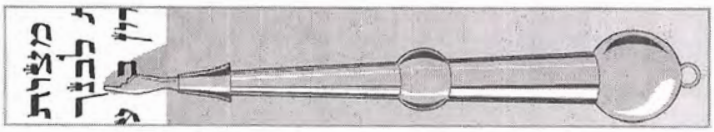
CONFIRMATION

Woodlands Community Temple

ETHICAL WILLS



Rabbi Billy Dreskin

THIS GIFT LASTS MUCH LONGER THAN MONEY

Regina Brett (Columnist, Akron Beacon-Journal)

It's graduation time and the standard gift, once again, is anything green — as in tens and twenties. On most occasions, you say it with flowers. At graduations, you say it with dollars. Money is the perfect gift. It's always the right shape and color — and fits any size wallet just right. But before you seal that envelope for your daughter or son, consider stuffing something else inside: a part of yourself.

I'd never heard of an ethical will until I married a Jewish man and discovered it's a tradition that goes back to biblical times. The idea of a will may sound morbid, but this is a different kind of document. Instead of a legal account of your possessions and wealth to be distributed upon your demise, this is a personal statement of what you truly value in life, passed on while you are still alive. An ethical will consists of a few handwritten pages where you sum up your innermost values. You jot down all you have learned about life and want to pass on to your children. You write out your hopes and dreams for their future.

If it sounds intimidating, it is.

When my stepson approached his Confirmation last month, his temple sent us a guideline urging us to write him an ethical will. They offered sample suggestions in the form of statements to jump-start us, like: "I hope that you will always be (fill in blank) as I have during my lifetime." "Let nothing prevent you from (fill in blank)." "Make our heritage a part of your life by (fill in blank)." "Be thankful for the true gifts that living brings: (fill in blank)." "I pray that you, too, will (fill in blank) the way that I have tried to in my lifetime." "Remember your ultimate purpose on this earth, to try and (fill in blank)." "May you be blessed with (fill in the blank) all the days of your life."

The letter urged parents to write down the stories that define us and the children, such as why we chose their name, who they are named for and what qualities that person possessed. It urged us to think back to when they were born: What were your hopes for them then? What are they now?

I figured the task would be easy since I'm a writer, yet I struggled for a few hours trying to put down the right thoughts.

A strange thing happened. Writing the will forces you to look at what you really do value. You learn as much about yourself as you do about your relationship with your child. You come to terms with the idea of mortality when you think that some day this paper will be here to guide your child and you won't. You may think you've lived out your values, but once you set out to write them, you discover the places you've come up short.

Last week, I gave my 16-year-old stepson the will. It ended up to be four pages long.

I started off by telling him how handsome he looked in his tuxedo on prom night, shared how his Jewish faith gave me a foundation to build on, told him to find what he loved to do and make that his career, and to remember that what matters in life isn't fame and fortune; it's hugs, laughter, friends, family, all the small moments that make every single day worthwhile.

Three days later when I dropped him off at his mom's after dinner, he stayed in the car and talked for half an hour. The will opened up a space between us that he filled by sharing his search for meaning in life, that quest that begins in adolescence and never ends.

It was the deepest conversation we've had in the seven years I've known him.

People say that money talks — but the conversation lasts only for a moment. Its voice is soon lost, spent on a textbook, invested in a tuition credit, squandered at a keg party. Years from now the size of the bill tucked inside a graduation card won't even be remembered, but the words that followed it will still be priceless.

Ethical Wills

A Gift to the Future

JACK RIEMER

Some time ago, there was a story in the newspapers about a Japanese airliner that crashed. The plane had engine trouble and floundered in the sky for thirty minutes before going down. In the rubble strewn on the ground were found scraps of paper with singed edges—farewell letters written by the passengers in the half-hour before they died.

Evidently there is a deep-seated urge within all of us to sum up our lives, to leave behind some message about who we are, what we stand for and how we feel. The passengers on that plane may not have known the name for what they were doing, but they were writing ethical wills.

Writing an ethical will is an old Jewish custom, going back to the Bible. Before he died, Jacob gathered his children around his bedside and tried, one last time, to teach them how to live after he was gone. He chastised one, corrected another, rebuked a third and then blessed them all (Genesis 49:1–28). Moses did the same thing in the Book of Deuteronomy. When the Israelites stood on the edge of the Promised Land, he bid them farewell by summarizing all that they had learned in their forty years together and by giving them a last set of instructions on how to live in the years ahead. In the Book of Kings, and in the Book of Chronicles, we have two versions of how David said good-by. In Kings, he tells his son whom to watch out for and what to be wary of. In Chronicles, he tells him that it was his great dream to build the Temple, but since his hands were full of blood, he was not allowed to. So, having gathered the material, he asks his son to finish the task.

This tradition of writing an ethical will—a document in which one tries to sum up all one has learned in life and what one wants for and from his children—has continued through the centuries. Israel Abrahams collected talmudic and medieval ethical wills in a volume published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1927, which has been reprinted in a paperback edition. And Nathaniel Stampfer and I did a sequel to this book, updating it with modern and contemporary ethical wills, which Schocken published in 1983 (*Ethical Wills: A Modern Jewish Treasury*).

Both books drew an enormous response. Around the country I met people who told me they had ethical wills left to them by their parents, which they treasured but had never recognized as part of the Jewish tradition, as a custom that had a name. I met one family that has four ethical wills written by four generations, each quoting from the one before. The four hang proudly together now on one wall, and they are precious mementos treasured by this family.

To my children: In material things I have seen to it that you will not want. These are the least important things, although the lawyer has prepared a *megilla* to safeguard them. Remember to be Jews, and the rest will follow as day follows night. Our religion is not ritual but a way of life. To us as Jews, life is its own *raison d'etre,* its own self-justification; we await neither heaven nor hell. Ritual is only a tool to remind us who we are and of the divine commandments. Jews do not lie, steal, nor bear false witness—*past nisht,* as our parents used to say—such things are simply unbecoming for a Jew. Take care of one another, and in honoring your mother, honor yourselves. I know the love she has lavished on you without thought of self.

Marry within your faith, not to please me, but so that you may be happy, not because gentiles are inferior—they are not—but because marriage is complex enough without the complicating variables of different viewpoints. You are the bearers of a proud tradition of four thousand years. Do not let the torch drop in your generation.

Never turn away from anyone who comes to you for help. We Jews have seen more suffering than any other people; therefore we should care more. That which you give away, whether of money or of yourselves, is your only permanent possession. . . .

Don't forget Israel. You can be a builder of the homeland for the remnants of our people. There is no conflict between your obligation as a citizen of our country and your concern for Israel. On the contrary, a good Jew is a better American.

To all of you: Let your word be your bond! Those mistakes that I regret most keenly are the times when I let human weakness forget this. I know it is hard to learn from the experiences of others, especially of parents, but if there is one thing I beg you to take to heart, it is this.

The only immortality I seek is that my children and my children's children be good Jews, and thereby good people.

God bless you and keep you. I love you.
Your father

Parents may ask: "Why do I have to put who I am and what I stand for down on paper? My children already know my values." True, they may know them, but there is still a value—to our children and to ourselves—in putting them down on paper.

An ethical will is not an easy thing to write because it means confronting one's own mortality and coming to terms with the meaning of one's life. But it can be a powerful educational experience for the writer and for those who receive it. Having read a great many ethical wills in recent years, I have found many that were humorous and many that were deeply moving. I have not found one yet that is petty or morbid or vengeful. You learn a great deal about yourself when you write an ethical will. One person said to me: "I couldn't write one letter to my wife and children. I had to write three different letters, because we aren't really one family. That's quite a thing to have to learn about yourself and your family, isn't it?" For him, writing an ethical will made him confront some harsh truths about his life while there was still time to do something.

Another reason to write an ethical will is that your children may know who you are, but *their* children may not. I frequently speak to youngsters who are becoming bar and bat mitzva. When I ask them, "Who were you named for?" they usually have a vague idea. Then I ask them: "What was that person like? Why did your parents feel that that person was so worth remembering that they chose to name you after him?" Almost never can they answer. Can you imagine what a valuable gift it would be to a child if the person for whom he was named had left behind a letter telling who he was, what he stood for, what he lived for and what he was like? What a precious gift that would be.

People ask if there's a danger that writing an ethical will will produce guilt feelings in the one who receives it. It can, but it need not do so. A parent has the right—more than the right, the duty—to convey to his children what he stands for, what he wants for and from them. If our children are willing to accept our property after we are gone, they ought to be willing to at least listen to our values. As Mordecai Kaplan said in a different context: "We are entitled to a vote—not a veto, but a vote—in their lives."

There are three reasons why the custom of writing an ethical will has nearly disappeared in our time:

The first reason is ignorance. Like so much of the Jewish tradition, this custom is almost unknown. When my book of ethical wills came out, my congregation was kind enough to arrange a party to celebrate its appearance, and there was some publicity about it in the newspapers. An hour before the program was to begin, a man came knocking at my door. He told me he was a therapist, and that he used the device of writing ethical wills in marriage counseling, in dealing with parent–child conflicts and in working with terminally ill patients. Then he said something that has haunted me since I heard it: "Why didn't someone ever tell me that this was part of Judaism back when I was Jewish?"

This man never rejected Judaism; he never had it to reject. Like many young people, he was cheated out of his heritage. An ethical will can be a way of making up to a child for that deprivation.

There are two more reasons why it is especially hard to write an ethical will in our time: One is that we live in a "now-centered" culture in which the past is irrelevant and the future is not our concern. So people marry later and choose to have no children because our lives, our careers, our fulfillment, are our chief concerns. In such a world, an ethical will makes no sense. But in Judaism, the future of our past *is* our responsibility. Judaism sees each of us as a link in the chain of the generations.

The other reason is that we live in a relativistic culture. You are entitled to your opinion, and I am entitled to mine. I have no right to impose my values on you, and you have no right to impose your values on me. I may happen to like cannibalism, and you may not—but each of us is entitled to his own opinion. In such a world, an ethical will is pointless. But in Judaism, people are supposed to believe in something so much that they are willing to, and feel the need to, convey what they believe to their children.

Only people who have convictions and values are able to write an ethical will. Writing one is a powerful way for a person to find out what his innermost values really are.

You don't have to be a professional writer to write an ethical will. "Words that come from the heart enter the heart," the Talmud says. Some of the most powerful and touching ethical wills I have ever read come from simple people.

Ethical wills provide windows into a people's soul. They are important historical documents, too, reflecting all that our people have experienced in this tumultuous century. I invite you to try your hand at writing one. It is not an easy thing to do, of course. It means coming to terms with your own mortality, searching out and expressing your innermost values, and making peace with your unfulfilled dreams and failures. But if you can, you will feel better for the effort, and you will leave behind a gift that your children and grandchildren will thank you for and learn from. To write an ethical will is, in truth, to make a gift to the future.

How to Write an Ethical Will

Now that you have made the decision that you want to try to write your ethical will, there are a number of simple steps you can take to write it. As you will see, it isn't very difficult to do.

If you think you would have a hard time doing this yourself, ask a family member to help you. Surely a spouse, child, grandchild or friend would be honored to help you reach your goal.

Collecting ideas

To start with, it's helpful to write down some of your ideas on paper. This can be a sentence or two, or just a few words. Write down each idea on a separate piece of paper or use "Post-it™" notes.

I found it helpful to group my ideas in different categories, e.g., personal values, my hopes for the future, and personal experiences

Two other ways to group your ideas are:

- My beliefs and opinions
- My actions (things I did to act on my beliefs and opinions)
- What I've learned from life
- What I've learned from you
- What my dreams are for you
- What my blessings are for you

or

You can also group your thoughts and feelings in terms of:

- Personal ideas
- Family ideas
- Spiritual ideas

Here are some exercises that will help you to generate ideas for your ethical will.

On a sheet of paper, write examples for the following:

- Something I learned from my grandparents
- Something I learned from my parents
- Something I learned from my spouse/children/siblings
- Something I learned from experience
- Something I am grateful for

Write stories about important events in your life as you remember them:

- What values are illustrated by these stories?
- Here are 4 "universal" values: love, beauty, truth, and justice. Write a story from your life experiences that provide your unique perspective of any or all of these values.

Think about critical decisions you've made throughout your life.

- Why are you glad you made them?
- What would you have done differently in retrospect?
- What positive actions can you undertake now? (this is a good exercise for healing and repairing relationships)

If you only had a limited time left to live, what would be important for you to do with the time you have left? What will be said at your funeral? In answering these questions, you will see what things you truly value. This will quickly put you in touch with those values worthy of transmitting to your family.

Here's another method for collecting ideas:

Start "journaling"

- Write about events, thoughts, and feelings that strike you as important, and place these in a folder
- Save items that articulate your feelings, e.g. quotes, cartoons, etc.
- In a few months, take some time off and review what you've collected or written
- As you examine this information, you'll see items that are related
- Clump these similar words, phrases, etc., together
- Important values and patterns will naturally emerge from all that you've collected
- Connect these thoughts into sentences, and the sentences into paragraphs
- Arrange the paragraphs in an order that is comfortable
- Add an introduction and a conclusion.

Putting it all together

It might seem hard to know how to begin the actual writing of your ethical will.

To help you with this task, I have included several resources:

- A step-by-step exercise for writing your first draft
- A copy of several modern ethical wills
- References for further reading about ethical wills and related topics

I believe many people want to preserve their values, experiences and hopes for future generations. As our modern society places more emphasis on material things, it's easy to lose sight of what we think is really important in our lives.

Recording these thoughts and feelings in this way might be one of the most meaningful gifts you can give to your family. Let your ethical will speak from your heart. Best of luck.

Creating Your First Draft

Facing a blank piece of paper is probably the biggest barrier you will have to overcome in writing your ethical will. To help you get over this hurdle, I have put together some general topic areas that identify some specific values that may be important to you.

Completing this exercise will give you an initial draft of your ethical will from which to work. I know this was helpful for me in bridging the gap from blank page to finished product.

These "thought-starters" are in no particular order. When you go through the ethical will after you have a working draft, you can move things around so they are in an order that makes sense to you.

You might want to consider whether you plan on presenting your ethical will to your family during your lifetime or after your death. This draft is written with the intent of passing it on while still alive.

Possible openings for your ethical will

- To my family:
- To my dearest family:
- Dear . . . (use actual names of people you want to give your ethical will to):
- To the people who are most important to me :

As I think about my life, I want to tell you about some of . . .

- my experiences
- the things that I value
- the things I believe in
- the things that I did
- the lesson's I've learned from life
- the things that had the biggest impact on who I am as a person

Life experiences

Tell about some of your life experiences. These memories-particular events, mishaps, and successes, will help you see the patterns that shaped your life. For example, write some stories about where you grew up and experiences with your family that stand out in your mind.

Here's an example of a story about growing up:

I grew up in Brooklyn, NY. I lived on the upper floor of a duplex apartment with my parents and my younger brother. My aunt and uncle and their two kids lived downstairs. We took vacations together every summer in the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York.

My grandparents only lived a few blocks from our house, so I saw them several times a week. When my grandma was unable to live by herself in her apartment, she moved in with us.

Being close to family was always important to me. I hope you stay close to each other after I'm gone.

Stories about jobs you had or how you chose your occupation.

Here's an example of a story about jobs I had earlier in my life:

I worked from the time I was in high school. I sold newspapers, worked in a candy store (that's what they called soda fountains in Brooklyn), and did some office work all through college. From working with people, I knew I wanted to work where I could help people.

It's important to choose an occupation that you really enjoy-even if it takes a while to figure out what you want to do.

Values and Beliefs

"I've always valued" or "These are the values that I believe in":

- being honest
- keeping your word
- being dependable,
- helping others in need
- learning from your mistakes
- having a sense of humor

use other items from your list!

Here's one example of what I did to act on my beliefs.

I've always felt that helping others in need and volunteering to support your community are important personal values.

While training to be a physician, I volunteered some of my time working in a migrant workers clinic. The migrant workers didn't have any health insurance or easy access to medical care. They often went without needed health care in order to support their families. They were so grateful for any medical services, I really felt like I was making a difference in their lives.

I hope you will experience this same feeling of making a difference in other people's lives. There are many opportunities for this. You usually receive more than you give whenever and wherever you volunteer your time to help others in need.

Describe what you've learned from life

- Do you have some favorite sayings and examples of how they guided you?
- What are you most proud of? Your work? Your family? Your interests?
- What activities did you devote your time too and why?

These are all important to pass on to your loved ones.

Here's an example of a saying I'm fond of:

"Learning is a lifelong occupation".

I love to learn new things all the time. I've found that the more I learn, the better I understand myself and others.

Wishes for the future

"My hopes" or "My dreams", are for you:

- to continue the family tradition of....
- to establish a family
- to stay involved with.....
- to be successful in .....
- to follow the observances of our religion

Write about things you haven't done yet or regret not having done. This can be a time of asking for understanding or forgiveness, forgiving others, providing guidance or "words of wisdom".

Summing up

- Thank you for your love and support through the years
- I love you all very much
- Think of me when you . . .

I believe that if you can walk yourself through this exercise, you will have a good starting point for your ethical will. These are very personal and meaningful documents, so be sure to write about what is important to you. The wording of your ethical will reflects the voice of your heart.

Possible Phrases for Use in Your Ethical Will

My dear children,

I want you to know the things I hold most precious, the things that I hope will someday be yours to nurture and to cherish. There are so many things that I want you to have.

- Jud has always been important to me because _____.
- I pray that you, too, will _____ the way that I have tried to do in my lifetime.
- Though I have little in the way of possessions, I leave you my (ritual object) which has always been a source of _____ for me.
- I also leave you _____ (family ritual object or observance) which we have _____ together.
- We live by our values, for it is them which we must maintain as a life guide in the years to come.
- Take care of (the) _____.
- Always share what you have with those _____. Let learning always _____.
- Cherish _____ that it may always be a source of support and strength.
- Be on your guard concerning _____, for they/it can lead you astray from the ways of our people.
- I further hope that you will always be _____ as I have tried to be during my lifetime.
- Let nothing prevent you from _____.
- Make our heritage a part of your life by _____.
- Be thankful for the true gifts that living brings: _____.
- Remember your ultimate purpose on this earth, to try and _____.
- And cherish _____, that you may always be blessed with _____ all the days of your life.
- I know that you will live full lives, Jewish lives, lives guided by _____.
- May you always know that I _____.

Your loving parent,
Mom/Dad

More Ideas and Possibilities for Your Ethical Will

- Include formative events of your life.
- Speak about the world of your youth.
- Write about important lessons you've learned.
- Mention people who have influenced you most.
- Share stories of things that are most precious to you.
- Include causes for which you feel a sense of responsibility.
- Speak about some mistakes you regret having made, and hope your child won't repeat.
- Mention biblical passages that have meant much to you.
- Write your definition of true success.
- Share how you feel as you look back on your life.
- Write about things you like to forgive and/or seek forgiveness.
- Include your love and your gratitude to your child.

ETHICAL WILL
Barbara Rosenblum

On this birthday, my wish for you is to live your life with a social dream. Everyone wishes for good things in their lives. People want security and comfort, love and esteem. People want material possessions, a home and money in the bank. They wish for recognition at work and the chance to do something important in their lives. They wish that their children will have opportunities and experiences that they themselves never had. People want the best for themselves and for their children. Of course, you should have these things too.

But those who have advantages in education, income and class also have the opportunity to make a difference in this world by living according to an ethic of social responsibility. Part of this ethic is having a social dream ...

I wish for you a vision that links you to the common good of all people, so that you may make common cause with the needs of people everywhere ...

My parents gave me a dream. Regina, your grandmother, believed that the ruling classes didn't repair subways so that workers' morale would remain low and, therefore, they would not have the energy to make a revolution or even fight for better transportation. Your grandfather, David, sang to me songs of slavery and the struggle of Black people. They went on marches for peace. They fought for union rights. They joined organizations and made donations to organizations that tried to help make the world a better place. They rang doorbells to get people to sign petitions. They knocked on door after door to register voters to increase political participation.

They passed their dream on to me and, while I did different kinds of things, I always felt connected to my parents in our common feeling of making the world a better place. I organized tenants and led rent strikes on a block that was voted the worst block in New York City in 1964. I was part of a group that took over the administrative offices of Brooklyn College in protest against the Vietnam War. I answered telephones on a volunteer basis at the offices of CORE (Congress for Racial Equality) in 1963 and 1964 ...

Most of all, I became a teacher. The major reason I became a professor was to inject my students with the passion of a social dream. I believe strongly that knowledge is power and I wanted to be an agent for transmission of knowledge. I wanted my students to have hope, to have the energy to fight good struggles, and I wanted to pass my dream on to the hundreds of people I could influence. I can only hope they have been touched and their lives reflect the dream I tried to pass on.

And what is this dream? It is so simple. I want to live in a world where there is no hunger, where everyone can read, where the resources of the planet can be used by all. I want to live in a world that provides medical care for everyone and where no one dies alone. I want to live in a world where the words "racism," "sexism," "classism," "ageism," and "homophobia" disappear from our vocabularies and our hearts. I want to live in a world in which each person has the same chance as every other person to be what he or she wants.

ACROSS THE GENERATIONS
Arthur Gordon

Dear Sandy,

Your nice thank-you note for the graduation present I sent you a few weeks ago just came in, and I've been chuckling over your postscript in which you say that such presents are dandy but you wish someone could give you "half a dozen foolproof ideas for bending the world into a pretzel."

Well, Sandy, I must admit I don't have any very original thoughts of my own. But through the years I've encountered a few ideas of that kind — not platitudes but ideas sharp-pointed enough to stick in my mind permanently. Concepts that release energy, make problem-solving easier, provide shortcuts to worthwhile goals. No one handed them over in a neat package. They just came along from time to time, usually from people not in the wisdom-dispensing business at all. Compared to the great time-tested codes of conduct, they may seem like pretty small change. But each of them has helped make my life a good deal easier and happier and more productive. So here they are. I hope you find them useful too.

If you can't change facts, try bending your attitudes. Without a doubt, the bleakest period of my life so far was the winter of 1942 to 1943. I was with the Eighth Air Force in England. Our bomber bases, hacked out of the sodden English countryside, were seas of mud. On the ground, people were cold, miserable and homesick. In the air, people were getting shot. Replacements were few; morale was low. But there was one sergeant — a crew chief who was always cheerful, always good-humored, always smiling. I watched him one day, in a freezing rain, struggle to salvage a Fortress that had skidded off the runway into an apparently bottomless mire. He was whistling like a lark. "Sergeant," I said to him sourly, "how can you whistle in a mess like this?" He gave me a mud-caked grin. "Lieutenant," he said, "when the facts won't budge, you have to bend your attitudes to fit them, that's all." Check it for yourself, Sandy. You'll see that, faced with a given set of problems, one man may tackle them with intelligence, grace and courage; another may react with resentment and bitterness; a third may run away altogether. In any life, facts tend to remain unyielding. But attitudes are a matter of choice — and that choice is largely up to you.

Don't come up to the net behind nothing. One night in a PTA meeting, a lawyer — a friend and frequent tennis partner of mine — made a proposal that I disagreed with, and I challenged it. But when I had concluded what I thought was quite a good spur-of-the-moment argument, my friend stood up and proceeded to demolish it. Where I had opinions, he had facts; where I had theories, he had statistics. He obviously knew so much more about the subject than I did that his viewpoint easily prevailed. When we met in the hall afterward, he winked and said, "You should know better than to come up to the net behind nothing!" It is true; the tennis player who follows his own weak or badly placed shot up to the net is hopelessly vulnerable. And this is true when you rush into anything without adequate preparation or planning. In any important endeavor, you've got to do your homework, get your facts straight and sharpen your skills. In other words, don't bluff — because if you do, nine times out of ten, life will drill a backhand right past you.

When the ball is over, take off your dancing shoes. As a child, I used to hear my aunt say this, and it puzzled me a good deal, until the day I heard her spell out the lesson more explicitly. My sister had come back from a glamorous weekend full of glitter, exciting parties and stimulating people. She was

bemoaning the contrast with her routine job, her modest apartment and her day-to-day friends. "Young lady," our aunt said gently, "no one lives on the top of the mountain. It's fine to go there occasionally — for inspiration, for new perspectives. But you have to come down. Life is lived in the valleys. That's where the farms and gardens and orchards are, and where the plowing and the work are done. That's where you apply the visions you may have glimpsed from the peaks." It's a steadying thought when the time comes, as it always does, to exchange your dancing shoes for your working shoes.

Shine up your neighbor's halo. One Sunday morning, drowsing in a back pew of a little country church, I dimly heard the old preacher urge his flock to "stop worrying about your own halo and shine up your neighbor's!" And it left me sitting up, wide-awake, because it struck me as just about the best eleven-word formula for getting along with people that I've ever heard. I like it for its implication that everyone, in some area of life, has a halo that's worth watching for and acknowledging. I like it for the firm way it shifts the emphasis from self to interest and concern for others. Finally, I like it because it reflects a deep psychological truth: People have a tendency to become what you expect them to be.

Keep one eye on the law of the echo. I remember very well the occasion when I heard this sharp-edged bit of advice. Coming home from boarding school, some of us youngsters were in the dining car of a train. Somehow the talk got around to the subject of cheating on exams, and one boy readily admitted that he cheated all the time. He said that he found it both easy and profitable. Suddenly, a mild-looking man sitting all alone at a table across the aisle — he might have been a banker, a bookkeeper, anything — leaned forward and spoke up. "Yes," he said directly to the apostle of cheating, "all the same, I'd keep one eye on the law of the echo if I were you." The law of the echo — is there really such a thing? Is the universe actually arranged so that whatever you send out — honesty or dishonesty, kindness or cruelty — ultimately comes back to you? It's hard to be sure. And yet, since the beginning of recorded history, mankind has had the conviction, based partly on intuition, partly on observation, that in the long run a man does indeed reap what he sows. You know as well as I do, Sandy, that in this misty area there are no final answers. Still, as the man said, "I think I'd keep one eye on the law of the echo if I were you!"

Don't wear your raincoat in the shower. In the distant days when I was a Boy Scout, I had a troop leader who was an ardent woodsman and naturalist. He would take us on hikes, not saying a word, and then challenge us to describe what we had observed: trees, plants, birds, wildlife, everything. Invariably we hadn't seen a quarter as much as he had, nor half enough to satisfy him. "Creation is all around you," he would cry, waving his arms in vast inclusive circles, "but you're keeping it out. Don't be a buttoned-up person! Stop wearing your raincoat in the shower!" I've never forgotten the ludicrous image of a person standing in the shower with a raincoat buttoned up to his chin. The best way to discard that raincoat, I've found, is to expose yourself to new experiences in your life all your life.

All these phrases that I have been recalling really urge one to the same goal: a stronger participation, a deeper involvement in life. This doesn't come naturally, by any means. And yet, with marvelous impartiality, each of us is given exactly the same number of minutes and hours in every day. Time is the raw material. What we do with it is up to us. A wise man once said that tragedy is not what we suffer, but what we miss. Keep that in mind, Sandy.

Your affectionate godfather.

THE ANNUAL LETTERS
Raymond L. Aaron

Shortly after my daughter Juli-Ann was born, I started a loving tradition that I know others (with whom I have subsequently shared this special plan) have also started. I tell you the idea here both to open your heart with the warmth of my story and also to encourage you to start this tradition within your own family.

Every year, on her birthday, I write an Annual Letter to my daughter. I fill it with funny anecdotes that happened to her that year, hardships or joys, issues that are important in my life or hers, world events, my predictions for the future, miscellaneous thoughts, etc. I add to the letter photographs, presents, report cards and many other types of mementos that would certainly have otherwise disappeared as the years passed.

I keep a folder in my desk drawer in which, all year long, I place things that I want to include in the envelope containing her next Annual Letter. Every week, I make short notes of what I can think of from the week's events that I will want to recall later in the year to write in her Annual Letter. When her birthday approaches, I take out that folder and find it overflowing with ideas, thoughts, poems, cards, treasures, stories, incidents and memories of all sorts – many of which I had already forgotten – and which I then eagerly transcribe into that year's Annual Letter.

Once the letter is written and all the treasures are inserted into the envelope, I seal it. It then becomes that year's Annual Letter. On the envelope I always write "Annual Letter to Juli-Ann from her Daddy on the occasion of her nth Birthday – to be opened when she is twenty-one years old." It is a time capsule of love from every different year of her life, to her as an adult. It is a gift of loving memories from one generation to the next. It is a permanent record of her life written as she was actually living it.

Our tradition is that I show her the sealed envelope, with the proclamation written on it that she may read it when she is twenty-one. Then I take her to the bank, open the safe deposit box and tenderly place that year's Annual Letter on top of the growing pile of its predecessors. She sometimes takes them all out to look at them and feel them. She sometimes asks me about their contents and I always refuse to tell her what is inside.

In recent years, Juli-Ann has given me some of her special childhood treasures, which she is growing too old for but which she does not want to lose. And she asks me to include them in her Annual Letter so that she will always have them.

That tradition of writing her Annual Letters is now one of my most sacred duties as a dad. And, as Juli-Ann grows older, I can see that it is a growing and special part of her life, too. One day, we were sitting with friends musing about what we will be doing in the future. I cannot recall the exact words spoken, but it went something like this: I jokingly told Juli-Ann that on her 61st birthday, she will be playing with her grandchildren Then I whimsically invented that on her 31st birthday she will be driving her own kids to hockey practice. Getting into the groove of this funny game and encouraged by Juli-Ann's evident enjoyment of my fantasies, I continued. "On your 21st birthday, you will be graduating from university."

"No," she interjected, "I will be too busy reading!"

One of my deepest desires is to be alive and present to enjoy that wonderful time in the future when the time capsules are opened and the accumulated mountains of love come tumbling out of the past, back into my adult daughter's life.

THESE THINGS I WISH FOR YOU
Lee Pitts

We tried so hard to make things better for our kids that we made them worse. For my grandchildren, I'd know better. I'd really like for them to know about hand-me-down clothes and homemade ice cream and leftover meat loaf. I really would.

My cherished grandson, I hope you learn humility by surviving failure and that you learn to be honest even when no one is looking. I hope you learn to make your bed and mow the lawn and wash the car. And I hope nobody gives you a brand new car when you are sixteen. It will be good if at least one time you can see a baby calf born and you have a good friend to be with you if you ever have to put your old dog to sleep. I hope you get a black eye fighting for something you believe in. I hope you have to share a bedroom with your younger brother. And it is all right to draw a line down the middle of the room, but when he wants to crawl under the covers with you because he's scared, I hope you'll let him. And when you want to see a Disney movie and your kid brother wants to tag along, I hope you take him. I hope you have to walk uphill with your friends and that you live in a town where you can do it safely. If you want a slingshot, I hope your father teaches you how to make one instead of buying one. I hope you learn to dig in the dirt and read books, and when you learn to use computers, you also learn how to add and subtract in your head.

I hope you get razzed by friends when you have your first crush on a girl, and that when you talk back to your mother you learn what Ivory soap tastes like. May you skin your knee climbing a mountain, burn your hand on the stove, and stick your tongue on a frozen flagpole. I hope you get sick when someone blows smoke in your face. I don't care if you try beer once, but I hope you won't like it. And if a friend offers you a joint or any drugs, I hope you are smart enough to realize that person is not your friend. I sure hope you make time to sit on a porch with your grandpa or go fishing with your uncle. I hope your mother punishes you when you throw a baseball through a neighbor's window, and that she hugs you and kisses you when you give her a plaster-of-Paris mold of your hand.

These things I wish for you: tough times and disappointment, hard work and happiness.

Four Letters to My Child

RICHARD ISRAEL

In the Hospital Waiting Room, May 24, 1961

To my (as yet) unborn child,

It is late. Though expectant fathers are supposed to be nervous, I am more restless than worried and wish you would already arrive.

Observing the children of friends, it is my impression that it may be some time before I will once again have the opportunity to address you in as much quiet as I have available this evening. Since talking to you at this time in the waiting room would merely raise questions in the nurse's mind about my potential competence as a stable parent, I shall commit this address to writing, to deliver it at some presently unknown and undesignated time.

I am full of expectations for you. Not about your sex. I don't have the least interest in whether you are a girl or a boy. Five or six children from now, if the law of averages treats us shabbily, I might have some feelings about the question, but I don't now.

There are other matters that seem far more significant. It is, for example, very important to me that you be fun, not so that you should keep me amused, though I wouldn't mind that, but, more significantly, that you should be joyful. It appears that whatever you turn out to be, you are likely to be named after my father, who was an Isaac ("Yitzhak," from "laughter"), so that somehow your name will have to do with laughter or happiness, and that seems right. I do not recommend earnestness to you as your chief virtue.

That does not mean that I don't want you to care about others. I want that very much. May you be able to be either kind or angry for others' sakes. You will know which is appropriate when the time comes. Even more, may you be willing from time to time to risk doing something that may turn out to be foolish, for the sake of a wise concern.

Tonight, I am particularly conscious of our responsibilities to make the world a better place, since it is with mixed feelings of guilt and relief that I am now sitting in the hospital rather than driving to Montgomery, Alabama, with Bill [Rev. William Sloan] Coffin and John Maguire (they drove off without me) in pursuit of what seems like a very important cause.[1]

I write all this to warn both of us that I shall try not to live out my deficiencies through you, but at the same time that I do not plan to abandon all goals and aspirations for you just because they happen to be mine, too. One goal that I think I shall not give up is that I want you to be clearly and irrevocably Jewish. I do not know if my way will be your way, but your way must be a real way, and a serious way. I won't give an inch on that one. It is perhaps a sign of our (or at least my) time that I am already taking a defensive posture on this issue. Perhaps for you, being Jewish will be an easy and relaxed thing, not the struggle and effort it has been for me, but I don't feel compelled to wish you an easy time of it. Valuable things usually cost quite a bit. Perhaps part of your struggle will be with me.

I want you to be happy, caring, and Jewish. How am I going to get you to be any of them—ah, now the anxiety begins. I don't have the vaguest notion of what it means to be a parent or how one goes about the task. Doing what comes naturally is clearly no panacea. People have been doing that for years, and we can see what the results have been. But then what alternatives have I but to promise you that I will try hard and hope that you won't have to pay too much for my on-the-job training. If you try to forgive my mistakes, I'll try to forgive yours. We are both going to make them—lots.

But, alas, my noble sentiments are rapidly leaving me as I am slowly becoming engulfed by the desire to sleep and my impatience for you, or at least for Dr. Friedman, to appear with joyous tidings. The Almighty is clearly helping me to practice parenting even before your arrival. I am not sure that I am grateful for His concern in this area at this moment. In any event, my wishes for you and the Messiah are the same at this moment. May you both come speedily.

With love of unknown and untested quality,
Your expectant father
Richard Israel

[1]Coffin and Maguire were the Protestant chaplains at Yale and Wesleyan Universities, respectively, while I was the Jewish chaplain at Yale. They were joining a group trying to integrate interstate bus transportation in the South.

September 4, 1979

Dear Alisa,

It is eighteen years now since I wrote you from the waiting room of the New Haven hospital. Though we have communicated by letter from time to time over the years, this seems like the right occasion to resume that earlier correspondence. The last time I wrote, you were an abstract idea. This time I am writing to a very concrete you. In a few hours, I am going to take you off to college. I don't know about you, but I certainly don't feel old enough for this sort of thing. I am not sure which of us is more nervous, though we probably are not worried about the same things.

I should imagine that you are worried about losing old friends and making new ones, about how you are going to do in your classes, whether it is really difficult to survive in big, bad old New York City, and the distant, but not distant enough, question about what you will do with your life four years from now.

I am worried about the same matters but some additional ones as well. (At the time of the last letter, I thought I was worrying more than you.) In addition to worrying about you, I am worried about myself, worrying about my failings, worried about whether I have adequately prepared you for what is to come.

The Talmud says that a father must teach his children three things: Torah, a worldly occupation, and how to swim. It is presumed that with skills in these three areas, you can manage anywhere. You are certainly a splendid swimmer, far better than one who is as ill-coordinated as I am had a right to expect. I am very pleased about your cooking and catering abilities. They are formidable and will always give you an occupation if you want one, whatever else happens in your life. Whether it is a skill that you will use or only store away in your head doesn't matter. I have always been grateful to my grandfather for teaching me to bind books. I doubt if I am ever going to bind books for a living, but it is comforting to believe that I could if I really had to.

I don't think that I have taught you enough Torah. When I was growing up, Judaism for me was mostly something I found in books. For you and your other three siblings, I wanted it to be more immediate, the sounds you heard, the food you ate, as natural as breathing. As a result, though you know a lot of pieces of the tradition, certainly much more than I knew at your age, I don't know if you have the right set of connections, the ideas that make it all hang together. I wanted you to be both

traditional and modern at the same time, and I am not sure that I have given you the tools. I am also concerned about the extent to which I have tried to glue onto you my kind of Jewishness and what that might be doing to your soul.

I think I should try harder to realize that we are different people. Of late, I have taken to counseling parents that they have no more right to take credit for their children's successes than they are obligated to blame themselves for their children's failures. The most casual glance at your brothers and sister makes it clear that kids raised in the same home turn out to be very different people in ways that can hardly be accounted for by position in the family. It may be biology, it may be *mazel* (luck), or even will that has made each of you unique.

That is what I believe in my head. In my gut, however, I and the other parents to whom I dispense this wisdom feel great personal satisfaction from their children's triumphs and great shame from their failures. I secretly say of you: Look what I did (hooray!), or Look what I did (sigh). For both of us, part of the process of our growing up is learning to separate out some of these issues.

I feel comfortable with your political sensibilities, particularly that you have them but also insofar as they incline in the same direction as mine. Then I say to myself, What right have I to be happy about such a thing? They are, after all, your sensibilities, or if they aren't, they have no meaning. But on the other hand, didn't I help give them to you? Do I deserve no credit? How do I give you standards as a parent while at the same time view you with at least as much nonjudgmental compassion as I would want to extend to any other independent adult? I don't yet know.

You haven't made it any easier, either. Whenever I give you the no-adult-privileges-without-adult-responsibilities speech, you always respond by telling me that you are neither an adult nor a child but are something in between. That is true, but also an easy dodge. We are both rather muddled about this issue, and I am aware of no way out except to be aware of it.

You turned out to be named properly. You are certainly a joy and a ray of sunshine for everyone who knows you. But when I expressed the wish that you would be that way those eighteen years ago, I forgot that the energy that gives people like you especially good cheer would from time to time be quite depleted. It is reassuring, however, how much better in control of your gloom you are than you once were.

We have had a special closeness, you and I, perhaps because you were a first child or perhaps because so many of our best and worst qualities

and even our styles of dealing with the world are so similar. Perhaps it is because of the way we seem to sweep up after each other. It is more than likely that your mother will have a bird tomorrow upon seeing the state in which you will almost inevitably leave your room. To me, it seems the most natural state of affairs in the world that you should be going to visit Eva in the hospital, and if everything doesn't get done, so be it. On the other hand, you should be clear that people like us need people like your mother to keep our worlds ordered, and our "flexibility" is most often sustained, at no small cost to her, by her sense of orderliness, resist it though we may.

I do not think I am much better a parent now than I was eighteen years ago when you were born. I have learned much less along the way than I should have supposed. I have far less insight into how I think you should raise our grandchildren than I would have suspected. What I have learned is that as complex and exhausting as I thought raising children would be, I greatly underestimated the measure of effort and time that would be required. I am now more tolerant of other people's styles of childrearing because I have discovered how much more confusing, exhausting, and sometimes even desperate a task parenting is than I imagined. I certainly no longer believe that if you are sincere, everything works out nicely. But though we have had moments together that have been painful, I can honestly say I do not regret any of them. I have come to view even those hard times as part of what it is all about.

And so, Alisa, may you go in peace and come in peace. May you always be both our child and your own independent person, even though it will never be very neat. May you find your path to Torah. May you succeed with hard things. Whatever you do in this world, may you do it well, for then you will remain *aliza* ("happy" in Hebrew, pun intended).

With a love that has been well-seasoned,
Your satisfied father
Richard Israel

June 18, 1985

Dear Alisa and Harold,

I should like to address you this day of your marriage with great love, respect, and not a little anxiety.

On two important occasions in the past, when you were about to be born and when you were about to go to college, I have written letters to you, Alisa, that were a sort of cross between a classical ethical will

and what might be described as a parental position paper. This seems like a significant enough event for the third in the series, though this time, the letter does not go to you alone, Alisa, but rather, to the two of you.

It goes to both of you, because my relation to Alisa is no longer unmediated. Though you, Alisa, are no less my daughter now than you ever were, you are a daughter whose new primary relationship will be to you, Harold, her husband. That suggests that the areas in which it is permissible for me to nag are now greatly restricted, indeed, almost entirely eliminated, that your home, Alisa, is elsewhere, and that this house in which you grew up and where you will always be welcome, has become a place to visit, a storage warehouse (although, it should be noted, for only a finite period of time) and a laundromat that doesn't charge quarters.

That is a very hard thing to think about, much less say, particularly inasmuch as I don't feel ready for you to be my married daughter. It is not that I want to discourage you from getting married. Certainly not. I have been a very active encourager. We all know that. It is just that I have an unreasonable wish that first you should know as much about what it means to be married, as I, in retrospect, now wish I had known lo those many years ago. I want you to know how wonderful it is and how hard and how many things you can do wrong and what are the comforts you can expect and how to muddle through when the comfort season is a little lean. You clearly ought not get married without knowing these things . . . and alas, neither should I have, nor should anyone else who also can't be told and who has to make those discoveries alone.

It doesn't much help me that I understand perfectly well that my concerns are just a part of the inevitable war between the generations in which parents always find their children not quite prepared for whatever their children believe themselves to be ready. Whether the question is who holds the cereal spoon or when to begin using the family car, or when to have babies, parents and children are only rarely on the same timetable. I shall do my best to make my peace with your current innocence, in the comforting knowledge that, in the first place, you are probably a lot less innocent than I was when I married and, second, like the rest of us, you will get older.

As you spend years getting to know one another, you will learn that one of the more curious features of the human personality is how close virtues are to deficiencies. It is likely that you both cook too well for either of your long-term good. Alisa, wherever you are, there is a party, but parties sometimes take up quite a bit of space. Also, your extraordinary ability to respond with great competence to the exigencies of the moment does not always leave you with the resources to dole out your formidable talents in measured fashion for more routine matters.

Harold, my congenial fellow woodsman and log splitter, some of whose handiwork will warm this house next winter, I eyed you with all of the suspicion uniquely and appropriately directed to the suitor of one's firstborn daughter. By now, you are far less a stranger than a comfortable and treasured member of our confusing and noisy family. While Alisa is an expert in liveliness, you, Harold, seem to specialize in steadiness; she in now, you in then. May you each corrupt each other, but only just a little, so that you don't lose these, your very real strengths.

You both know how to work hard. No matter what you do, that is a quality that will surely stand you in good stead. Neither of you appears to view yourself as a finished product. That too, I find admirable. It has always seemed more important to me to try to be a *lamdan,* one who keeps on learning, than a *talmid hakham,* one whose learning has already arrived. Don't let your curiosity about important things die as you become engrossed by the routines of living. Don't let your search for the perfectly set table distract you from a concern for a larger vision which will energize both your lives over the years. Your commitments to Torah and *hokhma* will nourish you more than will Julia Child and her friends. Yuppie heaven is ultimately not a very interesting place.

The Midrash assures us that making a proper match, one that will really hold together, is as great a miracle as the splitting of the Red Sea. If that was such a miracle in the time of our ancestors, how much greater a miracle it must be in our own days, when many expect from marriage so much more and invest in it so much less.

As you may have discovered already, it is either a great act of faith or an illusion to believe that men and women are really both members of the same species. In the face of the inevitable strains, what will serve you best is what can only be thought of as moral resolve, your commitment to stick to your marriage and make it work. That determination is what you need more than anything else to carry you over the bumps.

Off you go on a formidable adventure together. It should be a wonderful one. We, your family and friends, are very proud of you today, proud of your qualities as Jews, as students of secular culture and as very honorable *menschen.* And there is every reason to believe that we will be even more proud in the course of time.

So may you go forth in joy and be led forth in peace. May the mountains and the hills before you break into singing and all the trees of the field clap their hands. Though you are two persons, there is now only

one life before you. May you find happiness in the time to come, and may your days be good and long upon the earth.

Your father and soon-to-be father-in-law

Thursday, January 14, 1988

Dear Alisa,

I never planned these letters as part of a package when I first started writing them. It seems to me that this is likely to be the last of the four I will have written you on special occasions—the last, not because there will be no further special occasions between us, but rather, because now the cycle is complete. (It is for that reason that I address it to you rather than to you and Harold. I in no way want to minimize the profound affection and respect I feel for him.)

I first wrote you when I was a young parent just about to have a newborn and now, it is you who are a young parent about to have a newborn. It is you who are now more or less in the situation I was in some 26 years ago, when you first surfaced. The decisions we had to make about your life are now for you and Harold to make about your nearly born child.

In many respects, it is a very different world today than the one into which you were born. Politically, the 1960's were full of turmoil and hope. We were confident that we could change the world and make it better. It was comforting to realize that we knew who the good people were and who were the bad ones. Now everything is much more muddled and our chances of affecting the system seem much more remote.

Jewish life then was more bland, but more genial. The world around us was so much more obviously hostile to Jews that we could not yet afford to harass one another. Israel was a tiny country, only a few miles wide and the Wall could only be seen in sentimental pictures of old Jerusalem.

Digital watches and VCR's didn't exist. Hand-held calculators cost a fortune and were as big as Kleenex boxes. Computers lived in large laboratories at universities and didn't come home at night. Students were ashamed to tell their classmates they were going into law or medicine, unless they claimed they were doing it to serve the poor. Teaching and the Peace Corps were the preferred professions, and no one, simply no one, would admit to wanting to go into business.

Into all of this, you appeared. I still remember clearly how terrified I

was with the thought of bringing this expensive stranger into my house and had only the vaguest notions of what I was supposed to do with it. In this respect, you are probably better prepared than I was. You already seem to know what to do with babies, something I never quite learned. I have argued that it is programmed into your feminine hardware (feminine software would probably be the more felicitous phrase), but since Harold, too, appears to know significantly more about these things than I, an ostensibly experienced father, perhaps it is only my soft- or hardware that is deficient.

In other respects, too, I think you have an advantage over me. You seem to have fewer illusions. I was determined to be an outstanding parent—an obviously outrageous goal. You are more likely to want to be a good-enough parent. That is not to say you will want less for your child than I did for you, but rather, that you may know more about the limits of parenting than I did. Your aspirations for your child may be better tempered by your child's aspirations for himself. My parenting was grounded in a plan, albeit not a very clear plan. Yours is more likely to be in your child. I am probably overstating the case, because another part of me hopes that you and Harold also have in your heads and hearts some kind of grand notion about the kind of person you want your child to be and the values you want that child to have. To be altogether person-centered is to assume that only your child knows what one kind of person to become. That is patently a fraud, just as much as the other notion, which assumes that you can make any child turn out the way you want, if you only try hard enough. As with most anything else in this world, there is undoubtedly a middle ground which makes most sense of all.

As I look around at zealous and pure types, whether Jews, vegetarians, or Republicans, it has become increasingly clear to me that any good idea carried to its logical conclusion is probably wrong. (I just ran into someone who wanted to impose the death penalty on people who hurt animals.) It is very easy for people with noble concerns to run amok. Avoid fads, whether of childrearing, Judaism, or politics, and you will probably be better parents for it.

If you are like us, part of the baggage of childhood that you bring with you into parenthood is the notion that since you are much nicer people than your parents, you and your children will get on much better with each other than you did with your parents. No chance. Undoubtedly, you will not make the same mistakes we did. Rather, like us, you will make your own new and improved mistakes. Just don't assume that by

doing the opposite of what we did, you will be more likely to be right. In the process of developing your own style of childrearing, do your best not to bend over backward so far that you fall on your faces.

You and I have spoken of the old Greek theory of knowledge, reworked by the Midrashic literature, that all knowledge is known *in utero,* but that an angel comes along at birth, strikes the child under the nose, leaving the crease that we all have and causing the child to forget, so that learning is really recalling. Knowing with exquisite precision how to exasperate parents is one piece of wisdom that never has to be recalled. It always seems to sneak past the angel. Be confident that whatever your weaknesses, your children will find you out at once and immediately leap for the jugular, just as you and your brothers and sister did. It is part of what parenting is all about. May you manage not to take it any more personally than necessary. It is important to understand your contribution to the mess but not to assume responsibility for all of it.

In particular, be sure to hold your psychic breath throughout those difficult adolescent years and hang on, no matter what. You were about thirteen and at the beginning of it all. There was something we wanted you to do that you didn't want to do, though what it was, I have forgotten. You were in your nightgown on the stairs between the second and third floor when you declared, "I am now an autonomous, responsible adult and able to make my *own* decisions,"—and your teddy bear was under your arm, an irony that somehow eluded you.

You will probably have forgotten your own adolescence by the time your child reaches that age. May you at least recollect enough to know that a lot of love and dogged determination will carry you through better than clever psychological insights.

Children are often hard on a marriage. In the course of raising them, it will be important for you and Harold to make a special effort to be nice to one another—for quite some time, particularly since, as we have learned from you and your sibs, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But we have also learned that things do become more manageable with the passage of years. In the short run, you should take comfort in knowing that you really will sleep again. Do not assume that life will *ever* come together in a neat package, but in the long run, there will be some very satisfying resting spots.

Yes, raising children is hard, but it is also the most gratifying activity there is. If you raise them to get gratification, you will get none at all, but if you do it because there are few if any tasks more important, then childrearing can provide a measure of extraordinary satisfaction that

only those who have raised children can know. I am grateful to you for providing some of those choice satisfactions.

It is true that there were times in the past when I would have or maybe did mumble the old curse, "May you have children like you." It turns out that I can still say the same words, but now they have turned into a blessing. Alisa, may you have children like you.

With a love that is eager to discover new dimensions,
Your child's alarmingly inexperienced grandfather