

While I Still Can

A Caregiver's Journal for the Stories Worth Saving

MEREDITH GLYNN

Serenity & Sweet Tea

This journal holds the stories of

_____

their name, and what the family calls them

Lovingly gathered by _____

We started on _____

Our favorite place to sit and talk _____

Others who helped write these pages _____

_____

A life was lived. Stories were shared.
And someone cared enough to write it all down.

A Note to the Caregiver

Caregiving fills our days with responsibilities. Appointments. Medications. Schedules. Endless lists of things that must be done. But woven quietly through those busy days are moments that deserve to be remembered: stories, laughter, lessons learned over a lifetime, and wisdom that might slip away if no one writes it down.

This journal was made to help you catch those moments while you still can. Take your time. Ask the questions gently, not like a formal interview, but like a conversation between two people who love each other. Spelling can wait. Beautiful handwriting is optional. What matters is their voice, and your faithful witness to it.

I made this journal because I'm living it too. I care for my Daddy, and some days he tells me stories about growing up and the family he's lost. I listen like it's the first time, every time, because one day those stories will only live in me, and in pages like these.

Some days will be heavy with the work of care. Others will carry small flashes of wonder: a song half-remembered, a recipe described from memory, a nickname whose story makes you both laugh. Catch them as they come. Even five minutes of conversation captured today becomes a priceless inheritance tomorrow.

The porch light is always on.

Meredith

How to Use This Journal

- **Make it cozy.** A warm cup of tea, a familiar blanket, a soft playlist, a favorite chair by the window. Small rituals make the time feel safe and special.
- **One question at a time.** Begin simply and let silence do some of the work. Memories often come in layers: facts first, then feelings, then meaning.
- **Use any order.** Skip what doesn't fit today. Come back when new details surface. If an answer belongs somewhere else, write it in the Notes pages at the back.
- **Write it in their words.** Short, exact quotes are powerful. Your job isn't to correct the record; it's to keep what feels true to the teller in that moment.
- **Date and initial each entry,** especially if more than one person is writing. That way every voice stays clear for the future.
- **Add a [bracketed note]** when timelines blur, so future readers can follow along without interrupting the story.
- **When emotions rise, slow down.** Breathe with them. You aren't only gathering details. You're honoring a life.

> REMEMBER
>
> *There are no wrong answers and no deadline. Even one line written today is a gift to tomorrow.*

What's Inside

A Note to the Caregiver 3

How to Use This Journal 4

SECTION ONE
A Life Timeline 6

SECTION TWO
Family Tree and Heritage 13

SECTION THREE
Love and Family 18

SECTION FOUR
Becoming a Parent 21

SECTION FIVE
Life Lessons and Wisdom 24

SECTION SIX
Favorite Things 27

SECTION SEVEN
Our Family Traditions 31

SECTION EIGHT
Questions to Ask While the Stories Are Close 37

SECTION NINE
Moments During Caregiving 41

SECTION TEN
Photo Memory Pages 53

SECTION ELEVEN
The Caregiver's Reflection Pages 61

SECTION TWELVE
Letters of Gratitude 69

SECTION THIRTEEN
While I Still Can 75

A Final Word 78

Notes 79



SECTION ONE

A Life Timeline

Begin with anchors: the year, the place, and the names of the people who first spoke your loved one's name. If dates are fuzzy, write approximate years and any clues: a big snow that winter, a war just ended, a parade downtown.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Ask about the senses. What did the kitchen smell like? What color was the front door? Whose voice sang the lullabies? Those textures bring the past to life for readers who never walked those halls.*

Early Life

Full name and nicknames _____

Date or year of birth _____ Birthplace (city, state) _____

Parents' names _____

_____

_____

Describe your earliest memory.

Childhood

What was your childhood home like?

Sketch the floor plan, name the street, list the neighborhood landmarks.

What games or activities did you love as a child?

A favorite toy, book, or radio show? Write its name.

Who was your closest childhood friend, and what do you remember about them?

How you met, where you played, the little rituals of your friendship.

What is one childhood memory that still makes you smile?

Let it stretch into a scene: the crack of a bat in a summer alley, garden tomatoes with salt.

Teenage Years

What music did you love listening to as a teenager?

Records, the car radio, the places you gathered after games.

What were your closest friendships like during this time?

What was your first job, and what did you learn from it?

The name of the store, the boss who taught you something, the lesson that stuck.

What did you dream of becoming when you were young?

Even dreams that changed reveal what mattered: freedom, service, creativity, adventure.

Young Adulthood

What was your first place on your own like?

Roommates, rent, the stove that always clicked twice.

What work paid the bills, and what work fed your soul?

What responsibilities or experiences shaped you most during this season?

Military service, college, an apprenticeship, travel? Note where and when, and how it felt.

Life at a Glance

Decade by decade: where you were, and what was happening in your life and in the world.

YEARS	WHERE WE LIVED	WHAT WAS HAPPENING



SECTION TWO

Family Tree and Heritage

Think of this section as a map of belonging. List names with nicknames, maiden names, and how to say them. Add where people came from, the languages spoken at home, and the heirlooms tied to each person.

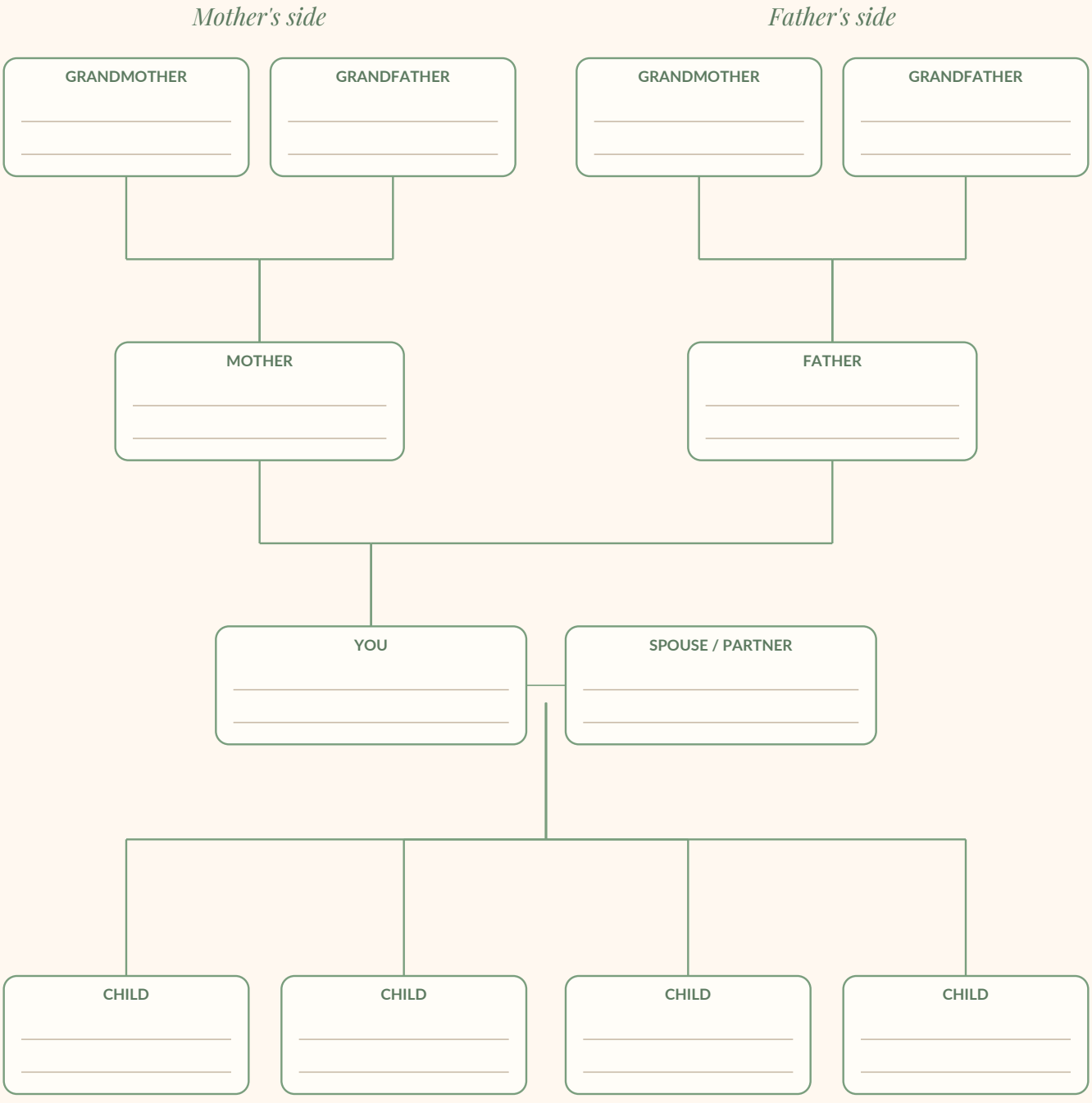
> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Pair each name with a one-line memory: "Grandpa smelled like cedar shavings," or "Aunt Ruth's laugh filled the whole kitchen." Where stories disagree, write down every version. Questions and mysteries are part of the inheritance too.*

Grandparents' names and where they were from

Include maiden names, nicknames, and how to pronounce them.

Our Family Tree

Write a name in each box, with a birth year and where they were from.



Siblings _____

More children or grandchildren _____

Parents' names, and what you remember most about each of them

Siblings, and the role each one played in your life

Protector, instigator, confidant? How did those roles shift as you grew?

Children, and a favorite memory with each

Be specific: the bedtime story read on repeat, the soccer game in the rain.

Aunts, uncles, in-laws, mentors, and chosen family who became kin by love

Where the family moved over the years, and why

Work, safety, love, adventure.

Family stories that should be passed down to future generations

Family mysteries, open questions, and stories told more than one way

Write down every version, without judgment.



SECTION THREE

Love and Family

Start with the setting of the first meeting: the room, the season, the way the light fell on their face. Then let the ordinary days in: grocery runs side by side, quiet Sundays, learning how to disagree with tenderness.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Ask for the tiny wedding-day moments: a crooked boutonniere, a grandmother's song, the meal that almost burned. If the story includes heartbreak before wholeness, that belongs here too. Honesty is part of the gift.*

How did you meet the love of your life?

What did you first notice about them?

What was your wedding day like?

What is a favorite memory from your early years together?

What did you learn about love through your relationship?

Through moves, career changes, illnesses weathered, and the practice of staying.

What advice would you give someone about love and marriage?

Ground it in a story: "We learned to say sorry by leaving notes in the breadbox."



SECTION FOUR

Becoming a Parent

Tell the arrival story with honesty: the awe, the fear, the way time folded at that first meeting. However family came, through birth, adoption, fostering, step-parenting, or grandparenting, it all belongs here.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Proudest moments don't have to be trophies. The day someone apologized without being asked, or stood up for a friend, counts too. And the funny stories belong here: mispronounced words that became family lore.*

What was it like becoming a parent for the first time?

What were your hopes for your children?

Write them in the present tense, as a gift forward: "May you be kind, curious, and brave."

What family traditions mattered most to you?

Big celebrations and small rituals: Saturday pancakes, the clean-up song.

What were the funniest moments of raising your family?

What were your proudest moments?

What do you most want your children and grandchildren to remember about you?



SECTION FIVE

Life Lessons and Wisdom

Approach this like a conversation on a quiet porch. One story per lesson: what happened, the turning point, and what changed after.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *A life well-lived often looks ordinary up close: a steady kindness, a garden tended, a neighbor known by name. When this section feels complete, sign and date it. That small act marks the wisdom offered.*

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

What mistake taught you the most?

What would you do differently, and what did grace look like afterward?

What advice would you give to future generations?

How to apologize, how to celebrate, how to rest.

What values have guided your life?

Integrity, hospitality, courage, faithfulness? Add a sentence showing each one in action.

What do you believe matters most in a life well-lived?

What helped you through the most difficult times you faced?

The people who checked in, the phrases that steadied you, the small habits that held you up.

Signed _____ *Date* _____



SECTION SIX

Favorite Things

A joyful inventory: simple to fill, rich with meaning. For each favorite, add the why: the spice that tastes like home, the song that played at a milestone, the beach whose wind braided your hair with salt.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *If a favorite changed over the years, write the timeline. If a favorite holiday ties to a tradition, flip to Section Seven so the story travels with the flavor.*

Favorite meal

and why

Favorite dessert

and why

Favorite holiday

and why

Favorite place you ever visited

and why

Favorite song

and why

Favorite movie or TV show

and why

Favorite book or story *and why*

Favorite hobby or pastime *and why*

Favorite season, and why *and why*

Favorite smell, and the memory it brings back *and why*

Favorite saying or expression *and why*

Favorite way to spend a slow afternoon

and why



SECTION SEVEN

Our Family Traditions

Start with the traditions they received: who led them and what they meant. Then the ones they started, and how those began. Write the steps so someone can repeat them: where the banner hangs, which song starts the meal, who slices the first piece of pie.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Write recipes in full: measurements, oven temps, resting times, and especially the little secrets that never make it into cookbooks. The recipe cards at the end of this section are made for exactly that.*

What holiday traditions were celebrated in your family growing up?

Who led them, and what did they mean?

What family meals were always made for special occasions?

What traditions did you start in your own family, and how did they begin?

Which traditions do you most hope will continue, and why?

Recipe Card

a recipe worth keeping

Recipe name _____

From the kitchen of _____

Serves _____ Prep _____ Cook _____ Oven _____

INGREDIENTS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

DIRECTIONS

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THE LITTLE SECRET (and the story behind this dish)

_____

_____

Recipe Card

a recipe worth keeping

Recipe name _____

From the kitchen of _____

Serves _____ Prep _____ Cook _____ Oven _____

INGREDIENTS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

DIRECTIONS

THE LITTLE SECRET (and the story behind this dish)

Recipe Card

a recipe worth keeping

Recipe name _____

From the kitchen of _____

Serves _____ Prep _____ Cook _____ Oven _____

INGREDIENTS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
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- _____

DIRECTIONS

_____

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_____

_____

_____

THE LITTLE SECRET (and the story behind this dish)

_____

_____

Recipe Card

a recipe worth keeping

Recipe name _____

From the kitchen of _____

Serves _____ Prep _____ Cook _____ Oven _____

INGREDIENTS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
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- _____
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- _____
- _____

DIRECTIONS

THE LITTLE SECRET (and the story behind this dish)



SECTION EIGHT

Questions to Ask While the Stories Are Close

These questions are especially precious to ask while the stories are close. Approach them gently, over time, as part of natural conversation, never a formal interview. Repeat a question in new words if needed, and follow any spark of memory that appears.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Set a soft scene: a favorite snack, a familiar chair, beloved songs. Ask one question at a time and let silence work. With their permission, record audio too. Their voice is a gift all its own.*

What was the happiest moment of your life?

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

Who influenced your life the most, and how?

If you could relive one single day of your life, which would it be?

Is there a dream you had that people might not know about?

What do you hope your family remembers about you?

Is there anything you want to say to the people you love that hasn't been said yet?

Conversation Notes

After each talk, jot the date and a sentence or two about what you learned about them.



SECTION NINE

Moments During Caregiving

These pages are for right now, while you're in this season together. Keep this section open on the table so you can add a line or two whenever a moment lands. Small notes become a mosaic of this time: the humor, the tenderness, the resilience.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *If your loved one repeats a phrase often, write it exactly as spoken. Those echoes will one day sound like music.*

What Helps

Write these down so other caregivers can step in with confidence, and so future you remembers what worked.

Times of day with the most energy

Activities that bring ease

Folding towels together, sorting photos, watering plants…

Routines that soothe

A favorite radio show, a short drive, a porch sit…

People who help, and how to reach them

On hard days, what we tried and what worked

A moment worth keeping

Date _____ Written by _____

Today we laughed about

Something they said that I want to remember (in their exact words)

A story they told

A quiet moment we shared

Something about them I never want to forget

A moment worth keeping

Date _____ Written by _____

Today we laughed about

Something they said that I want to remember (in their exact words)

A story they told

A quiet moment we shared

Something about them I never want to forget

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Date _____ Written by _____

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Date _____ Written by _____

Today we laughed about

Something they said that I want to remember (in their exact words)

A story they told

A quiet moment we shared

Something about them I never want to forget

A moment worth keeping

Date _____ Written by _____

Today we laughed about

Something they said that I want to remember (in their exact words)

A story they told

A quiet moment we shared

Something about them I never want to forget

A moment worth keeping

Date _____ Written by _____

Today we laughed about

Something they said that I want to remember (in their exact words)

A story they told

A quiet moment we shared

Something about them I never want to forget

A moment worth keeping

Date _____ Written by _____

Today we laughed about

Something they said that I want to remember (in their exact words)

A story they told

A quiet moment we shared

Something about them I never want to forget

A moment worth keeping

Date _____ Written by _____

Today we laughed about

Something they said that I want to remember (in their exact words)

A story they told

A quiet moment we shared

Something about them I never want to forget



SECTION TEN

Photo Memory Pages

Tape or glue photographs into the frames and write the story beside them. Note names, dates, places, and who took the picture if you know. No original? Print a copy, or sketch it from memory.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Ground each photo with three details: a sound, a smell, and a texture. “Screen door creak, cinnamon toast, wool blanket.” Tiny anchors pull future readers right into the memory.*

A photo from their childhood

place photo here

Who's in it

When

Where

The story behind it

A sound · a smell · a texture

A wedding or early family photo

place photo here

Who's in it

When

Where

The story behind it

A sound · a smell · a texture

A favorite family vacation

place photo here

Who's in it

When

Where

The story behind it

A sound · a smell · a texture

A photo that always makes you smile

place photo here

Who's in it

When

Where

The story behind it

A sound · a smell · a texture

A photo from this season of caregiving

place photo here

Who's in it

When

Where

The story behind it

A sound · a smell · a texture

A photo of your choosing

place photo here

Who's in it

When

Where

The story behind it

A sound · a smell · a texture

Little Moments Collage

Hands holding, cups of tea, notes on the counter, the porch light at dusk.

place photo here

place photo here

place photo here

place photo here



SECTION ELEVEN

The Caregiver's Reflection Pages

These pages are for you, the caregiver. A space to process, to remember, and to honor this season. Some entries will pour out; others will come one sentence at a time. Both are holy.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Stuck? Start with "Today I notice…" or "Right now I feel…" and let your words follow. Close with something small for you: a deep breath, a note of gratitude, a promise to step outside for sunlight.*

What caregiving has taught me about love

A moment I will never forget from this caregiving journey

What I learned from walking beside my loved one during this time

How caregiving has changed my heart

The skills I've learned, the griefs I carry, and the gifts I didn't expect

Medication sorting, appointment advocacy, patience in waiting rooms. Plans postponed. Neighbors who showed up.

Date _____

Today I notice…

One small thing I will do for me today _____

Date _____

Today I notice…

One small thing I will do for me today _____

Date _____

Today I notice…

One small thing I will do for me today _____

Date _____

Today I notice…

One small thing I will do for me today _____

Date _____

Today I notice…

One small thing I will do for me today _____



SECTION TWELVE

Letters of Gratitude

Write letters here, to share with your loved one now or to keep privately. Either way, they matter. Begin with a scene instead of a summary: the kitchen at dawn, the winter driveway shoveled clear, the hospital chair pulled close. Then say thank you.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Sign with the title that feels truest: daughter, son, partner, friend, or simply, grateful. Keeping it private? Note whether it may be opened later. If reading aloud, go slowly. Breath is part of the message.*

Letters I want to write

To _____ about _____

To _____ about _____

To _____ about _____

To _____ about _____

A thank-you letter for all you have given me

Dear _____,

With love,

_____

What I admire most about you

Dear _____,

With love,

_____

The memories I treasure most

Dear _____,

With love,

_____

To someone in our circle of care

Dear _____,

With love,

_____

A letter of my choosing

Dear _____,

With love,

_____



SECTION THIRTEEN

While I Still Can

Final prompts for your loved one. Ask gently, and write the answers in their own words. These closing questions gather a whole life into a few bright sentences.

> **A GENTLE TIP**
>
> *Capture exact phrases; they become family blessings. Invite your loved one to sign the final page, even if it's brief, and add a traced handprint or small photo beside it. This page often becomes the heart of the whole journal.*

What message would you leave for future generations?

What do you hope your life represents to the people who knew you?

Invite a story: a moment of courage, a habit of kindness, a practice of generosity.

What values do you most hope your family will carry forward?

In My Own Words

A final note, written or spoken by the one whose stories fill these pages.

Signature _____ *Date* _____

a traced handprint, or a small photo



A Final Word

If this journal is opened many years from now by someone who never had the chance to meet you, let it remind them of something simple but powerful.

A life was lived. Stories were shared. Love was given freely. And someone cared enough to write it all down.

The porch light is always on.

— Meredith Glynn

Serenity & Sweet Tea · serenityandsweettea.com

Notes

stories that showed up out of order, names to look up, things to ask next time

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