



*Legacy of Love...*

*Pearls of Wisdom  
from  
One Generation  
to Another*

*February 14, 2021  
West Orange, NJ*

## Foreword



These epic times are certain to be etched into our collective memory and written in the archives of American history. We are navigating a devastating pandemic, social unrest, political hostility, and constitutional challenges. Simultaneously, we are witnessing, unprecedented medical breakthroughs, scientific advances, heightened civic engagement and amazing technology that facilitates virtual schooling and enables instantaneous communication around the world.

In many different cultures, the lotus flower is considered a compelling metaphor for the human condition. Despite its origin, with roots steeped in dark murky waters, by sheer conviction and help from nature, this beautiful flower emerges, reaching toward the sunlight to achieve its magnificent bloom.

*Aging Well West Orange* invited older adults in the community to draw on the depth of their experiences that encompass historical periods of wartime, civic unrest, financial crises and personal hardship, to share those strategies and perspectives which helped them persevere.

Each senior reflected in this booklet, graciously responded with a unique heartfelt story of life lessons, crises averted, dogged persistence and determination to create for you, our dear West Orange Teenager, this *Legacy of Love... Pearls of Wisdom from One Generation to Another*. We affirm the courage, bravery and family legacies of everyone who joined this intergenerational project and shared their important voice. Thank you for adding your profound insight and essential wisdom to this Legacy of Love.

To our West Orange teenagers, may this *Legacy of Love* illuminate your path and hold something special for each of you. May it help to encourage you to stay true to your dreams and goals, understand that you are enough, and strengthen you to build on these legacies to achieve your highest potential.

We are grateful for your nurturing parents and relatives who set you on this path and to the teachers, administrators and staff of the West Orange school district who continue to guide you, at home and in school. Importantly, we honor the various paths and multi-cultural backgrounds that have brought each of us together as the diverse, age-friendly community of West Orange, NJ.

Our collective unwavering commitment to and belief in our teenagers is awe inspiring.

Happy Valentine's Day

February 14, 2021

[Artist Credits: Special thanks to West Orange Artists](#)  
[Lois Condon and Mary Franklin for their original watercolor artwork and illustrations](#)



Dearest Teenagers,

Here are a few thoughts as you approach adulthood. In life, you will face many obstacles. Don't allow challenges to get the best of you, no matter how difficult. In the moment, a situation may seem insurmountable, but you will come to learn, it is not the end of the world.

Love is one of the most wonderful experiences in life. Love deeply, but never allow- even love - to get the best of you. Some think that loving someone means owning them. That is never the case. Neither for you, nor the one you are involved with.

Sometimes love leads to marriage, but marriage can also lead to divorce. Should your parents divorce, your life will be different, but they still love you. You will be fine. I have loved, married, had a child and divorced. My daughter learned resiliency and I learned to be a better father. I will always treasure our very special bond.

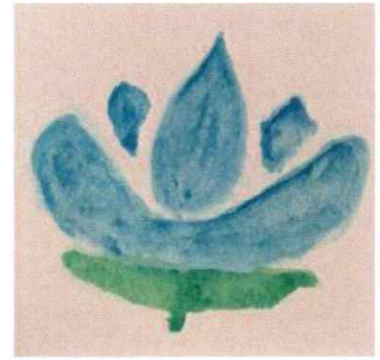
Be careful who you trust. Trust is very important and everyone should have someone they can trust. However, there is no guarantee that trust will not be betrayed. This happened to me and I learned to forgive and move on. Nurture true friendships with honest people you can trust unconditionally, even with your life.

Finally, find a true friend with whom you can be yourself. This is both liberating and wonderful.

Remember, bad things happen in life and sometimes it will be through no fault of your own. Persevere and you will be fine. All the best for the rest of your life...

Love,  
Winston

Age 62



My Dear Teenager,

Throughout our lives we experience peaks and valleys. I have several memories of having to cope with circumstances beyond my control in order to survive. One such time was during the poliovirus epidemic. Polio is a life-threatening disease that can cause paralysis and possibly death. The 32<sup>nd</sup> President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was crippled by it.

As a child, I remember anxiously standing in a long line, waiting to get the polio vaccine. The line was moving slowly, the weather was uncomfortable and I was extremely afraid of needles. I clung tightly to my aunt, who began talking to me about various topics and telling knock-knock jokes. The conversation distracted me and made me laugh. Her loving approach eased me, shortened the wait time and diminished the needle's sting.

I have been confronted with many obstacles, including racial discrimination, sexism and unfairness. Today, like you, I am confronted with the coronavirus pandemic, attack on our democracy, racial divide, economic instability, social unrest and the loss of loved ones.

Whenever I have a problem, I reflect on the historical events that gave me strength, lean on my faith, participate in meaningful social activities, journal about my gratitude and remember hopeful messages, such as "keep your eye on the prize". You can also exercise, start a hobby or learn new things.

You are strong, creative and smart. You are working toward your future. I am confident that whatever you do to survive this challenging time, you will be successful because you are more than yourself.

We will get through this.

Love,  
Rosemary

Age 71



My Dear Student,

One this Valentine's Day, I would like to share with you a message of hope and inspiration.

I grew up in a public housing project in the Bronx, New York. During the 1960's, the government decided to bus students from my area to a predominantly white elementary school several miles away.

My white teacher made all the black kids sit in the back of the classroom. She never selected or acknowledged us when we raised our hands. It didn't bother me, but when my mother asked me why my grades were so poor, I told her what was going on in the classroom.

Mom showed up unannounced the next day at school and observed how all the black students were seated in the back of the classroom. Well, the seating situation changed and the teacher began to acknowledge and respond to me and the other black students. I began to excel as a student.

Mom sat my sister and me down and talked to us about racism in a way we could comprehend. I later understood that racism may be an obstacle in life but I cannot let it discourage me. I learned to overcome bigotry and discrimination as a child and well into adult life. I did it for myself and to benefit those who follow, meaning YOU. You can do the same.

Love,  
Cynthia, Age 67

"The struggle you are in today is developing your strength for tomorrow."  
Unknown Author





My Dear Student,

In 1967, the second quarter of my senior year at college I was a student teacher at Trenton Central High School. Shortly before Thanksgiving there was a student walkout and threats of a riot. My students, frightened, came to class, and we kept them safe in the room. The school closed one day early for Thanksgiving, and my college decided that we student teachers had finished our assignments and would not return.

Two years later I was teaching at Lincoln High School in Jersey City. Again, there were student demonstrations and walkouts. The protests were not against the school itself, as this was a time of the Viet Nam war and national protest. I don't remember the precise details of how the principal, a respected church pastor, resolved the issues, but I recall he did meet with the protest leaders, and eventually the school returned to normal.

I am 73 and haven't thought of those protests in years. They were frightening but I tried to maintain normalcy for my students, remain positive, and listen to what they had to say. In some ways, the Jan 6, 2021 riots on the US Capitol brought those memories back to mind.

National conflicts, along with the various hardships you are experiencing today, will also pass. You will be stronger and smarter because of it. I hope this helps.

Love,  
Bonnie

Age 73



Dear Teenager,

As I approach my 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday, I reflect back on all I have lived thru: 5 wars, the Cuban missile crisis, numerous pandemics starting with polio, several strains of the flu (winter after winter), several assassinations of prominent leaders, numerous riots, 911, Y2K and the deaths of numerous friends and family. Wow! Why would I want to keep living?

There were other times I also recall. I remember the excitement when I graduated high school and college, my first car, my first job, my first paycheck, getting married and having our first child, then a second, then a third. Having a child changed my life. It made me reevaluate what it's all about.

It is for them and - now my 10 grandchildren- we must go on. I came to realize all of this is no accident. Someone created it all. I concluded there is a God and we are not him. Now I call upon God for strength, peace and wisdom to go on.

He provided running, yoga and exercise to help us get through the hard times.

We must take care of ourselves so we can help others. Showing love, compassion and helping others is what gets us through the difficult times. In helping others, we help ourselves.

In conclusion, what would I tell my teenage self? Grow up and stop being such an asshole!

Love,  
Vince

Age 72





Dear West Orange Youth,

I was born the first of 10 children in Americus, Georgia, 5 miles beyond city limits. My parents were sharecroppers and I attended school in a country church house where one teacher taught all 8 grades. It was not until the eighth grade that I sat in a regular classroom or attended school in a traditional environment.

I graduated from the Sumpter County School System, where James (Jimmy) Carter, the 39<sup>th</sup> President of United States, formerly served as President of the Board of Education. After graduation, I attended Fort Valley State College on a work visa. My job was in the Agriculture Department milking cows. Afterwards, I enlisted and served in the US Navy for four years.

When I was 21 years old, I moved to New Jersey and married my sweetheart 5 years later. In 1972, I was called to the ministry, licensed and ordained as a Minister. I continued my education at Marywood University and Drew University School of Religion.

For 42 years, I pastored congregations in Essex County and also served as a Professor of Theology. I honorably served as President of the local branch of the NAACP for 18 years. I also served as Chairman of the Board of Directors and President, NJ State NAACP.

The strong foundation and solid Christian upbringing provided by my family helped me to overcome many struggles and challenges in my life. My continuous pursuit of education aided me in managing through difficulties.

My unique and rich life experiences positioned me to accept God's mission, and undertake the critical goals of the NAACP in our struggle to eliminate racial discrimination and ensure equality for everyone.

With love and prayers,

Bill

Age 76

My Dear Student,



As a teenager, my biggest challenge was getting through High School because at 16, during sophomore year, my mother passed away from cancer. As a young girl, I didn't know what my future held because a young girl needs her mother and I had just lost mine. I had no direction. I also had a 5-year-old sister to help look after because my father had to continue working to pay the bills.

So, I grew up pretty fast. Through it all, I managed to graduate and attend college. I had friends and some extended family that I leaned on for support. Without them, my church family and God in my life, I don't think I would've made it.

Please never give up on your dreams, no matter what the circumstance. Never stop believing in yourself. You will succeed as long as you keep your eyes on the ball and don't give up. Don't be afraid to ask for help; you will be surprised to learn that people will help you as long as you ask.

So, don't be so proud to think you can do it all by yourself. Sometimes, as a young person you may think that you know it all and you don't need anyone, but believe me this can be a cold, hard world. Without the right direction and God in your life (or whoever your higher power is) you can find yourself in serious trouble.

God is always there to help guide you, just ask.

With all my love,  
Shalove H.

Age 66



Dear West Orange Teen,

Life is a very precious gift from the Al-mighty. At the same time, He presents us with seemingly insurmountable challenges. Knowing that the tragedies are also from Him and therefore there is inscrutable meaning behind them helps.

In this life we are only in the middle of the movie. In the finale, all will be understood.

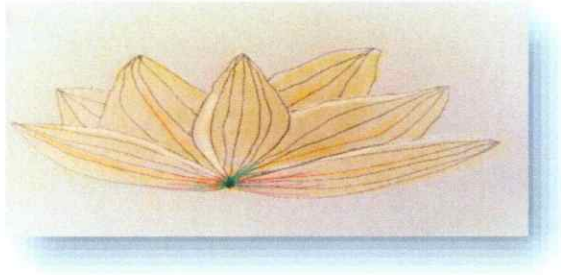
When my daughter died, it was and, twenty years later still is, indescribable pain; but then a learned person told me that the soul longs to return to G-d. It was a comfort to know that Elana is happy. As I returned to life, I told myself, "Even if you can't pick your head up, just put one foot in front of the other and keep walking." Then I told myself that if I crack, I'd take the rest of the family along with me. But they have beautiful, meaningful lives to live.

So, unfortunately yes, sooner or later there will be pain. But look for and embrace the blessing.

Love,  
Joanne

Age 75





My Dear Teen,

I was born November 1931 at the height of the Great Depression. The world was going through a serious financial crisis. Banks collapsed, Wall Street crashed and many people were unemployed.

I lived in Newark, among a mix of immigrants, ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Although we didn't speak the same language, there was a strong bond and sense of community. I incorporated the tenacity and strength of my close-knit family and my community's diverse heritages.

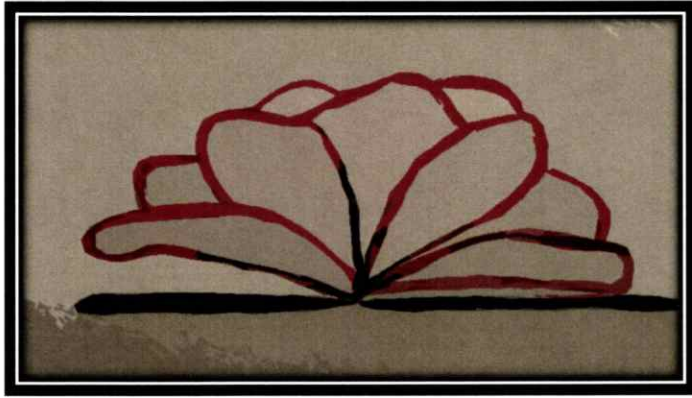
My extended family included grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins who always lived in the same building. Both sets of grandparents only spoke Italian. My grandmother greatly influenced my life. A devout Catholic, like many Italians she maintained a shrine of Saints and votive lights on her bedroom dresser. I keep a similar shrine. She was very calm, soft spoken and a good listener. I didn't inherit these traits.

Many families attended evening church services. My mother forced me to go with her every night; I dreaded it. I didn't realize this was the only hope parents had that if they prayed their young sons, serving in WWII, would survive. Although many were killed, wounded or MIA, parents were proud that their sons fought for their country. Entire neighborhoods turned out in front of the boys' homes on the day of the funeral.

On Sunday afternoons, American Military Police would bring a busload of Italian Prisoners of War to our neighborhood. The MP would set up wooden tables and chairs. The Italian women would set out plastic table cloths and place settings and serve as interpreters. The foods included ethnic favorites, corned beef and cabbage, sauerbraten, spaghetti and meatballs, kielbasa, pierogi, homemade desserts and more. And very good homemade Italian Wine. Years later, I realized that some of our neighbors' sons were likely being fired at by relatives of the very boys our families treated so kindly.

My faith sustains me through the bad experiences and tragedies in my life. Today, I often reflect on the various dimensions of faith, love, life and war.

Love, Rosary Age 81



My Dear Student,

I want to share a personal journey that began in 1989, while visiting Yellowstone National Park, a favorite family destination. At age 21, I had travelled out West to attend a family reunion. The prior year devastating wildfires ravaged mass acreage of forest. I had some anticipatory dread as to what I would see.

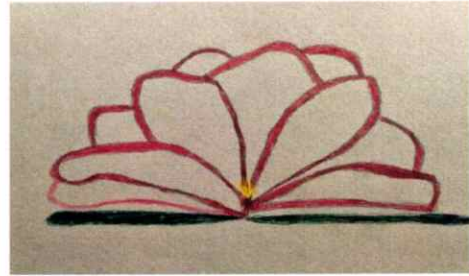
Unexpectedly, upon arrival, there was a spectacular sight: an abundance of wildflowers with vibrant colors of pink, yellow, purple and blue. Apparently, the fallen tree ash had enriched the soil, creating this wonderful vista. I was delighted.

This experience precipitated a shift in my thinking. What began to crystalize for me was the understanding that people have the same potential for transformation following hardship, loss, or unexpected change. Growing up with a devoted mother who struggled with bouts of depression, my budding perspective now required clear and intentional focus to see hope and possibility amidst the daily strife.

Over time, I learned that a person must be open to change and should understand, as nature perfectly demonstrates, the muck is part of the journey. To deepen self-knowledge, ask yourself, "Where do I rest my gaze: on the ash or the bloom? Both deserve notice, but where does my gaze linger?"

Love,  
Laura

Age 53



Dear West Orange Youth,

I was born the 4<sup>th</sup> of eight children, in Newark, NJ. My dad worked hard as a chemical mixer and my mom was a devoted homemaker. I graduated from the Newark public school system. Growing up, I never realized that we were underprivileged and the education we received was sub-standard.

Upon graduating from high school, I married the love of my life. Both of us worked full-time and my husband took on a second job to make ends meet. Two years later, my husband and I were able to purchase our first home. We realized that if we wanted to be successful and make a decent salary, we would need to obtain more than a high school diploma. So, both of us attended college while working full-time and raising our family.

In 1984, we started our own business. We required our children to work during the summer months. We always tried to impress upon them the importance of earning a living and investing their savings. Our deep-rooted quest for our children to have a better life motivated and sustained us. That kept us moving forward.

Once our children were in college, my husband and I returned to the university to achieve our college degrees. I furthered my education by earning a Master of Criminal Justice Degree from Boston University, allowing me to teach at the college level. Together, my family and I learned a lot about focus, sacrifice and fortitude. My unwavering determination to accomplish my educational goals, despite the challenges, made a huge difference in my life. I know you can do it too!

Love,  
Marilyn

Age 68



*My Dear Student,*

*On this Valentine's Day, I would like to share with you a message of hope and inspiration.*

*As a teenager, my biggest challenge was adapting to Freshman year of high school. Early in the school year, I sustained a serious injury playing football that required surgery and left me unable to attend school until midway through February. Being out of school that long, being tutored at home...long before virtual learning was even possible ☺...made it difficult to reacclimate myself when I did return. I struggled to fit in the remainder of the year and catch up with classwork.*

*Here are a few important life lessons I have learned:*

- We all make mistakes but can't dwell on them. Learn from them and try hard not to repeat them.*
- Life is long, don't get hung up on small setbacks.*
- Be nice to people...sometimes casual acquaintances come back to your life many years later.*
- Don't set aside your dreams for small desires...when you set a goal, pursue it and don't allow yourself to be distracted.*
- We all have our own way of doing things...don't be critical of others for doing things their way.*
- Life isn't fair...don't use that as an excuse.*
- Be positive...negativity prevents success.*
- Be responsible for your own happiness...don't look for objects, things or others to fulfill that.*

*The most important thing I want you to remember is: Respect yourself...and others. Regardless of where in life you go, or what you pursue, in a profession, in relationships, a career, you will be selling yourself and will be judged on how you live your life and how you treat others.*

*We all get one go-around; make the most of it!*

*With all my love, Robert Age 54*



Hello, my name is Althia.

I am a product of St. Louis, Missouri. My grandparents moved to St. Louis during the Great Migration because of harsh racism in Arkansas. Don't get me wrong, there was racism in St. Louis too, just not as overt as in Arkansas.

My parents divorced when my brother and I were 3 and 5 years old. We lived with my wise mother and wonderful grandparents. We attended kindergarten through grade 12 in segregated schools. This was the norm and I was happy with it. We had highly educated and devoted teachers with so much love, support, understanding and care.

I absolutely loved my 4 years at Vashon High School. I remember leaving a football game and stopping at "White Castle" for burgers. We were told we had to go around back to get served. I felt humiliated. After all, my father fought in World War II for this country.

In school, we were encouraged to become teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc., however, we knew we must work harder because our skin color. Grandpa ingrained his work ethic in us without our realizing it. Everyone in our family went to school or work, no exceptions.

I finished college and taught school for 30 years. I opened a successful business and invested in real estate. As a child, I knew that that I would purchase income property to make my life more comfortable.

I refused to let racism stop me. I had to work twice as hard, but it made me a stronger person and afforded a better life for me and my family.



Love, Althia  
Age 80



Dear Important Member of West Orange Youth,

I am an 81-year-old woman. I have one daughter, a son-in-law, and two grandsons, ages 12 and 9. I am healthy and can still walk without a walking stick or a cane.

I think the COVID-19 pandemic has been the hardest thing and most difficult time I have lived through. I did not live in the U.S.A until 1965. I did not live in the U.S.A during the flu epidemic. I lived in Maine when 9/11 happened so it was not "in my face" so much.

The best wisdom I would love to convince you of, even if you never visit a house of worship: There *is* "someone up there" (if you believe in Heaven); "something out there" if you believe in an "Energy"; a supreme good being.

Call this "someone" God, or Jesus, or Father *or* Mother and BELIEVE that the same Being/Energy/Person is "out there."

If none of this letter makes sense to you, then simply "Be the best Positive Thinker" you can possibly be. If this letter helps a little, great. Otherwise, try reflecting on, "This COVID thing will get better." Convince yourself by convincing others.

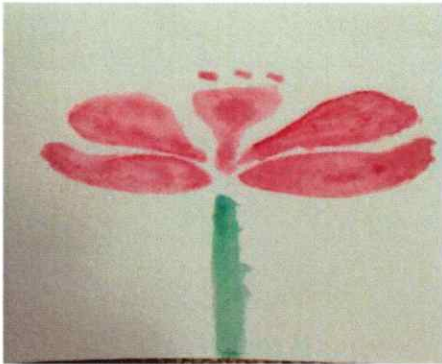
And remember- You are loved.

Love,

Pat Age 81



February 14, 2021



My Dearest Teenager,

I am over a half-century old. I have lived through several terrible historic events, including the devastating loss of 35 colleagues on 9/11. Like many, I have faced disappointments and sorrow.

As a teenager, I agonized over how to fit in at school and what would become of me. Today, I accept obstacles and challenges as the price of admission for a full life.

I have learned to appreciate the goodness and beauty that surround us. Perhaps, a child's laughter, beautiful art, diverse people joining together for positive change, even rainy days and the ensuing rainbows.

When I was 16, my dad died of cancer. I could not fathom why this happened to me. With time, I realized that his spirit never departed and continues on. I was the only girl who knew a Phillip's head from an Allen wrench and could change a flat. I learned the importance of hard work, determination, faith and love.

Life isn't always fair, but it is fascinating. Don't take it for granted. Steel yourself and resolve that come what may, you will conquer obstacles and grow stronger. A setback is an opportunity for a comeback.

Don't consume yourself with anxiety. Sometimes the person you least expect it from, will let you down. Keep things in perspective. Wonderful experiences in this world await you.

Always remember, just like the acorn, you possess within you the mighty oak tree.

You are young. The future is yours!

With all my love,  
Dorothy

Age 65



Dear Young Friend,

As a High School Senior, I fell in love with the thought of becoming a Physician. I declared my course of study as pre-med, delving deeply into Chemistry, Biology and Physics. While the romance of calling myself a Pre-Med student went forward, my progress in the Sciences did not. I was in danger of failing my studies. My grade point average plummeted, passing only one course, that of basic French.

What should I do? Visits to my adviser left me frightened. How do I maintain my self-respect? I knew that my self-respect was less important than maintaining a GPA that would keep me in school. I assessed my grades. Although French was my only passing grade, I passed with a B+. I decided to pursue languages instead of the Sciences.

The rest is Happy History. I went on, in the remaining three and a half years and studied French, German, Spanish and Russian, majoring in German. I went on to earn myself the rank of Chief Translator in the US Army. The product of recognizing what I could not do, turned into doing well what I could do. Just do it! You'll be glad you did.

Sincerely yours,  
Abe

Age 91

## Afterward

Dear Student,

I am a 2013 graduate of WOHS. If my life was divided like chapters in a book, I'd say each chapter holds one or more valuable life lessons, skills, and sometimes losses. I consider my current position as the Senior Services Program Assistant a new chapter in my life. One thing I have learned from this job is the importance of proactivity. Oftentimes too much time is spent on the negative feelings, given each situation. Feelings like anger, sadness, disappointment, annoyance, etc. is a place where one often gets stuck. Utilizing ones energy towards a solution or positivity makes all the difference. I do believe in feeling all feelings but remember to be proactive as life is still happening. How one reacts can make the difference in emotional and physical health.

When I was a freshman in high school, my English teacher, Mr. Suriano, had assigned all his freshman classes to write a letter to ourselves that we would then open our senior year of high school. My letter described me as I was when I wrote it; it excessively described my family, it laid out short term plans, it described who my close friends were, and it described how seriously I took my academics. If I could go back in time, I would have included long term goals to test my dedication of having completed them by senior year of high school.

Legacy of Love is just as big of an opportunity but backwards. Take the advice, suggestions, and wisdom from our community's seniors and use it to shape your growth and future path.

Noelia

Age 26





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*Aging Well*  
**WEST ORANGE**  
*An Age-Friendly Township*

