

# Legacy Letter of Sandra Smith

July 1, 2021

To my dearest daughter,

We humans spend a short time on Earth and although none of us knows the exact moment when we will leave this life, I am preparing for my life to end. I am sad about that but I accept my fate. I have received wonderful care through hospice and I'm eternally grateful for the love and support you have shown me, especially during the past few months of my illness.

We have always been good about sharing our feelings with each other, so I don't have a lot of important things that remain unsaid. At the same time, I recently learned about the beautiful and ancient practice of writing a "legacy letter," and I thought it could be an opportunity to say a few things that I wish I had expressed to you previously. I hope we can read this letter together and talk about what I've written – I would love to hear your thoughts and memories, answer any questions you may have and share more details if you wish.

My mother, the grandmother you never met, was, like you, a talented artist. Just like you, she could always create beautiful artwork even when she was a young child. Your grandmother went to school for hairdressing, which is why I smiled and was proud of you when you cut hair in college for extra money. She was also a professional photographer, opening her own studio along with her sister. She would later open her own card and gift shop – all while raising a family of six children!

Your grandfather was a very hard worker. He also owned his own business, teaching his children to have a strong work ethic. He let us know that if you work hard, you can get what you want and need. He also taught us to treat everyone with respect.

My parents certainly influenced my life, teaching me to be independent and that women can do anything. When I learned about feminism in college, it all made sense to me – it very much fit who I was, and who I still am today. I was part of a consciousness raising group that helped make everything "click." I felt empowered and wanted to "Change the World."

In college, my friends and I held a male beauty pageant – it even made it on the evening news! We also held a women's arts festival and started a feminist newsletter, "Women's Times." Women's rights was my passion and my career would reflect this, working in rape crisis, domestic violence, and working with women in recovery and their children. I learned that I could do things I never thought I could do, things others told me I couldn't. I learned not to let others control me and that control has nothing to do with love. My hope is that you continue to be a strong woman and that you never allow anyone in your personal or professional life to oppress or abuse you in any way.

Equality means respecting others regardless of their differences. While this is always a learning process and a challenge, I have tried to practice this throughout my life. In elementary school I would try to befriend those who were picked on or bullied. I would invite the whole class to my birthday party. In high school I would sit at lunch with a classmate who others treated as an outcast. I was touched when my best friend from high school, a popular cheerleader, later said to me that she always told her daughter to be kind and treat everyone with respect, telling her, "Be like (my name)."

While I learned it wasn't always easy, I would do my best to do the right thing and advocate for what I believed in. My hope is that you will continue to surround yourself with a diverse group of friends, and that you try to stand up for those who are discriminated against despite the pressure you may get to do otherwise.

When I adopted you, I was a single woman working as a school social worker in special education. I am proud of my accomplishments in that rewarding career, but I also have regrets. My greatest regret is that I let a demanding job be all consuming. I was unable to set limits and I remember cancelling a camping trip with you to complete a case for work. I had a strong work ethic, and wanted to do what was best for the children and families. But working that hard meant I had less quality time with you, and I was often exhausted and always taking work home. I was unable to balance work with caring for myself and being there for you as much as you needed me. I hope you can forgive me for not always putting you first, as I should have.

I am so grateful for having had the opportunity to adopt you and be your mother. You were a sweet and sensitive child with so many strengths and talents – so athletic and strong, an amazing artist and an incredible animator! You are intelligent and have great perseverance. I always dreamed of having a family,

and you gave me that family. You have been my greatest gift in life and I love you more than words can express.

I have learned through parenting that children do not become clones of their parents. My wish for you is that you continue to be a strong woman and be true to yourself. That you continue to persevere when things get tough, just as you always have done. My hope also is that you believe in yourself and use your amazing talents. That you are able to strike a balance between time for yourself, those you love and a rewarding career. That your relationship with your life partner is one of mutual respect and equality, love and happiness. I hope that integrity and honesty are values you honor, and that you continue to stand up for what is just and try to make the world a better place.

Finally, I hope that when someone tells you that you can't achieve your dream, that you hear my voice saying "Do it anyway – you CAN do it!!"

(Handwritten)

All my love,  
Mom