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Fulfillment | August 30, 2021

Leaving My Legacy to Family While I'm Still Alive

Here's how I'm giving the gift of my time.

By **Mary Alice Monroe**



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Antonio Giovanni Pinna

Every day is a gift.

That's a familiar phrase we've all heard or said in some form in our lives. In fact, it's such a cliché that we sometimes lose sight of the real truth in it. My experiences during the pandemic have crystalized the importance of that simple yet profound statement, it has led me to examine my priorities and consider what legacy I'm leaving. I feel comfortable that my 30-year career has left a body of work that speaks to my professional legacy. I'm looking now at the personal legacy I'm leaving for my children and my grandchildren. This, in the here and now, is at the heart of it.

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with reflection and intention?

Believe me, I know how easy it is to get swept up in life's big wave of busyness. Job demands, medical challenges, family needs, financial questions, tragedies ... the list goes on. I've been riding that wave. With two new books coming out in a matter of weeks, I still am. The difference, however, is that now I'm choosing to ride the wave with *intention*. What does that mean? It's back to choices. I am choosing the direction I want to go instead of allowing the wave to push me along haphazardly. I am choosing to pause and take a breath, smell the roses, walk more, call a friend. To say "yes" to my children and grandchildren rather than work. I can't change my routine overnight, but I'm consciously trying to shape the legacy I *want* to leave behind. Here's what happened to lead me to this new intentionality.

When the world went on lockdown over a year ago, I was writing a new book, the 27th one in my career. My stories are family sagas set against the backdrop of nature. For this book, with all of us locked in place, I sought to explore the global phenomenon we were living in through the story line of my characters. This wasn't so much about COVID-19 but instead about the family dynamics. The roller-coaster experience of the pandemic and writing led my characters (and me) through the five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Over that year like no other, the theme of legacy emerged from the pages of the story. While I explored that topic from each character's perspective, I found myself examining the theme of legacy in my own life, as well. Before the global shutdown, I had been working at a breathless pace, with little time for the things that mattered most to me, which is making memories with my children and grandchildren. When the shutdown was announced, my book tour was cancelled, I couldn't travel, and I found myself at home with hours to focus on personal choices. It was a scary time, full of confusion and questions. We learned to zig and to zag. When the

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legacy led to further questions like: *What family stories and traditions am I passing down to my loved ones? What memories am I taking the time to create with my grandchildren? What life lessons am I teaching?* The legacy I leave my loved ones will ultimately be memories. How I am remembered—kept alive—in the hearts and minds of my family, friends, and readers. I can only create the memories if I see each day as a gift, and I give the gift of my time to them. These things include:

- Playing board games with grandchildren, especially Monopoly
- Movie nights with pile-ups of kids, dogs, and popcorn!
- Turtles on the beach; discovering nests and watching hatchlings scramble to the sea
- Cooking my chocolate chip cookies with my helpers
- Creating journals with my grands of what we found in the wild

Today, my work schedule is demanding, and I know I'll never reach the bottom of my checklist of to-dos. And that's okay. I'm training myself to say *no* more often to things that don't positively serve my legacy, so that I may say *yes* more often to my children and grandchildren and friends. Whether it's video calls or long phone chats or family visits, a dreamed-about mother-daughter getaway—I'm doing it. I'm hungry for more opportunities to share family stories, to witness the miraculous changes occurring—so fast!—in my grandchildren. To pass on family traditions. To live in the present. I know now that the greatest story I'll ever write is the book of life with my family.

Many of us have undergone some kind of transformation in the past year, acquired some kernel of self-knowledge, had an epiphany, or perhaps discovered a new skill or talent we might wish to continue as we move into the new normal. For me, it's simple. I wake up each morning and choose to believe that each day is a gift. To

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Mary Alice Monroe

MARY ALICE MONROE is the *New York Times* bestselling author of nearly thirty books, including her latest, *The Summer of Lost and Found* (available May 11; Simon & Schuster). Her books are sold worldwide. She's also the co-creator and co-host of the popular Friends & Fiction webcast/podcast.

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Relationships

The Last Summer With All My Kids Around

With my baby off at college, where does that leave me as a mom?

By Jo Varnish

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Health

The Top 5 Menopause Myths – Debunked!

We're here to give you the facts.

By Lauren Streicher M.D.



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