

Legacy Journal Starter Kit

12 Prompts That Go Beyond Biography to Preserve What Matters

Memorial Merits | Should Tomorrow Never Come

Why These Prompts Matter

A year ago, I faced a life-threatening DVT after surgery while serving on Active Duty in the U.S. Navy. Alone, miles from family, I confronted a terrifying reality: if I didn't wake up tomorrow, would the people I love truly know how much they meant to me?

In those quiet, frightening nights, I kept a notebook by my bedside. I wrote letters to my loved ones, not goodbye letters exactly, but truth letters. The things I needed them to know. What they meant to me. The lessons I'd learned. The mistakes I'd made. The moments with them that I treasured.

Those bedside writings became 'Should Tomorrow Never Come,' the legacy journal I created after my recovery. Because I realized legacy journaling isn't about documenting your life for ego or posterity. It's about loving people enough to give them the gift of truly knowing you, even after you're gone.

Most legacy journals ask surface-level questions: where were you born, what was your first job, describe your wedding day. Those questions have value, but they don't capture essence. These 12 prompts go deeper, preserving wisdom, vulnerability, and transformation in ways your family will treasure forever.

How to Use This Guide

There's no right or wrong way to approach these prompts:

- Answer them in any order that speaks to you
- Write as much or as little as feels right
- Return to prompts over time as perspectives evolve
- Record audio or video responses instead of writing
- Share responses with family as you go or keep private until you choose

The goal is authenticity, not perfection. Your family doesn't need you to be profound or eloquent. They need you to be real.

Get [Memorial Merits Legacy Journal: Should Tomorrow Never Come](https://memorialmerits.com/12-legacy-journal-prompts-your-family-will-treasure-that-you-probably-havent-considered/)
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Prompt 1: The Thing I Almost Did (But Didn't) That Still Haunts Me

Reflect on: The job you almost accepted. The person you nearly married. The move you backed out of. The apology you rehearsed but never delivered. These near-misses often define us as much as our actual choices.

Consider exploring:

- What drew you to that alternative path?
- What made you pull back?
- Do you think you made the right choice?
- What did that decision cost you, and what did it give you?

Your Response:

Prompt 2: A Time I Was Genuinely Wrong About Someone

Reflect on: First impressions aren't always accurate. Describe someone you misjudged and what they taught you about making judgments.

Consider exploring:

- What was your initial assessment and why?
- What changed your mind?
- How did being wrong affect your relationship?
- What did this teach you about bias and perception?

Your Response:

Prompt 3: What My Body Taught Me (That My Mind Refused to Learn)

Reflect on: Illness, injury, aging, physical challenges. Your body keeps score and teaches lessons that intellectual knowledge never could.

Consider exploring:

- What physical experience changed your perspective?
- What did your body force you to accept?
- How did this change what you value?
- What wisdom came from physical limitations or challenges?

Your Response:

Prompt 4: The Kindness I Received When I Least Deserved It

Reflect on: The forgiveness when you were clearly wrong. The help offered when you'd burned bridges. Grace extended when you deserved consequences.

Consider exploring:

- What had you done to deserve consequences?
- Who extended grace anyway?
- How did their kindness change you?
- Did you ever tell them what it meant?

Your Response:

Prompt 5: Something I Pretended to Be (And How Long I Kept Up the Act)

Reflect on: The confident persona hiding insecurity. The expert who was winging it. The strong one who was breaking inside. We all perform versions of ourselves.

Consider exploring:

- What version of yourself did you perform?
- Why couldn't you be authentic?
- How long did you maintain the facade?
- What did pretending cost you?

Your Response:

Prompt 6: A Conversation That Changed Everything

Reflect on: A casual comment that reshaped your trajectory. A teacher's encouragement. A stranger's perspective. A friend's question. To them, it was Tuesday. To you, it was transformative.

Consider exploring:

- What was happening in your life at the time?
- What exactly did they say?
- Why did it land so powerfully?
- Have you ever told them what their words meant?

Your Response:

Prompt 7: What I Spent Too Much Time Worrying About

Reflect on: Hindsight reveals which worries consumed energy for nothing. What did you agonize over that never actually mattered?

Consider exploring:

- What consumed your thoughts and energy?
- What did you fear would happen?
- What actually happened?
- What should you have been paying attention to instead?

Your Response:

Prompt 8: The Betrayal That Actually Set Me Free

Reflect on: Sometimes being let down, lied to, or left behind forces us into better situations than we would have chosen ourselves. Not all painful experiences are purely negative.

Consider exploring:

- What was the betrayal?
- What did it free you from?
- How long did it take to see the hidden gift?
- Do you feel gratitude now for something that once devastated you?

Your Response:

Prompt 9: What I Said Yes To That I Should Have Declined

Reflect on: Saying yes to the wrong things drains us. What did you agree to that compromised your values, time, or energy? What did you learn about boundaries?

Consider exploring:

- What did you agree to that you knew you shouldn't?
- Why did you say yes?
- What did it cost you?
- When did you learn to say no?

Your Response:

Prompt 10: A Moment of Cowardice I Still Carry

Reflect on: Times you stayed silent when you should have spoken. Walked away when you should have intervened. Chose safety when courage was required.

Consider exploring:

- What was happening?
- What did you know you should do?
- What stopped you?
- Have you forgiven yourself? Did you get a second chance?

Your Response:

Prompt 11: The Best Money I Ever Spent (And The Worst)

Reflect on: Financial decisions reveal values. The splurge that brought lasting joy. The investment that was throwing money away. What do your spending choices reveal about you?

Consider exploring:

- Best: What did you buy and why was it worth every penny?
- Worst: What seemed like a good idea but wasn't?
- What did these decisions teach you about your values?
- What financial wisdom do you want to pass on?

Your Response:

Prompt 12: What Death Has Taught Me About Living

Reflect on: Loss teaches something about mortality, priorities, and what matters. What have your experiences with death revealed about how to live?

Consider exploring:

- What did specific losses teach you?
- How did watching someone die change how you live?
- What regrets do you have about relationships that ended?
- What do you understand now about living that you didn't before?

Your Response:

Bonus Prompts for Deeper Exploration

Once you've explored the 12 core prompts, consider these additional questions to deepen your legacy journal:

- A time I was brave when I didn't feel brave
- What I learned from my biggest professional failure
- A relationship I gave up on too soon (or held onto too long)
- What I pretended not to notice (until I couldn't ignore it anymore)
- The hardest truth someone told me (that I needed to hear)
- A time I chose comfort over growth (and what it cost me)
- What I wish I'd understood about parenting/partnership earlier
- A time I was right for the wrong reasons
- The person I wish I'd apologized to (and why I didn't)
- What I hope my life stands for when it's over

Tips for Making This a Practice

Set aside regular time: Even 15 minutes weekly makes progress. Choose a consistent time that works for your rhythm.

Don't force it: Some prompts will flow naturally, others will need time to percolate. That's normal.

Be honest, not perfect: Your family needs authenticity more than polish. Raw truth creates deeper connection than edited perfection.

Consider audio/video: If writing feels hard, record yourself speaking. Voice and mannerisms add depth that text alone can't capture.

Make it multi-generational: Invite family members to answer prompts too. Compare perspectives across generations.

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Store it safely: Keep digital backups. Tell someone where to find it. Ensure it won't be lost or discovered too late.

How to Store and Share Your Responses

Storage locations:

- Keep one copy with your estate planning documents
- Give a copy to your designated decision-maker
- Store digital copies in cloud storage with access shared
- Consider a fireproof safe for physical journals

Sharing instructions:

- Decide if you want it shared immediately or after a waiting period
- Consider age-appropriate timing for different recipients
- You can create different versions for different audiences
- Document your wishes clearly so your family knows your intentions

Additional Resources

Should Tomorrow Never Come - Legacy Edition:

A beautifully designed legacy journal with thoughtful prompts and space for writing and photos.

Visit: <https://memorialmerits.com/legacy-journal-edition/>

Legacy Journal Prompts for Seniors:

Additional perspectives specifically valuable for older adults reflecting on full lifetimes of experience.

Visit: <https://memorialmerits.com/legacy-journal-prompts-for-seniors/>

Memorial Merits Blog:

Comprehensive guides on legacy planning, funeral preparation, and meaningful memorialization.

Visit: MemorialMerits.com

Your family doesn't need you to be perfect.

They need you to be real.

These prompts help you share the real you.

That's the legacy worth preserving.

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