

# It's not just about the valuables — it's about the values

*By creating an ethical will, you can help your family preserve your legacy.*

**By Iris E. Wagner**

**W**HAT DO Martin Luther King Jr., Steve Jobs and Randy Pausch have in common? All of them shared their values and inspired younger generations. King's "I Have a Dream" speech invoked his heartfelt beliefs. Jobs' commencement speech at Stanford allowed students to hear what "really mattered" to him. Pausch's "Last Lecture" received more than 10 million hits on YouTube and became a best-selling book. These men's messages can be considered to be their ethical wills.

Ethical wills achieve what conventional wills cannot. As James E. Hughes Jr., author and family business adviser, states, "It isn't a complex document, it's simply our story ... in whatever way we communicate best." An ethical will guarantees that people hear, in your own words, what you have learned, who influenced you, what you stand for, where you succeeded and where you failed.

If you decide to create an ethical will, you have three choices.

**1.** You can write a letter in which you reflect upon your influences, mentors and significant experiences. You can prepare this form of ethical will yourself at no cost.

**2.** You can create an oral ver-

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**Legacy consultant Iris Wagner and her team record a couple's video ethical will.**

sion, recording your favorite memories and stories in your own voice. Professional help is optional, since good microphones and editing software for most computers are widely available.

**3.** You can create a video ethical will. This allows your loved ones to watch your face as you tell your story. A professional legacy consultant can help you incorporate photos and mementoes, and can objectively help you to draw out certain ideas.

William B. Turner, past CEO of W.C. Bradley, a sixth-generation family business, says that in creating a corporate ethical will on video, he wanted to "make our family appreciative of our inheritance and values" and to "bring family closer together."

Whatever method you choose, you need to think about your personal history, and all the moments that have influenced you.

**Your family's past.** Start by thinking about

preceding generations and the stories you heard, the impact they had on you, and what you observed from your elders.

**Your own past.** Consider what events and people helped define who you are today. You might also record your highs and lows, challenges and triumphs, successes and failures.

The content will depend on whom you intend to pass the legacy on to. For example, is it strictly for family or intended for future generations of business leadership? You may wish to include explanations, apologies, hopes, aspirations and messages of forgiveness, if appropriate.

Creating an ethical will can be a personal catharsis. The process is "emotional, reflective, insightful and deep," says Susan Portnoy, president of Organized Success, who presented a video ethical will to her family on her 60th birthday.

Most important, the act of preparing an ethical will allows you to preserve your family's non-financial legacy. It's best to record it on either acid-free, lignin-free paper or archival CDs or DVDs. Greg Rogers, president of RayLign Advisory LLC, says he felt great relief to know that his beliefs were "preserved for future generations to see and internalize."

It's never too early or too late to begin your ethical will process. What's stopping you from creating this most precious legacy?

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*An Ethical Will &  
Video Biography Company*

*Memoirs Productions* produces *Legacies of Values*™ (Ethical Wills) and personal and corporate video biographies for families, foundations, institutions and corporations. *Memoirs'* highly-integrated team of professionals produces A&E-style broadcast-quality productions on DVD. We work passionately to bring people closer together with shared heritage through preserving their stories. We do whatever it takes to make each production a special experience for families.

Our productions are lasting legacies.

#### **Who**

Each shoot includes you and a crew of professional production people with technical support: director of videography, sound and lighting, hair and makeup, broadcast journalist, and producer. Post-production editing includes broadcast-quality effects and titles and DVD authoring.

#### **What**

A **Legacy of Values**™ **Edition** (Ethical Will) includes a professional consultation to capture and preserve values, beliefs, morals, lessons learned, and personal reflections. First collected on paper and through an in-person interview process, it is then digitally shot, edited and produced on DVD. It becomes a precious gift — a lasting legacy.

An **Heirloom**™ **Edition** or **Corporate Archival**™ **Edition** (Video Biography) includes professional research and interview techniques with the subject, founder or CEO. The one-hour production is similar to an A&E™ *Biography* format using creative integration of awards, photographs, video footage and memorabilia.

**Donor Legacy**™ **Edition** for family philanthropy or foundations to record their mission, vision, values and goals for their giving. **Art and Collectibles**™ **Legacy Edition** to capture the stories and inspiration of a collector's art collection.

#### **Why**

If "a picture is worth a thousand words", how much is a video (of a loved one) worth?

#### **Where and When**

*Memoirs* is an award-winning production company creating legacy productions for nearly ten years in New York, Connecticut, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Aspen. We are available to interview and shoot anywhere.

Kindly visit our Video Gallery at: [www.MemoirsProductions.com](http://www.MemoirsProductions.com)

For more info, or to be linked to our Private Video Gallery please contact:  
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"The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not intend to sit."  
— Nelson Henderson