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**Marsha Kay Seff** OUR PARENTS, OURSELVES

## Life stories by parents can ease them into thinking about the end

When Sharon Lund writes about life and death, she knows what she's talking about.

She has been living with HIV/AIDS since she contracted it from her ex-husband in 1983. The Chula Vista says she had two near-death experiences in the mid-'90s. Today her blood count is normal.

Trained as a metaphysical minister, Sharon is an international speaker and the author of "Sacred Living, Sacred Dying: A Guide to Embracing Life and Death," published by iUniverse and available — autographed — through [sharonlund.com](http://sharonlund.com).

Her primary reason for writing the book, Sharon says, is, "I would love to see adult children sit down with their parents and grandparents and write, video or audiotape their life stories."

That's the "living" part of the book. Sharon says as older folks start talking about their life stories, they end up re-prioritizing, looking at what really matters.

Which brings her to the "dying" part of her book. The life stories ease parents into thinking about the end of lives, their final wishes. The life stories can become part of planned creative memorials, she points out. "Know that the amount of time you spend creating the second part of your Sacred Planner will spare your

friends and loved ones from having to make critical and often difficult decisions at the emotional time of your death."

Talking about life and death with your parents can be a positive experience for all, she says.

"Having grown to appreciate the sacredness of life and the dance with death, my passion is to assist other men and women to leave their legacy of love and plan a unique memorial. By honoring the story of our life's journey and sharing our wisdom, we will discover ways for our memories to cascade and live on in the hearts and minds of friends and loved ones."

The reason more people don't write their stories is they believe their lives aren't important or valuable. And they're afraid to think about death.

Sharon debunks this. "The great thing about writing your life story (including your final wishes) when you are healthy is that you can start living knowing everything is in place."

I have to agree. In fact, I've been teaching a class for San Diego Community College Extended Studies on Writing Your Life Story.

Obviously, writing doesn't come easily to everyone. That's why I found Sharon's suggestions for topics so important.

Here are just a few you might share with your parents to encourage them to put pen to paper:

- What were your first childhood friendships like? What did you enjoy doing as a child?

- What stands out about your school days?

- What are you passionate about? What gives your life meaning? What is one of the happiest days of your life or your proudest moment?

- What one thing lifts your spirits and makes you happy?

- What is your favorite time of the day and why?

- How do/did you and your spouse enhance each others' lives?

- If neither money nor time were an issue, what would you want to do and why?

You get the idea. As I tell my class, you don't have to start your story with the day you were born and include every earth-shattering or not-so-shattering moment. Hit the highlights, the things that make you the person you are.

Then, it might feel natural to make the leap into jotting down your final wishes. For some ideas on that subject, check out "Sacred Dying" at the top of the home page of [sandiegoeldercare.com](http://sandiegoeldercare.com).

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**Marsha Kay Seff** edits the San Diego ElderCare Directory. The 2008 books are available at libraries, senior centers, UT offices and Longs Pharmacies. You can also check online at [SanDiegoElderCare.com](http://SanDiegoElderCare.com). Contact Seff at [marsha.seff@uniontrib.com](mailto:marsha.seff@uniontrib.com).