

Appendix II

Three Legacy Letters and Ethical Wills

By Chris Palmer

Christopher.n.palmer@gmail.com

www.ChrisPalmerOnline.com

LETTER #1

To my precious family:

Dear Gail, Kimmie, Tina, Jenny, Sujay, CJ, Chase, Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, and Kim's soon-to-be third baby,

If you are reading this, it means that I have died. Perhaps it will be suddenly and unexpectedly, or perhaps after a long illness, from something like prostate cancer.

I hope I had a chance to say goodbye to you all. If not, then this letter is designed to fill that sad omission.

For decades now, I've wrestled with the problem of how best to prepare Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny if I were to die suddenly. One worry was the thought that Mommy and I might perish together in, say, a plane crash. The chances are highly remote, but it could happen. Mommy and I periodically talk about it. As the years have passed, this has become less of a worry for us because you are all growing up and can take care of yourselves.

On October 12, 2006, I wrote the following letter, and whenever Mommy and I left home for a trip together, I placed it in the middle of my desk where it would be easily found. Mommy wrote a similar letter at about the same time, and I would always leave copies of both letters side-by-side on my desk. Okay, here is my October 12, 2006 letter: (I would include Mommy's letter too, but she has no electronic copy of it.)

Darling Precious Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny,

If you are reading this, something terrible has happened. Whatever happened, remember that you made Mommy and me the happiest people in the world. We couldn't have died feeling happier, more content, and more at peace.

We are incredibly proud of each of you. You are strong, loving, resourceful, beautiful, courageous, bold, reflective, tenacious, caring, determined, intelligent, and wise. You are living honorable and wonderful lives. The world is a better and richer place for you being here.

A few days ago, Mommy asked me, “What are you most proud of in your life?” Without hesitation, I said, “Kim, Tina, and Jenny.” I also now add Sujay to that list.

You are all set to continue leading vibrant, optimistic, and energetic lives, bringing joy and love to all you come into contact with. Mommy and I know you will continue to live happy, rewarding, and fulfilling lives. We are the luckiest parents in the world and will always adore you.

Remember, we will be at all the big events in your lives in the same way Sujay’s father and my parents were at Kim’s wedding.

Please tell your children my biggest sadness in not having the opportunity to be a loving, mischievous, and wise grandfather.

I love you more than I can say.

Your loving Dad
XXXOOO

As I say, if you are reading this letter, it means that I have died. This letter (the one you are holding) is designed to update the one above from 2006. I have found inspiration [from the Stanford Life Review project](#). Here is [another useful link](#).

If you are experiencing grief and sadness, I hope you’ll be okay. Grief is exacerbated by regrets, but I hope we’ve all lived in a way together that any regrets are insignificant or very minor.

A companion letter to this is my January 9, 2019 letter (which I sometimes call a legacy or heirloom letter) describing the non-financial family assets Mommy and I are leaving you. That January 9, 2019 letter is tied to [the shared Google Drive](#) that contains many family documents, including letters, eulogies, mission statements, journals, books, family history, stories, etc.

I want to tell you how incredibly grateful I am to all of you for being the family that many husbands and fathers only dream about. I’ve been extraordinarily lucky, especially meeting and falling in love with Gail in 1972. You have all been so loving, so caring, so thoughtful, so generous, and so affectionate.

I am so proud of all of you:

- Gail, for being such a loving, amazing, compassionate, and understanding wife, life partner, and mother.
- Kim, for being such a loving and capable mom, wife, and professional, for all the books you’ve written helping people, and for being a wonderful daughter.
- Tina, for being such a loving and competent mom, wife, and professional, for all the patients you’ve helped as a family doctor, and for being a wonderful daughter.

- Jenny, for being such a loving wife and capable lawyer, for all the pro bono clients you've helped, and for being a wonderful daughter.
- Sujay, for your love of reading (especially history!), your equanimity, your outstanding fathering, and your love and caring for Gail and me.
- CJ, for your endless curiosity and love of learning, for your outstanding fathering, and the way you always make Gail and me feel so welcome when we visit you and Tina.
- Chase, for getting your job at Google, for your determination to succeed, and for the touching way you talked to Gail and me about your desire to marry Jenny.
- Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, and Kim's about-to-be-born baby, for the indescribable joy you bring me, your love of games and play, your wonderful questions, and your inexhaustible love of learning.

Remember the vacation we all spent together in Monterey in August 2017? How much fun was that?! Here is an email I sent you all afterward with some of our memories:

1. Surfing (Kim, Sujay, CJ, and Chase)
2. Swimming in Jen and Chase's pool with JJ
3. Whales lunge feeding and tail slapping
4. Anchovies jumping out of the ocean onto the beach in countless numbers
5. Birds flying in lyrical and lithe murmurations
6. Beach fire on the beach and fire pit
7. Reading the *Circus Ship* book to the grandkids
8. Train ride through the Redwoods
9. Visit the Monterey Aquarium
10. JJ playing tennis
11. Max's funny "old man" expressions
12. Neal doing exercises
13. Kareena showing how she can do two dances at the same time
14. Gift of a special book from JJ for my 70th birthday
15. Talking to K and N on the beach
16. Sujay's 40th birthday and my 70th
17. Watching Wimbledon-level tennis at the Nordic Natural Challenger
18. Playing tennis with CJ
19. Watching Tina and CJ play tennis
20. Tina and I having a handstand competition
21. Happy Hour every day at 5 pm in our hotel room
22. Kim's branding: "Cousin Time"
23. Hide and seek with K, N, and JJ
24. Playing diving games in the pool at Dinah's with Kareena and Sujay
25. Planning for Jen and Chase's December 9 wedding
26. Kim and Sujay enjoying the Carmal Refuge water resort

27. Gail arranging everything (thank you, my love!)
28. Feeding ducks and fish at Dinah's
29. Neal and JJ holding hands as they walked together to the train station
30. JJ's 3rd Birthday party, all the neighbors and the piñata, plus the train ride
31. Seeing Mark and his five kids
32. Going to the Menlo Church with Tina, CJ, JJ, and Max for the evening service
33. Two dinners at Tina and CJ's
34. Babysitting K and N while the other grownups had a drink
35. "Ceej" and "Suj" joke
36. Talk of moving to Denver
37. Having Kareena, Neal, JJ, and Max spend time together
38. Having Kim, Tina, and Jen spend time together (as well as Sujay, CJ, and Chase)
39. Spike ball (thanks to Jen and Chase)
40. Chase and I agreeing that kids need moral education
41. Getting all of us together and realizing these times are special
42. Chase's top secret, and still secret, Fitbit project
43. Jenny trying on her wedding dress and having it sent back to China
44. Chase giving me Sangrias
45. Max in the process of learning to walk
46. Giving JJ and Max baths (and Gail washing their hair with no tears)
47. Dinner with Jen on the last night
48. Dinners at Sanderlings
49. Getting rides on golf carts to get to and from the beach
50. Tina and CJ playing golf
51. Kareena and Neal showing JJ the red thimble magic trick
52. Kids playing Geronimo with me
53. Seeing Chance
54. Playing catch with a tennis ball on the beach.

I have so many happy and meaningful memories from my life. Here are just a small handful:

- Gail: dancing lessons, playing tennis, club parties, watching *The Crown*, StoryWorth questions
- Kim: when your first book was published
- Tina: when you finished your medical training
- Jenny: the trip you took with Mommy after taking the bar exam
- Sujay: sharing history books on tape
- CJ: playing tennis
- Chase: your personal training sessions

- Kareena: Admiral of the Fleet
- Neal: Geronimo
- JJ: the book you wrote for me for my 70th birthday
- Max: your smile
- Sammy, Aiden, Connor, and Kim's about-to-be-born baby: I was so looking forward to getting to know you.

Thank you to all of you for everything you have done for me. I have so much to thank you each for:

- Gail, for your profound love, your wisdom, your values, your empathy, and for teaching me so much
- Kim, Tina, and Jenny for being fantastic daughters—so loving, so loyal, so affectionate, so generous, so capable, so wise. I learned so much from each of you.
- Sujay, CJ, and Chase for being fantastic sons-in-law. You are the sons I never had.
- Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, and Kim's about-to-be-born baby, for letting me be the playful, loving grandpa I always dreamed of being.

I want you all to know that I love you very much.

- Gail, I love you for being the most beautiful and wonderful wife a man could ever have.
- Kim, Tina, and Jenny, I love you for being incredible daughters.
- Sujay, CJ, and Chase, I love you for being the best husbands Kim, Tina, and Jenny could ever marry.
- Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, and Kim's about-to-be-born baby, I love you for being the most spectacular grandchildren a grandpa could ever wish for.

Thank you all for everything you have done for me. It has been an extraordinary honor to have been a part of your lives. I know you'll find peace, love, and joy in the years to come.

I want to end with a few specific goodbye messages:

- Gail, my love, do marry again if you'd like to!

- Kim, Tina, and Jenny, take care of each other and of Mommy. Never let anything come between you.
- Sujay, CJ, and Chase, thanks for taking care of Kim, Tina, and Jenny and for loving them so profoundly.
- Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, and Kim's about-to-be-born baby, I know you'll grow up to be strong, loving, successful, fulfilled, and resilient, that you'll bring joy and light to all those you connect with, and that you'll each leave a special and precious legacy that you can be proud of.

I love you.

Chris/Dad/Grandpa
XXXOOO

LETTER #2

Darling Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny,

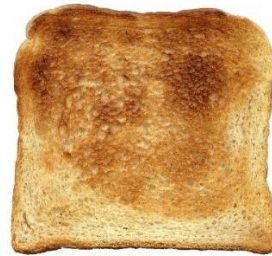
As you know, I'm writing a book on death and dying, and one thing I've learned is that postponing important talks until one is on one's deathbed is a big mistake. Deathbed conversations are rarely rewarding. Everyone is grieving, and the person dying is usually barely conscious, frail, cognitively impaired, and maybe in pain and discomfort.

So, I want to tell you now how much I love you and not put it off to a time when I may have trouble speaking and thinking. I'm at the peak of good health, so now is the perfect time for this letter.

This letter supplements my 5-page January 11, 2019, letter I sent to the whole family, which I call my "goodbye" or "gratitude" letter, and my June 20, 2020, letter to the three of you expressing why I am so proud of you.

This letter is also part of my ongoing project to write "toast letters" to family members and friends to let them know I love them. You are, of course, at the top of the list (along with Mommy) to receive a "toast" letter from me.

So, Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny, this is a toast to you!!!



I am so proud of you and so proud to be your father. You have helped make me supremely happy and content. You are thoughtful, generous, and affectionate while also having grit and tenacity.

You are incredible daughters, and you are living honorable lives. I know the days seem long and exhausting. Your jobs are challenging (in a good way), kids have bad moods and tantrums, the laundry is relentless, and cleaning up constant messes is tedious—but the bigger picture is that you are living outstanding lives, and the world is richer in so many ways for you being here.

Mommy and I adore you and always will, even after we are gone. Thank you for bringing us so much joy. You are each so strong, resourceful, loving, capable, wise, and beautiful.

Not only are you competent and loving mothers, but you are also highly accomplished professionals. You've worked diligently to establish yourselves in challenging and esteemed career paths. Your peers, colleagues, and supervisors have a high regard for you.

On top of all that, you married amazing men. Sujay, CJ, and Chase are the beloved sons Mommy and I never had. Mommy and I are as proud of them as we could be.

And then there are your children! Were grandparents ever blessed with a more adorable brood than our nine?! Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, Dylan, and Charlie are wonderful, and they are wonderful in large part because they have stellar parents.

Your kids are flourishing because you create environments that encourage them to flourish. You—and your husbands—work hard to be the best parents possible.

You also do something that many parents neglect. Although you constantly have to make sacrifices for your family, you make an effort to take care of yourselves. You eat well, exercise whenever you can, and sleep as much as you can. (Sorry, Kimmie, I know Dylan is up half the night at the moment, so a good sleep for you is impossible.)

Good for you for doing your best to take care of yourselves. You can't take care of others if you are not healthy yourself, although I know how hard that is when you have babies and toddlers under your feet all the time.

Here are three stories about you that stick vividly in my mind:

- Kimmie: When you were at Amherst, you realized in the first year or so that you were not making the quality friends you yearned for. You found yourself surrounded by mediocre, average people that weren't worthy of you. So, you were proactive in solving that problem. You looked around, saw Alison, realized she was exceptional, and went out of your way to befriend her. Because you took that initiative, you now have a special group of lifelong friends (KEPAC) from your college days. Writing this recalls fond memories of your college-era journalism—essays about coming home for Thanksgiving freshman year and your appreciation for my graduate gift journal.
- Tina: The strength and grit you showed to survive the hardships of medical school and residency amaze me. When you were at UCSF, you sometimes had to get up at 4 am and cycle in the dark and rain through deserted streets to get to the hospital. You showed a lot of toughness, determination, and self-discipline to get through those hard times. I am also in awe of your ability to learn all the science you had to learn, especially biology and chemistry, to get through med school. That took a lot of admirable hard work and focus. Your experiences with street kids in Costa Rica, the homeless in India, and the TB wards in Botswana are other examples of times you showed your resilience and strength.
- Jenny: The story I will select about you is your pregnancy with Aiden and Connor. When you learned you were having twins, you resolved that caring for those babies was your highest priority. You did everything possible to ensure that Aiden and Connor got off to the best possible start in life. Being pregnant with twins is arduous and exhausting, and you dealt with all the discomfort and physical awkwardness with poise, resilience, focus, and strength. You proactively took the best care of yourself when work demands might have tempted you to put work first—and you made it all the way to week 37! After Aiden and Connor were born, you took extra care to study up and hire help to get you through the early months. Writing all this reminds me that you always set goals and worked hard to achieve them, and in doing that, you often took bold and courageous steps, like when you moved to SF, where you knew no one, to work for Brattle.

Those stories say a lot about your characters. You set high standards for yourselves, took on challenging and complex goals, and then planned your time effectively to accomplish those goals.

As you know, I've been collecting stories about you since you were born. And, as you also know, I've collected them into a 50-page book called *Family Stories*. Of all the books and journals I've written relating to our family, that precious little book is one of my favorites.

You each got into the very top colleges in the country (Amherst, Dartmouth, Princeton) and thrived and blossomed there, and then went on to get accepted at top graduate schools (Chicago, UPenn, and Stanford), each of you with offers of substantial scholarships.

Of course, before college, you had all done exceedingly well at Holton-Arms and accepted early admission to your first-choice college.

You will each leave a significant mark on the world, and who knows what the future might hold for you. Here are a few possibilities:

- Writing books (or more books!)
- Making films
- Starting nonprofits
- Lavishing love on grandchildren and great-grandchildren
- Making new friends
- Writing letters to newspapers
- Pursuing exciting job and career opportunities
- Teaching
- Playing competitive tennis
- Running for public office
- Devoting yourselves to worthy volunteer responsibilities
- Pursuing minimalism
- Starting a newsletter or podcast
- Spreading joy and inspiration to all those you encounter
- Helping your families flourish and thrive
- Serving on the board of a nonprofit

When you get to my age, you might do what I've done and pursue new interests like juggling, drawing, playing the piano and singing, running a death and dying group, playing tennis, and being a hospice volunteer. All three of you are very good at challenging yourselves and constantly growing and learning. It's good always to be doing something hard.

One of my top goals in life has been to be the best possible father to you and give you constant love, support, encouragement, and inspiration. I poured a lot of effort into learning how to parent because, unlike Mommy, I knew very little about it when Mommy and I got married. I had a lot to learn. Of course, I stumbled many times and made mistakes, but I was always amazed at how forgiving you were and how my mistakes never diminished your immense love for me.

Parenting you three girls gave my life incredible meaning and purpose. Nothing else came close to it, including my environmental work with films or my book writing. My over-powering love for you and intense feelings of responsibility for you made me into a new and better person with stronger values and a steadfast sense of purpose.

I'm deeply grateful to you, not only for the love you have for Mommy and me but for the love you have for each other. You care about each other and are each other's best friends. Your relationship with each other is filled with respect, laughter, fun, enjoyment, and shared values.

You are so important to me. I treasure you each. Mommy and I are incredibly proud of you, and we love you more than words can convey.

Love, Dad
XXXOOO

LETTER #3

To my three precious daughters, Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny,

Darling Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny,

I recently came across a six-minute video in which ten fathers and their (mostly) grown children were videotaped in pairs as the child asked the father, “What about me makes you proud?”

I found the video so moving and poignant that I sent it to my aging, death, and dying group in my most recent weekly letter to them.

Then, an idea occurred to me. I want to answer that question for you, and what better day to do that than Father’s Day? Also, I don’t want to wait to do this until I become frail and cognitively impaired from old age, and it’s too late!

At first, I started drafting individual letters to each of you, but they were so overlapping that I decided it would be better to write the letter to all three of you.

Here you go:

Darling Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny,

I am proud of you for so many reasons that I don’t know where to begin.

For a start, you are all such accomplished professionals. You’ve worked incredibly hard to establish yourselves in particularly challenging and competitive careers. I’m proud of you for doing so well and for being highly regarded by your colleagues, bosses, and subordinates.

I’m even prouder of you for what you’ve accomplished in your personal lives. You’ve each married a fantastic man. Sujay, CJ, and Chase are beloved sons-in-law, and Mommy and I are so proud and happy that they are now part of our family.

And your children! Wow! Where to begin?! I’m proud of you for being extraordinary mothers. I know it’s not always easy. Raising kids is one of the most vexing jobs in the world and one of the most important. Children can be exhausting, and being a mom often involves tedious work—now (during the pandemic) more than ever.

I’m proud of you for taking on the job of raising kids with dedication, devotion, and love. All three of you have incredible families, and Mommy and I are so grateful for all the love and affection we receive from you and your families.

Your families are flourishing because of the love and caring you (and your husbands) bring to the job of being the best parents you can be. You all have beautiful homes, too!

I'm proud of you for taking care of yourselves, for eating healthily, for keeping fit, and for getting as much sleep as you can (which I know is not nearly enough).

I'm proud of you for the characters you have forged and the values you uphold. You are loving, wise, kind, patient, persevering, tough, resilient, determined, compassionate, and generous. You were a joy to raise.

Your sense of humor, your zest for life, your decency, your loving natures, your grit, your love of learning, and your capacity for friendship are all things that make me proud of you.

I'm proud of you for being *you*. Thank you for bringing Mommy and me so much profound joy. I'm proud of what you are making of your lives despite the hardships and setbacks that life brings to us all.

Some of my favorite recent highlights:

- Kimmie: How you give Kareena and Neal life challenges and other challenges during the Covid-19 shutdown. And the respect and warmth the NBC Today Show hosts show you (and how outstanding you are on TV).
- Tina: The love and values you bring to your loving documentation of your rich family life in your family blog. And the courage and strength of character you showed in your bold move to Colorado.
- Jenny: The rave assessments you received recently during your annual review from the partners at your law firm. And the courage, resilience, and sound values you demonstrated during your challenging twin pregnancy.

I love you—and thanks for blessing my life.

Yer ol' Dad
XXXOOO