardest letter is your reflection on your own death. Write what you feel about dying, how you want to be remembered. A legacy letter is not a legal document, but I recommend attaching it to your advanced care directive. I've heard many people say, I feel at peace now that I've done this, I've said what [I] had to say.

Q: Any warnings or cautions for letter writers?

A: Remember how easy it is to be blind to our own imperfections.

Don't instruct your readers when you mean to bless them. It should feel like it's coming out of your heart, not your head. Read it aloud and listen to yourself.

There's only one thing I say *not* to do — don't write your anger. Many years from now, is that how you want to be remembered? Write your anger in your journal. Not in your legacy letter.

Q: Are legacy letters meant to be sent after the writer's death?

A: Some letters are in your top drawer, to be read after you've died. Some you give immediately, the love letters to your children and grandchildren as they graduate, get their first job, marry.

It's fine to send letters while you're alive. My son said to me, if you have wisdom to give, I don't want to wait until you're dead, I want it now.

Before sending the first letter I suggest you prepare your chil-

dren. One woman who took my workshop mailed the letters to her kids out of the blue and they called in a panic, certain that she was dying.

Q: You say you've seen greater interest in legacy letters of late. What do you suspect is driving that?

A: The world is in huge transition at this moment. The pandemic made a lot of people think about what's important and we had time for contemplation when we were locked in. It also made us think about dying; any one of us might have ended up on a respirator.

I think about the people who died in the pandemic; I've long thought about those who died on 9/11 and their families who will grieve all their lives. What if they had left legacy letters for their children when they didn't come back?

None of us know when our time is up. That's why I say, write a letter now, when you have the physical and mental health to do it. You can start today.

"Don't be scared off by not being an accomplished writer. Write your values, write your love."

Rachael Freed