

Grieving Mom Honors Late Daughter with 'LegacyLetters'

BY [STEPHANIE LECCI](#)

Lake Effect's Stephanie Lecci interviews Leah Dobkin, founder of Legacy Letters.

A few years ago on the show, [we spoke with](#) Shorewood writer [Leah Dobkin](#) about a new business she was launching called "Legacy Letters."



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Credit Leah Dobkin

Leah Dobkin's late daughter, Hannah Rose, had a special connection with animals and dreamed of being an oceanographer. Dobkin was inspired by Hannah to create the "Honor Your Angel" Legacy Letters.

She would help people write the stories of their lives and channel their collected wisdom and values into one heartfelt and comprehensive letter, to be passed down to future generations.

Dobkin knew that most people needed direction and guidance as they took stock of their lives, as they considered their legacies - and even their mortality.

Little did Dobkin know when she started the project, that she'd have to confront the same questions her clients were facing.

A few weeks after launching the project, she was diagnosed with cancer. All of her events were put on hold until she finished chemotherapy in September of 2011.

Just as she was starting the project up again, she was hit with yet another tragedy: the death of her 19-year-old daughter Hannah Rose.

It was an unfathomable, painful loss.

"The first year, you are in shock, you're numb, you're frozen," she says. "You're walking, but you're not living. You're not part of the people who are alive, even though you look alive and talk and walk."

Dobkin did find a small comfort in writing, in the poems about her daughter and in the Legacy Letter she had written Hannah after the cancer diagnosis. Today, she says she is thankful she wrote it when she did.

"In a million years, I never expected that she would go before me, so I was really glad that I wrote the Legacy Letter to her," she says. "But now, I have this new sense of urgency that everyone should do it yesterday, kind of thing."

Along with that urgency, Dobkin also struggled to honor her daughter's life, to make sure it "wasn't in vain." She wrote Hannah poems and remembered how the young woman, who volunteered at Discovery World, dreamed of being an oceanographer.



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Credit Leah Dobkin

Shorewood writer Leah Dobkin is the founder of Legacy Letters.

"When she was little, she used to train gold fish to do flips," she says, laughing. "I want to talk about her love of animals, how wherever she would go butterflies would land on her."

Dobkin soon realized that, just as she wanted to tell her daughter's story, so would other parents who lost their children. So she developed what she calls "Honor Your Angel" Legacy Letters. In these specialty letters, parents or other family members can share the stories of their loved ones' lives.

"How did they inspire you? What stories illustrate why they're so special, and how did they impact you? What difference did they make in your life?" Dobkin says, listing off questions to be answered in the letters.

Dobkin says the letters offer parents and family a much-needed opportunity to talk about their deceased loved one. After Hannah died, Dobkin says people felt uncomfortable talking about her, but all Dobkin wanted to do was remember her daughter.

"I want to hear her name out loud. I want to make sure she's not forgotten. I want to make sure that not only that I keep the memories alive, but that people around me remember her," she says. "So I realized other parents must be going through this, too."

With this additional focus, Dobkin is re-launching the Legacy Letters project, including a [new website](#) that will launch next week. She also credits the project in helping her through her grief. Listening to people share their life wisdom has given her what she calls an "eternity perspective."

"The legacy letter work that I do is sacred, and it's very spiritual and so it also provided some strength, I think, to deal with her death," she says. "I've been knocked down around a bit, but I'm still standing on my feet."

And Dobkin knows that right now, Hannah is proud of her mom.

"Right on, Mom!" That's probably what she would say," Dobkin says.



[Enlarge image](#)
Credit Leah Dobkin

The Legacy Letters logo

Dobkin will be giving a six-week series on Legacy Letter writing at Froedtert and the Medical College of Wisconsin starting on Sept. 23rd. She's also hosting a Legacy Letter Writing Circle for four weeks starting at the end of October.

She is also participating in Horizon Homecare and Hospice's [Life Lights](#) event this Friday, an annual community memorial event in honor of lost loved ones. You can find more information about Legacy Letters, Dobkin's upcoming events and Life Lights at wuwmm.com/lakeeffect.