

Template for Birthday Letters: Creating a Lifetime Legacy Love

Quit Carding Your Kids

When you buy children \$2.95 birthday cards (or \$4.95 if you want to show that you *really, really* love them), what happens next? They smile for a minute or two and read what some sappy aphorism artist at Hallmark wrote up to make it sound like you’re very thoughtful and loving. Then, the kid rips into whatever gift wrapped gadget you bought, the birthday card is discarded, and that’s the end of it. (If you’re *really conscientious about the future*, maybe the card and wrapping paper make it to the recycling bin.) Soon, the gizmo gift breaks. You spent (and I use that word consciously) hours and dollars for nothing more than a brief blip of shallow and temporary forgettable enjoyment.

There’s a better way. It costs *nothing*, takes less time than a trek to Toys R Us...and it lasts more than a lifetime. I call it a “Lifetime Legacy Love Letter.”

It’s this simple: I urge you, each year (at least), to write those kids letters that they’ll treasure throughout their lives and long after you’re gone. Heartfelt and thoughtful expressions of your love for a child; a memory lane of your observations about youngsters at this particular phase in their lives; and an encouragement to develop the traits and talents you find especially promising. Toss in some life lessons, too.

No kids of your own? Be generous and forward thinking, anyway; write them for nieces and nephews, grandkids, and friends’ kids.

How would *you* feel if you could read such letters from your parents, written back when you were a child? I was inspired by a friend who recently told me that she keeps the handwritten letters her adoring dad has written to her stashed in her freezer. If there’s a fire, she wants these treasures to survive. There’s no jewelry in her fridge; just these far more valued and irreplaceable treasures.

Flash forward a half century. You’re dead or dottering. The child is today’s age plus fifty years. He or she reads to your grandchildren the letter you wrote to your child. Your kid -- now a thoughtful, reflective adult with kids of his or her own -- remembers not the cards and gifts you gave, but the love you put into that letter. It’s your legacy; your lasting legend of love.

I’ve written my 18 year old daughter such letters all her life, and though they mean very little to her now, I savor satisfying self-smiles knowing that one day, decades down the line, she’ll have them. She’ll know exactly who her dad was,

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how he cared for her welfare, and how he adored her, even during the challenging phases of her young life.

Nothing will give YOU a better return-on-investment than taking the time to write Lifetime Legacy Love Letters for your own children and for other kids in your life.

Sure, you have excuses: “I’m really just not a writer. I wouldn’t know where to start. I’d make embarrassing errors. My kids wouldn’t care about a letter. She wants a doll and he wants an electronic toy. People would think I’m a cheapskate parent if all I did was write a letter.” OK, fine, give a gift, too. But first, write the letter. Don’t “spend” your time and resources, “*invest them!*”

Where to start? Right here. I’ll prime your pen with the template that follows. Whether longhand or typed, just finish these sentences. The more you write, the greater the treasure you’ll be passing along.

Although my written work is protected by international copyright laws, I’m giving you my specific, explicit permission to use the template that follows. Copy it exactly, or change it any way you wish. I don’t need any credit. The joy I’ll get from imagining, along with you, the impact you’ll be having on future generations is all I need.

Life Legacy Love Letter on Your Nth Birthday

My dear sweet child...

Today (*date*) is your (*Nth*) birthday and I want you to know how much I love you, what I admire about you, what memories I’ll always hold from this past year as your parent (*or friend, or Auntie, or Grandpa*), and what lessons I hope you’ll learn about life at your own pace. Right now, this letter may not mean much to you. Maybe you’d rather have some colorful card I bought at the drugstore. In the future, though, as you grow up, you’ll always have the memories that come with this letter.

Even though I may read this letter to you now, I’m really writing it for the grown-up person you’re in the process of becoming. I’ll do this every year and one day, you’ll have a chronological catalog of my caring.

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There will always be copies of these letters waiting for you in...*(Give directions for future retrieval: Bank safe deposit box? Filename on computer backup disc, Aunt Edith's freezer?)*

This year, as you complete your *N* th year, what I've noticed most in your growth is how you have become...

A couple of my very favorite moments this year were when you...

I bet you'll always be able to remember the time when we...

One of the main things you've taught me is...

At school, right now you really enjoy...

You'll grow, develop, and change in the years ahead, for sure. Right now, though, as I see who you already are, I can imagine that you'll grow to be the kind of person who...

One of the things I most admire about the way you behave is that you...

During the year ahead, one of the things I'll focus on as your parent *(or Uncle, friend, etc.)* is helping you to...

It's natural that you learn how to behave from me, and also from *(other parent)*. As I've watched you develop this past year, I can clearly see you being like your *(mother /father)* when you ...

And, you're a lot like your *(mother /father)* when you ...

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When you look back, years from now, you may wonder what was going on in my life aside from the joy I experienced raising you. So, I’d like you to know that, apart from the fun I’ve had with you, something I’ve particularly enjoyed about my life is...

There’ve been hard times this year, too. One of the toughest things I faced was when...

Kids reveal a lot about themselves through the friends they pick. I’ve noticed the interesting choices you’ve made in your own circle of playmates.

At this point in your life, you always say your best friend is *(best friend’s name)*. You seem to really enjoy *(playmate’s name)* because of *(point out his or her traits and qualities that seem to draw your child)*...

You also seem to really enjoy *(another playmate’s name)* because of *(point out his or her traits and qualities that seem to draw your child)*...

And even though you have lots of other friends, you seem to really particularly enjoy *(another playmate’s name)* because of *(point out his or her traits and qualities that seem to draw your child)*...

One of your qualities that I especially admire is how you...

If I couldn’t teach you any more about life, the one lesson I’d say is the most important thing you could learn is ...

This last year of knowing you and watching you develop has meant so much to me. The biggest thing I’ll carry forward in my heart is the knowledge that...

I love you, and that’s why I’ve written you this letter. It’s my Legacy of Love for your Lifetime.

(Revised 8/18/2008)