

CHRISTINE E. COWLEY



THE GIFT

*“Something I’ve Been
Meaning To Say...”*



SHARING YOUR
LIFE LESSONS
WITH THE PEOPLE
YOU LOVE MOST

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To facilitate easy reading, reference and note-taking, this book has been designed with lay-flat binding. Open to the desired page and press gently along the open face of the book spine. The book will stay open and flat.

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SKILLS REQUIRED

The only skill required for this task is the ability to write—not as in poetry or prose, but simply the ability to put words on paper. If you think in pictures, or if you are artistically inclined, you may want to use both words and illustrations to communicate your message (hence, the suggestion to use a notebook with ruled and unruled pages).

If you wish to include a music CD, a taped or digital voice message or digital images, you will require basic computer skills or the assistance of someone with those skills. You are urged to keep these to a minimum to avoid diluting the significance of your written (text) communication. The addition of too many “bells and whistles” can become a distraction for you and the intended recipient(s).

If you decide to package **The Gift** as an anthology of written text, images and recordings, be sure to include a clearly labelled *instructions* page at the beginning of the manuscript or book.

In the process of creating **The Gift** you will be asked to make numerous lists. These lists are the starting point for mining the beliefs, recollections and aspirations that you will share in **The Gift**. However, much of this preliminary work is simply process: a means of stirring your thoughts in ways that lift the sometimes buried beliefs or attitudes that the rigours of everyday life camouflage. It is extremely important to be honest as you write these lists or answer questions; however, this is simply raw material *for your use* only. None of this information need ever be shared at any time. So give yourself permission for complete and honest disclosure. You may be pleasantly surprised with the gems you uncover.

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PART 1 – MINING THE GEMS

The following exercises are designed to bring to mind significant memories, thoughts and principles that have played a role in your life. Some of these will be easy to recall, but many deep-seated beliefs and attitudes are hidden or deeply stored. They may have helped form your personality, or perhaps came into play when key life decisions were made.

Remember that during the entire process of creating **The Gift**, you are free to skip over or discard any of the exercises, suggestions or instructions.

A brief meditation before you begin each writing session will help to calm distracting thoughts, and allow you to concentrate on the memory exercises and writing tasks that follow. A sample meditation exercise is provided at the end of this book. However, you may use any method that helps to impart a sense of calm and purpose to your writing sessions.

Following the meditation or other calming technique, briefly write (minimum three minutes) a description of any images, questions and answers that arise. If you feel moved to write for a lengthier time, do so. Save these notes for some of your writing exercises in Part 2.

Writing and the Breath

How we use our breathing can help or hinder the writing process. In order to allow your thoughts to flow easily, try this simple breathing exercise, followed by a meditation to “loosen up” thoughts and feelings before beginning to write. Some of the exercises in **The Gift** are designed to tap into your deepest thoughts and feelings. Remember that you do not need to share everything you write; it is very beneficial, however, to write everything that occurs to you. Gems of memory are often hidden. You can edit to your heart’s content later on.

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PART 2

WHAT TO SAY & HOW TO SAY IT

You have just completed a series of exercises designed to unearth much of what you have come to know and believe throughout your lifetime. Most of this material is a distillation of experience and feelings; perhaps attitudes were carried forward from past generations, or maybe most of what you think and feel is based on your personality and circumstances.

Now that you have gathered much of the material to be included in **The Gift**, you are invited to develop and communicate some of this material through the method of storytelling.

Why tell stories?

The power of storytelling is to:

- inform;
- illustrate; and
- imprint (on memory).

Since the dawn of oral history, storytelling has been used to convey facts and impart beliefs, cautions, insight, philosophy and meaning. The reason storytelling is so effective is that themes and messages travel an indirect route through narrative, a little like the medicine in the honey.

Stories create pictures in words, incorporating examples of the principles or ideas we wish to relate. By framing these concepts in ways that engage sensory memory or an emotional response, we may deliver a more compelling message or move others to action. Storytelling is also an excellent way of communicating things we feel in our hearts more than we understand with our heads. An added benefit of telling stories as a form of communication is improved retention by the reader or listener.

Sensory details can breathe life into a concept or principle you wish to convey. In order to bring meaningful sensory detail into your story, you should attempt to recover as much detail from memory as possible. An ideal method for recovering details from a recollection is the clustering method described in Part 2, Exercise 1. You will be invited to use the clustering method throughout Part 2.

PART 3



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ARRANGING - TABLE 1

MANUSCRIPT SECTION	Part 1 Ex. 1 Favourites	Part 1 Ex. 2 Who Am I?	Part 1 Ex. 3 Nature/Nurture	Part 1 Ex. 4 What Is My Imprint?	Part 1 Ex. 5 Play & Work	Part 1 Ex. 6 If only...	Part 1 Ex. 7 Gratitude	Part 1 Ex. 8 Word Associations	Part 1 Ex. 9 Fears	Part 1 Ex. 10 Grief & Loss	Part 1 Ex. 11 Generosity	Part 1 Ex. 12 Life Lessons
Why This Gift?		✓					✓*			✓		✓*
Who Are Your Readers?							✓*			✓		✓
Who You Are	✓	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓	✓	✓*	✓	✓			✓
Core Values and Beliefs	✓	✓*	✓*		✓*	✓	✓*	✓		✓	✓*	✓*
Lessons from Your Life					✓	✓*	✓			✓		✓*
Regrets or Apologies						✓*			✓	✓	✓	✓*
Hopes for the Future (Requests)							✓*				✓	
Bequests: Moral, Spiritual and Material							✓*				✓	✓*

*particularly suited to the subject category

ARRANGING - TABLE 2

MANUSCRIPT SECTION	Part 2 Ex. 1 Clustering Method	Part 2 Ex. 2 Anecdotes	Part 2 Ex. 3 Core Values & Beliefs	Part 2 Ex. 4 Creating a Better World	Part 2 Ex. 5 Passions & Pastimes	Part 2 Ex. 6 Not Just People	Part 2 Ex. 7 Successes	Part 2 Ex. 8 Truth-telling & Secrets	Part 2 Ex. 9 Family Traditions	Part 2 Ex. 10 Humour, Joy, Compassion	Part 2 Ex. 11 Forgiveness & Apologies	Part 2 Ex. 12 Requests & Bequests
Why This Gift?			✓	✓*				✓	✓		✓	
Who Are Your Readers?				✓*					✓		✓	✓*
Who You Are		✓	✓*	✓	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Core Values and Beliefs			✓*	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lessons from Your Life	✓*	✓	✓*	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Regrets or Apologies				✓				✓*			✓*	
Hopes for the Future (Requests)				✓*		✓*			✓			✓*
Bequests: Moral, Spiritual and Material			✓	✓		✓*			✓			✓*

**particularly suited to the subject category*

IN CLOSING

When you began this project, you initiated an adventure of sharing, in your own words, your deepest thoughts, feelings, dreams, fears, hopes, longings, regrets and disappointments. Your initial enthusiasm may have waned and the time it takes becomes more and more difficult to find. But remember when you started this journey, you also threw open the doors to insight, reflection and self-discovery. These goals are obtained through the *process* of reviewing and writing down your thoughts, beliefs and moral code. So the ultimate objective, though it is an excellent one, is merely the crowning glory for this journey. Remember to enjoy every minute of the *process* along the way!

Joining with others who are creating **The Gift** will help you to feel you are not alone on this mission—and it may just be the gentle nudge you need to resume writing or editing or whatever stage of the process you are in when your attention starts to stray. Start a group of writing buddies to meet weekly or monthly, whether in person or via the Internet. It is an excellent way to develop new friendships, or cement old ones, while at the same time setting yourself a time-sensitive goal for completion of exercises and writing.

Working in groups³ also provides important opportunities for feedback regarding common questions⁴ such as what to include, what to leave out and what to avoid altogether! Reading your work aloud will help you in the editing process, pointing out problems of repetition, lack of clarity, or important missing facts. Working groups also increase your enjoyment as you take inspiration from other fascinating lives, or adopt writing methods and approaches, especially helpful for writing about sensitive or difficult subject matter.

Whether you work with a group or independently, keep your eye on the ultimate goal: **The Gift** of your life—a distillation of all those “things you’ve been meaning to say” to the people you love most.

Celebrate the journey!

³ Visit www.lifegemsbio.com for information on upcoming workshops and on-line writing groups.

⁴ Editing and style questions can be referred to info@lifegemsbio.com

NOTES

LifeGems

PERSONAL HISTORIES

Great tales await discovery from the days of every life.
They need only to be breathed into the richness of story to become
a lasting legacy – a gift for future generations.
This is the power of memoir.

Everyone has a story. Every story deserves to be told.

Specializing in biographical and autobiographical material, *LifeGems Personal Histories* provides a full spectrum of writing, editing and manuscript production services dedicated to preserving histories of individuals, families, businesses and organizations. Through interviews and independent research, *LifeGems Personal Histories* works with groups and individuals to create unique and lasting legacies, including commemorative lifestories, biographies, travelogues, ethical wills and full length books. In this way, the stories of the near and distant past are permanently preserved; intriguing characters and family legends entertain and inform; expressions of love and kindness provide comfort; success stories offer inspiration; and words of wisdom guide those who follow far into the future.

LifeGems Workshops are designed to help others to mine and record their own personal histories, while learning specific writing techniques to develop their recollections into interesting, effective narratives. The workshops offer participants the added dimension of small-group dynamics, resulting in tremendous opportunities for insight, cooperation and friendship.

Individual coaching sessions are available for professional assistance in writing, editing and producing a personal, family or corporate history.

Christine Cowley, founder of *LifeGems Personal Histories*, is available as a key-note speaker.



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or send an email with your enquiry to info@lifegemsbio.com.

IN THE ATTIC OF THE OLD FAMILY HOMESTEAD
SOMEONE DISCOVERS A SHOEBOX FULL OF LETTERS
WRITTEN MORE THAN A HUNDRED YEARS AGO. THEY
ARE ADDRESSED TO YOU AND EVERYONE YOU LOVE.
DO YOU WANT WHAT'S IN THAT SHOEBOX?

Bridging the gulf between family history
and legacy planning, this little book will help
save a life—maybe yours.

In these pages, you will find the map to a treasure trove; just follow a few easy steps to unearth, understand, share and preserve the events, people, insights, beliefs, regrets, challenges, dreams and life moments that have come to define you or someone you care about. Enjoyable, thought-provoking exercises help you find the words to say everything you would say . . . if only you could.

The greatest gift you can offer is yours alone to give: yourself.

ACCEPT THIS IRRESISTIBLE INVITATION TO
BEGIN SHARING THE LESSONS OF A LIFETIME.
SPEND AN HOUR. SAVE YOUR LIFE.



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