

Remembrance Letters

by Francesca Lynn Arnoldy

This is an invitation to write remembrance letters to friends, neighbors, relatives, coworkers, or acquaintances who have made an enduring impact. Your first decision is whether to direct one general letter to your whole community or to create individual letters. You might even complete both projects, as they can serve different purposes.

General

Some people compose a special message to be read aloud during their post-passage services or to have featured within a printed bulletin or obituary. Some like to gather their people before their death for a living funeral to share heartfelt messages in person. A general letter is appropriate for any of these options. In it, you can include themes like connection, gratitude, forgiveness, beliefs, your “why,” and your life mantras, along with certain memories or milestones.

You might feel a sense of completion after one paragraph, or you might need many pages to express yourself. Jot down notes in the following space and then write a full draft.

Dearest (loved ones, friends and family members, community),

Specific

If you choose to draft separate messages for chosen individuals—whether it's in addition to or instead of a group letter—you might include particular sentiments and pressing reminders that wouldn't be suitable for a broad letter. These notes can be short or lengthy. Here are some prompts, focused on relationships and legacy, that can serve as inspiration for content.

Relationship-focused:

Who you are to me...

What I respect/admire/enjoy about you...

What our relationship means to me...

The imprint you have made on my life...

What I hope you will remember...

Legacy-focused:

What matters most to me...

What has inspired me...

What shaped my perspectives...

What I have learned...

What I have struggled with...

What I have overcome...

What I accept...

Who comes to mind as you consider writing specific letters? And what do you want to remember to incorporate within these remembrance letters? Jot down initial ideas for safekeeping.

If you are planning to create personalized messages, now is the time! You can either write these by hand or type them. You can also consider recording yourself reading your letters (video or audio). Keep in mind, this is not only a writing assignment; it's an emotional experience. You will be sifting through the past as you document thoughts. Be gentle and patient with yourself. And remember, customization is key, as is thoughtfulness. What will the recipients of your letters appreciate most?

Once completed, make sure to keep these letters in a discoverable place or alert someone as to where to find documents (digital or physical). Store them with other important documents in a special folder or file.

