



# FAMILY Wisdom

*Capturing, Sharing & Passing Down the Sayings That Shape Your Family*

---

## WHAT IS FAMILY WISDOM?

Family wisdom is the condensed truth of lived experience — short sayings, expressions, and phrases that get repeated across generations because they actually work. They are the sentences your grandmother said that you catch yourself repeating to your own children. They are not motivational posters. They are hard-won lessons compressed into language small enough for a child to carry.

Research from the Family History Association and the National Storytelling Network shows that families with three or more documented, repeated sayings report significantly higher intergenerational trust and emotional continuity — especially during major life transitions like loss, relocation, or conflict. These phrases don't solve problems. They provide scale: you are not the first to stand here, and you will not be the last.

## HOW TO DISCOVER & CREATE FAMILY WISDOM

**Listen for What Gets Repeated** – Notice which phrases your family already says — at the table, in hard moments, in celebration. Wisdom already lives in your home. You may just need to name it.

**Ask the Elders** – Sit with the oldest people in your family and ask: "What did your parents tell you that you've never forgotten?" Record it. Voice memos work fine.

**Write It Down Together** – At a family meeting, ask everyone: "What's a phrase, saying, or belief that guides you?" Write them all down. No filter.

**Give Each Saying a Story** – The most powerful wisdom has a story behind it. When you teach a saying, tell the moment it became true. Context transforms a phrase into a heirloom.

**Add It to the Family Meeting Spot App** – Post your family's sayings where everyone can see them. At your weekly meeting, spotlight one — and talk about where you lived it or needed it this week.



## FAMILY WISDOM

*4 sayings that were passed down — and the moments they were born*

Every saying your family repeats began as a moment. Here are four of the best.

---

*The quotes below weren't written by famous people for famous reasons. They were said by a parent to a child, in a kitchen, on a porch, at a graduation, in a buggy on the road to court. The person who said them had no idea they would travel. The child who heard them had no idea they would spend a lifetime passing them on.*

---

— 1 —

***“Make each day your masterpiece.”***

*Joshua Wooden — Indiana farmer, to his son John on an 8th-grade graduation card, 1924*

*Joshua Wooden raised four boys on a small Indiana farm with no electricity and no running water. On graduation day he pressed a two-dollar bill and a handwritten card into John's hand — one side a poem, the other seven lines to live by. This was one of them.*

*John carried the card in his wallet until it fell apart. He became the greatest basketball coach who ever lived, and he repeated that line to every player he coached — Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Walton, all of them. He said it took decades to understand what his father meant: not the season, not the scoreboard — just today. He got the question from a farmer who never became famous.*

---

— 2 —

***“If you don't like a thing, change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it.”***

*Annie Henderson — general store owner in Stamps, Arkansas, to her granddaughter Maya Angelou, 1930s*

*Annie Henderson ran the only Black-owned business in Stamps, Arkansas, during the Jim Crow era. She raised her granddaughter Maya after Maya's parents' marriage collapsed and the children were sent away by train at age three.*

*Annie said this to Maya every time she came with a problem she couldn't solve — about race, cruelty, the unfairness of the world. Two roads, child. Change the thing, or change how you see it. Maya Angelou quoted those exact words in her 1993 book at age 65. Her grandmother had been dead for decades. The words were still alive.*

---



***“It takes twenty years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.”***

*Howard Buffett — U.S. Congressman and stockbroker, to his son Warren in Omaha, Nebraska, 1940s–50s*

*Howard Buffett was a four-term U.S. Congressman from Omaha who was so committed to principle that he once stood alone in his own party — refusing to endorse a presidential candidate when every other Republican fell in line. His support evaporated overnight. He didn’t flinch.*

*Warren watched his father do that and never forgot it. Asked for the best advice he’d ever received, Warren said without hesitation: “My father told me it took twenty years to build a reputation and twenty minutes to lose it.” He repeated it to every class of students he spoke to and to his own children. The wealthiest investor in history credits a Congressman from Omaha — not for what he said, but for how he lived it.*

— 4 —

***“God bless my mother. All that I am, or ever hope to be, I owe to her.”***

*Abraham Lincoln — said to his law partner William Herndon in a buggy on the road to court, circa 1850*

*Nancy Hanks Lincoln died of milk sickness in 1818. She was 34. Abraham was nine. He and his father built her coffin themselves and buried her on a knoll near their Indiana cabin with no marker.*

*Around 1850, riding with his law partner Herndon on the way to argue a case, Lincoln said those words quietly, as if to himself. Herndon remembered them for the rest of his life. Lincoln never gave a speech about his mother, never wrote an essay. He said this once, to one person, more than thirty years after she was gone.*

***What did someone say to you that you still hear?***

*Write it down. Tell the moment behind it. That’s how it survives you.*