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## **Words that endure**

### **Naperville woman says written legacy is a gift of a lifetime**

Robyn Sheldon / Special to The Sun: By Kathy Millen, staff writer



Workshop presenter Edna Groves hand-writes her spiritual-ethical legacy in a notebook to be given to her descendents someday. In it she writes about the meaningful intangibles in her life, including ancestral heritage, life lessons, values, hopes, spiritual and emotional gifts and wisdom. Groves recently began teaching classes on legacy writing.

Every life is a multifaceted story that, most of the time, never gets told. The absence of that story can make subsequent life stories incomplete, as well.

Edna Groves believes every life story is one worth telling and retelling. A longtime presenter, group and retreat leader, she is showing people how they can write their own personal histories for the generations that follow.

For seven months, Groves, of Naperville, has been holding workshops on legacy writing, a process through which writers may share their heritage and life stories with the people they love. She began to study the concept three years ago. One of her teachers was Rachael Freed, a Minnesota social worker and author of "Women's Lives, Women's Legacy." Today Groves is a certified Women's Legacy Circles facilitator, helping others write what she calls "the gift of your lifetime."

"We are yearning to tell our stories," said Groves, 71, a former psychotherapist and now a Spiritual Eldering Institute-certified "sage-ing" leader. "We all have a story. Everyone wants to tell their story. You don't have to be a writer. All you have to do is write."

Legacy writing, Groves said, gives people a way to put into words those things that give meaning to their lives. It is a way to communicate who they are, what they are thinking and feeling. It is a way to explore values and decisions. It is a way to share their love and their life with others.

It is also a way to get to know oneself, she said. These exercises give the writer a chance to explore "the big questions," Groves said, like Where do I come from? How have I been shaped by events and people? What are my beliefs and values? What is my life's purpose? How have I faced difficulty? What do I want those I love to know about me? How do I wish to be remembered? What personal blessings and hopes do I want to transmit to future generations?

Sometimes known as a spiritual-ethical will, written legacies date back to biblical times. Not to be confused with a legal will, these documents focus on telling the family story, bringing to light what Groves calls the meaningful intangibles of our lives. A legacy can be written at any age, under any circumstances and be given to recipients at any time.

"It honors ancestors – that's what makes this work important," she said. "It's sacred. It honors the ancestors, the people whose lives brought our lives into being."

Marti Beddoe of Naperville attended one of Groves' workshops last fall. She was inspired to write her own legacy after her mother's death three years ago.

"My father's family can trace their people back to 1100, and they have the names of all the men in the family written down," Beddoe said. "My mother's side, we can only go back three generations and we only know three women's names. That was very important to me when I started going through some of my mother's papers. Who were those women? Will I be remembered? How will I be remembered? That was a real motivator."

Beddoe decided she wanted to put something in writing for her six grandchildren that not only recorded some of her own memories, but also provided what little information she had about her female ancestors that would otherwise be forgotten.

Groves said there are many reasons to write one's legacy. Everyone has a story that others would benefit from knowing, she said. It also makes the writer more cognizant of the legacy they are passing on to their descendants. A written legacy documents the life we have lived and affirms that our life has made a difference.

A written legacy also is a way to express love and blessings to those who follow, Groves said. It also allows the writer to recover memories and, with maturity, see them in a new light. It helps them better evaluate how they are currently living their life and gives them the opportunity to put into words expressions of regret, apology and forgiveness.

Eleanor Ix Chel of Lisle has begun writing her own legacy. One of the exercises she completed in a workshop she took from Groves was writing a blessing for her grandson in which she expressed her love, acceptance and good wishes, affirming him as a person. It was her soul speaking to his, she said.

She also explored, in writing, her family history along with her memories, values, feelings and ideals. She hand-wrote the words on paper, enjoying the process.

"It's a lovely way of saying what's in your heart without being overbearing, or making assumptions or 'should-ing' on people," she said.

Naperville clinical social worker Kathy Powell said she sees the potential of legacy writing in her work with couples. Planning to attend one of Groves' workshops, Powell said that placing one's values, life perspectives and other thoughts on paper can spark discussion that might help people get out of their "stuck places," changing their lives and relationships.

"For people who are wanting to look at their lives from a broader perspective, from an ethical or integrity perspective, and to offer this, not only in a word document but in a life-well-lived document to their extended family or children, I think is exciting," she said.

Beddoe thinks it's exciting, too. She said that she was surprised at what has come out in her writing. It wasn't about her worldly accomplishments, she said, but rather about the quality of her relationships with other people.

Her goal is to complete her written legacy in three years, when she will be turning 60. It's a significant year to Beddoe. It was the age that her father died.

She hopes to find out more information about her female ancestors from other relatives and include that in her story. She also wants to share what she's learned about herself and how legacy writing has helped her examine how she wants to live the rest of her days.

"It's confirmed that life is precious and I am not going to be wasting my time with unnecessary activities," Beddoe said. "I'm only doing what really matters to me. This kind of activity matters to me. I think it's a message to my granddaughters that women's lives matter."