

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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## Want to live forever? Bequeath wisdom



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### ARTICLE

Al Blake recently celebrated his 91st birthday with his two sons, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The San Clemente man considers his long life "a bonus on borrowed time."

Birthdays are an occasion to receive gifts. But for Blake, at this time of his life, he has a lot to give.

Not just material possessions but, instead, his story – the essence of what he's learned in his 91 years.

His sons prompted his introspection. "They wanted to know some things ... After all these years, what has your life meant? ... What's important?"

### [SEE PHOTOS FROM AL BLAKE'S LIFE](#)

This idea — that the most important things we can share with our loved ones might be intangible — is a powerful one. We can bequeath property, of course, but we can also pass on hopes and dreams and values. Such assets will only accrue in value over time.

Maybe your legal affairs are in order, but what about your thoughts? Have you also written an ethical will? Just a simple letter, recording your insights, could be your most meaningful legacy.



Al Blake, 91, of San Clemente, has a video biography DVD which has a chapter called "Reflections." The section is an ethical will, a document in which a person leaves a code of ethics, guidelines and life lessons behind for his loved ones.

H. LORREN AU JR., THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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*occasion of other members of the family, pity the poor, and when circumstances permit, pay my debts, if there be any."*

Senior Rabbi Mark Miller at Temple Bat Yahm in Newport Beach has written his own ethical will. The spiritual legacy, he says, is most important. Our true worth lies in our character and values — think values over valuables.

This is a way, he adds, to show your children and their children who you really were. It's your shot at immortality, a chance to create a connection with those who will follow. You can explain your essence: the values by which you lived.

Miller says children and grandchildren should read an ethical will over and over as a way to know their family and keep them alive.

"This is the most intimate opportunity to appreciate your loved one: what they thought was important, what they thought was valuable."

Of course, we've come a long way since the Bible.

We can convey our thoughts on paper or in video. After Prof. Randy Pausch delivered his last lecture before his death, it became an Internet sensation. Elizabeth Edwards left books and letters for her children.

Still, it requires more than a tweet.



Al Blake observes as Jane Shafron pulls up a video biography produced by her company, Your Story Here LLC. It was created for him in April 2008.

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The desire to pass on our wishes and beliefs is as old as the Bible.

A dying Jacob expressed his hopes for his children in the book of Genesis. As literacy spread in medieval times, it became popular for Jewish people to leave ethical wills to their offspring.

Sholem Aleichem, whose stories were the basis for Fiddler on the Roof, left an ethical will in 1916. He succinctly nailed it in part:

*"Live together in peace, bear no hatred for each other, help one another in bad times, think on*

...

Blake's sons asked him to create a video biography and hired Jane Shafron, co-owner of [Your Story Here](#) to produce it.

Her videos include an ethical will called "Reflections." Shafron prompted Blake in advance with questions about his challenges, regrets, values and hopes.

"It's an important part of capturing somebody's story. It means so much."

Blake agrees.

His sons, he says, learned by observing his example. But his grandchildren and their children, well, they feel less of an imprint from his life. Over years, outlines grow faint. You have a pile of old pictures with no names written on the back.

"The grandchildren didn't live with me for years and years," observes Blake, who clearly remembers his own grandfather. "They have little knowledge of what I've been through and what I think about things — my philosophy of life."

Once somebody began asking questions, Blake knew what he wanted to say.

"I want to be remembered as a loving parent and grandparent — generous and honest and dedicated to family."

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