

Chris Palmer has shared samples of his end-of-life letters to his family and health care provider as examples that others may refer to as they prepare their own plans and directives.

A LETTER TO MY FAMILY ABOUT MY END-OF-LIFE WISHES

June 29, 2022

SUMMARY OF LETTER

I do not want my death to be protracted or lingering, especially if I am bed-bound and cognitively impaired. The quality of my life is more important to me than its length.

Highly intensive medical technology for older people is rarely helpful and often only causes suffering. I don't want to end up hooked to tubes and machines. I want to be home with my loved ones or in an inpatient hospice like Casey House if it is too challenging to take care of me at home.

As I enter the last phase of my life, the following are important to me: being able to talk with all of you, being mentally alert and competent, preserving my quality of life, having autonomy and independence, being comfortable and free of pain, leaving good memories for all of you, dying quickly to avoid wasteful and expensive care.

I love so much about my life—being active, spending time with grandkids, writing, giving talks, and volunteering—that if none of these activities were possible for me to enjoy anymore, I want to go out peacefully without a lot of heroics. I want my doctor to make a referral to hospice as soon as I am eligible.

If I'm severely compromised (for example, by dementia or other illness) and unlikely to regain my ability to recognize loved ones, I'd consider my life over and want you to carry out my wishes for a peaceful death. Please do not work to prolong my life.

I believe if I have an irreversible illness or intractable pain, I have the right to end my life in any way I choose—a right to death with dignity.

I support terminal sedation, medical-aid-in-dying (MAID), and voluntary stopping eating and drinking (VSED). I want access to MAID medications (if legal), so I have the option of taking a lethal dose of medicine. I do not want my life prolonged artificially after it has ceased to be the life I want.

--Please turn over for the full letter--

June 29, 2022

Dear Gail, Kim, Sujay, Tina, CJ, Jenny, and Chase,

Every day I'm so grateful we are all alive and healthy, and I hope we stay that way for a very long time!

As you know, I feel strongly about the importance of discussing how we want to be treated at the end of our lives and how the time to have that discussion is sooner rather than later. As the old maxim goes, we should repair the roof when the sun is shining.

So this letter is my way of getting the discussion started! My personal mission statement spells out my views on death and dying, and this letter supplements what I wrote there.

The nonprofit organization Compassion and Choices, as well as the outstanding books, *Finish Strong: Putting Your Priorities First at Life's End* by Barbara Coombs Lee and *The Art of Dying Well: A Practical Guide to a Good End of Life* by Katy Butler, have informed this letter and I am grateful to them.

Health Care Agents

Gail is my health care agent (or proxy) and will speak for me if I cannot. If Gail dies before I do, or is incapacitated and unable to act as my health agent or proxy, then Kim, Tina, and Jen will be my health care agents.

One of my goals with this letter is to give you the confidence to make hard decisions on my behalf if you must. In giving you this confidence, I also hope to provide you with peace of mind because you will know that you honored my wishes, and whatever decisions you made had my blessing.

Valuing the Time We Have Left

You might be thinking, "Why do we have to think about all this morbid, gloomy stuff?" My answer is that I love being alive and it is sad to think about life ending, but knowing my life will end and facing that fact forthrightly doesn't make me feel morbid or gloomy. Instead, it makes me value the time I have left and strengthens my determination to protect its quality.

We plan ahead for vacations to get the most out of them. We plan ahead for retirement. We plan ahead for our children to attend college. We plan ahead for all the important events and developments in our lives. And yet when it comes to the end of our lives, we tend to not think or talk about it. I believe this is a mistake.

Many Older People Don't Get What They Want

Most people want to stay in their homes towards the end of their lives. They want as much independence as possible and to be surrounded by friends and family. They want gentle and meaningful interactions with loved ones and to be free of suffering and pain.

But that isn't what most people get because they haven't prepared and planned ahead of time. Too many people begin to consider these questions only when a health crisis hits, which is a terrible time to make crucial decisions, such as whether you want CPR, surgery, or mechanical ventilation.

What Is a Good Death?

One of my life goals is to usher all of you gently through the process of my death so that, in retrospect, it is a positive, memorable, and loving experience for you.

I don't want you to suffer by watching me suffer. I do not want to be seen and remembered in a sad, pitiful state. I want to die *before* becoming a stranger to you through the cruel ravages of old age, particularly if I become demented.

I want my death to be peaceful and gentle, but I also want my exit from this world to be a meaningful, memorable, and even sacred time for all of you. So many survivors are traumatized by what they witness as their loved one dies in an ICU, with doctors frantically attempting to keep the dying patient alive for another few hours or days. I don't want you to be traumatized by my death.

When I approach the end of my life, which may be many years away, I want to ensure that my values and preferences are respected and honored so that I can achieve a good death, one free of pain, suffering, regrets, unfinished projects, and ineffective medical treatments, and, at the same time, one full of love, peace, and gentleness.

I want to make the most of those last few weeks and months of my life and have the opportunity to say goodbye to each of you.

I aim to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" with stoicism and courage, bringing cheer and comfort to those around me.

My Death

My healthy lifestyle (and two major surgeries for prostate cancer and heart disease) decrease the chance of my premature death but increase the likelihood of death by a chronic and painful illness like congestive heart failure.

A slow death in this way is often terrible. A peaceful and gentle death requires a strategy or plan. Leaving it to chance will likely result in prolonged suffering and futile over-medicalization that

serves only to waste money and deplete precious resources. I want us all to be able to talk about it. Dying should not be a taboo topic.

Mommy/Gail and I disagree about whether my mother's four years in a nursing home were what she would have desired. I am pained by the memories of her loss of functionality and dignity, and I am clear that I want to prevent what happened to her from happening to me.

I do not want my death to be protracted or lingering, especially if I am bed-bound and cognitively impaired. *The quality of my life is far more important to me than its length.*

My Motivation for Writing This Letter

In addition to letting you know my wishes for the end of my life, I hope this letter will help *you* achieve good deaths when your lives end, hopefully many years after I die.

My goal is to set an example of how to have a good death, and fulfilling this goal will imbue my life with meaning and purpose until my last breath.

I am conscious that how I die will set an example to all of you who come after me. I hope you will write a letter similar to this to your loved ones when you are still in the prime of your lives. It would supplement your advance directive—as this letter does mine.

We each need to spell out what we want so we have some control over what happens to us. Death is unavoidable and can happen at any time. Better to approach it intentionally than haphazardly.

Make Sure My Doctors are Candid and Honest with Me

I have written the attached letter to my doctor telling him how I want to be treated. Still, for many reasons, doctors are often reluctant to tell their patients that cures will no longer work and that it's time for comfort care, hospice, and efforts to maintain a high quality of life as long as possible.

Please make sure my doctors are candid with you and me and tell all of us the truth about the effectiveness of additional treatments. I always want to know the truth about my condition, treatment options, and the effectiveness of treatments. I don't want to be deceived or misled.

Inflicting Overmedicalization on Older People

As long as I am thriving and vibrant, I welcome care that will restore my health and help me retain a high quality of life.

Knowing that highly intensive medical technology for people in their 80s and 90s often doesn't work and causes undue suffering, I don't want to end up hooked to tubes and machines. I don't want to be isolated in an ICU, confused, ventilated, intubated, and in pain. I want to be home

with my loved ones (all of you!) or in an inpatient hospice like Casey House if it proves too challenging to take care of me at home.

I do not want to live as long as possible, regardless of my quality of life. If the prognosis is grave, my physical state is dire, and there is little chance that I will ever regain mental or physical function, I want to be allowed to die peacefully and as quickly as possible.

Being assigned to an ICU and hooked up to multiple machines would be worse than death for me. The pain, discomfort, isolation, lack of autonomy, and hopelessness would be unbearable and torturous.

At the end of my life, I do not want mechanical breathing and artificial ventilation, tracheotomy, CPR, artificial nutrition and hydration (through a nasogastric tube or a PEG tube), hospital intensive care, electroshocks to my heart, medications to stimulate heart function, dialysis, chemotherapy or radiation therapy, or surgery.

There may be other machines, drugs, or approaches yet to be invented that would, if used on my body at the end of life, add a few hours or days of diminished existence. Please know that I do not want any such “assistance.”

Instead, I want the end of my life to be driven by quality-of-life issues and palliative care rather than invasive and painful medical care, especially if the prognosis is poor.

If a hospital or any health care person associated with them or involved in my care intentionally ignores my advance directive and dementia coda and overmedicalizes me contrary to my wishes, please take legal action against the institutions and the persons who disregarded my wishes, so we can set a legal precedent (based on the “wrongful prolongation of life”) that others in the future must respect and follow advance directives.

Lawsuits in Georgia, Alaska, and elsewhere have resulted in large monetary settlements and, more importantly, put everyone involved in health care on notice that they should pay attention to advance directives.

As I Enter the Last Phase of My Life

As I enter the last phase of my life, the following are important to me: being able to talk with all of you, being mentally alert and competent, preserving my quality of life, having autonomy and independence, being comfortable and free of pain, leaving good memories for all of you, dying quickly rather than lingering in agony, and avoiding wasteful and expensive care.

Each of you knows me and can see what brings me joy in life. Your observations and knowledge, combined with the information and directives in this letter and our conversations, will guide you to recognize the point at which a good death is better than a “heroic” medically-produced life.

Dementia, medications, or my physical condition may make it hard for me to recognize when that point has arrived. I am counting on each of you to be attentive to the quality of my life, know what I value, and be courageous in making the decisions necessary to end my life with dignity.

I intend to have a disciplined routine to give my life structure up to the end. Even as I become frail, I plan to feel joy and gratitude and continue doing everything I love, like nurturing my grandchildren, volunteering, writing, reading, giving talks, seeing friends, drawing, juggling, and playing the piano.

As my world contracts and shrinks, I intend to be at peace with that reality. I will look at society and accept that I am departing from it and that it will carry on after my death with barely a flicker.

How to Treat me at the End of My Life

Before I begin actively dying, I'd like lots of visitors and to be surrounded by Gail, my daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. I want my loved ones to combine grieving with celebratory food, drink, music, stories, roasting, and toasting.

As I approach the end, I would love to hear you recall our happy times together and your fun and joyful memories. It would bring me enormous pleasure to talk to each of you, including my beloved and precious grandchildren, about the good times we have shared. If conversation is no longer possible for me, your presence, your words, and your love will bring me comfort.

I'd love to have photos of my loved ones (all of you!) in my room near my bed. Also, I would like to have my hand held and to be talked to when possible, even if I don't seem to respond to the touch and voice of others.

At the end of my life, I would like to be kept fresh and clean, and I would like my lips and mouth to be kept moist to stop dryness.

I'd love to die at home with hospice care but realize that at some point, this may impose too big a burden on members of my family. If that is the case, then it's OK for me to spend my last days in Casey House, a beautiful inpatient facility with Montgomery Hospice www.montgomeryhospice.org.

I want to be conscious and lucid enough to say goodbye as I die. But, on the other hand, I also welcome pain control and realize that painkillers may make me drowsy and *non compos mentis*. So I am counting on you to help me juggle these two conflicting goals.

Please make sure that my doctors and nurses know about the kind of person I was before getting sick and senile. For example, show them a photo of me doing handstands in my 70s! And please protect me from well-meaning religious folk who want to convert me before I die.

I want my death to release love. I want you to celebrate my life, not mourn my death. My death is not a tragedy—at my age, no matter when death arrives, no one will say I died young!

I Want No Heroics

I love so much about my life—being active, spending quality time with grandkids, writing, giving talks, and volunteering—that if none of that is possible, I want to go out peacefully without a lot of medical heroics.

I want my doctor to make a referral to hospice as soon as I am eligible. And if I'm in a hospital, I'd like a referral to palliative care at the earliest opportunity, even if undergoing curative treatment.

If it becomes clear that my remaining time is short no matter what treatments I receive, I'd like to do less instead of more. I do *not* want a tube put down my throat or inserted in my windpipe to keep me breathing. I do *not* want a PEG tube inserted into my stomach to feed me. Instead, I want a calm, gentle death.

If I'm severely compromised and unlikely to regain my ability to recognize loved ones, then I consider my life over and I want you to carry out my wishes for a peaceful death. If I have dementia and no longer recognize my beloved grandchildren, please do not work to prolong my life.

If I cannot respond to you with love and a sound mind, then I ask you to collaborate with nature to see that my life ends as quickly as possible.

Please do not wait for advanced dementia, permanent unconsciousness, or terminal illness. An incapacitating stroke, an inability to move and think, stupor, delirium, or serious mental impairment should trigger the implementation of my exit strategy.

I see no purpose in prolonging my dying if it is painful, miserable, and hopeless. If I have lost all cognitive ability, I request that I not be spoon-fed.

I do not want my life prolonged by artificial means (medicines, machines, CPR, tube feedings, devices or techniques not yet invented, etc.) if I'm bedridden or cannot recognize and communicate with my family.

Seek Opportunities to Welcome Death's Approach

My life is full of loving, thinking, feeling, writing, talking, giving, teaching, volunteering, and laughing. If I cannot do those things and will never be able to do them, my life is over and it's time for comfort care only.

If my mental function is seriously compromised with little chance for full recovery, please seek opportunities to encourage death's approach. Suppose, for example, I have pneumonia or another infection. Let my body go. Do not fight an infection with antibiotics if what remains after the

drugs work is not worth fighting for. Are my kidneys faltering? Let them. Is my heart failing or blood pressure falling? Do nothing. Am I refusing water and food? Good! Let it be.

Please look for what one expert in end-of-life issues, Dr. Joanne Lynn, calls “creative collaboration with the forces of nature.” In other words, please take advantage of natural illnesses as they arise. Welcome my health failings as benefactors that have arrived to hasten my death. They should not be regarded as diseases to be attacked and combated with medical marvels.

I welcome aggressive pain and symptom relief while a disease takes its natural course, but artificially sustaining my life (that is, keeping me alive) while my quality of life drastically deteriorates would be to torment me unnecessarily.

If I Have Dementia

Advanced dementia is worse than death. I do not want to experience the end stages of dementia. I do not want to become seriously dysfunctional and very different from who I am today. Nor am I willing to experience substantially reduced mental function and an inability to talk and write.

Anything worse than mild cognitive decline is unacceptable to me and should trigger my exit strategy. I don’t want the last years of my life to contradict all that went before, so I have added a dementia coda to my advance directive to underscore what I request in this letter.

If I have dementia, I am deeply concerned about the practical and emotional burdens this would put on those who love me and want to take care of me. Therefore, please remove all barriers to a natural, peaceful, and timely death. I want comfort care only. Please qualify me for hospice if you can.

Please make no attempt at resuscitation using CPR or any other method. Please ask my doctor to sign a do-not-resuscitate order.

Please do not authorize any treatment or procedure that might prolong or delay a natural death or prolong or increase my suffering. Do *not* intubate me. Do *not* give me intravenous fluids. Do *not* transport me to a hospital. Do *not* treat my infections with antibiotics but give me painkillers instead. Please ask my medical team to deactivate all medical devices, such as defibrillators and pacemakers, that might delay my death.

Please do not coerce or even coax me to eat. If I’m eating, let me eat whatever I want. Do *not* allow a feeding tube for me. If one is inserted, please have it removed immediately. Please forbid dialysis. I want comfort care only, and I want to avoid all treatments that might be painful, agitating, or prolong my dying. Please give me opioids to relieve any pain. If I need to be institutionalized, please send me to an inpatient hospice like Casey House.

My Right to Die

I believe that if I have an irreversible illness or intractable pain, I have the right to hasten the end of my life in any way I choose—a right to death with dignity. I want a good death if I can no longer enjoy a good life.

I support medical aid-in-dying (MAID) and want access to MAID medications (if legal), so I have the option of taking a lethal dose of medicine. I do not want my life prolonged artificially after it has ceased to be the life I want.

Pain Relief and Palliative Sedation

If I'm in pain, breathless, or agitated, I want those symptoms relieved quickly and vigorously with morphine, even if the treatment unintentionally advances the time of my death or even causes my death. It is more important to enhance my quality of life if I'm seriously ill, even if the treatment shortens my life.

With severe pain, intensely labored breathing (dyspnea), or agitation, I welcome palliative (terminal) sedation.

Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking (VSED)

I will use VSED (voluntarily stopping eating and drinking) to die if necessary. When there is no hope for recovery, my life is near an end, and I am no longer enjoying being alive, and assuming MAID is unavailable, I will intentionally hasten my death using VSED. I will initiate VSED before I stop recognizing loved ones and cannot communicate. I believe that VSED is justified when the burdens of my life outweigh the benefits.

VSED causes death by dehydration within 8 to 14 days. Doctors say it is peaceful and causes little suffering *when adequately supported by good oral care and pain-relieving analgesics*. Its slowness also provides time for reflection, family interactions, and mourning.

I would rather end my life using VSED or MAID than suffer the despair of a lengthy stay trapped in an ICU on mechanical life support.

Because of the legality and availability of VSED, I don't think I will need to use the Swiss nonprofit Dignitas to end my life unless the hospice I'm using refuses to support me using VSED (or MAID if it becomes legal). However, I'm prepared to use Dignitas (or another similar Swiss nonprofit organization) if my other options for a peaceful exit are blocked.

I Plan to Obtain a DNR (Do-Not-Resuscitate) Order

When the time is right, I plan to obtain a DNR (do-not-resuscitate) order (i.e., no CPR) and a MOLST (Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) from my doctor. DNR is also called DNAR (do-not-attempt-resuscitation) or AND (allow-natural-death).

MOLST will support my advance directive. An advance directive is ostensibly a legal document, while a MOLST is a medical order. A MOLST provides a tool for patients near the end of life to control their medical treatment better than advance directives alone, though both are important.

Please remember what I wrote earlier: if a hospitalist (a hospital doctor) chooses to ignore my advance directive and gives me painful treatments even though I have explicitly said not to, please sue them for medical malpractice and “wrongful prolongation of life.”

Such a lawsuit would help future dying people be treated with more compassion and teach hospital administrations that there are severe consequences for failing to adhere to an advance directive.

A Brief Ceremony After I Die (if it helps you)

I am indebted to author and science writer Katy Butler for the following idea. In many cultures, washing and anointing the body with oil after death is traditional. Katy Butler describes how nurses are now bringing a beautiful version of this ancient ceremony into hospital rooms.

This “bathing and honoring” practice may help loved ones say goodbye. A death doula could help facilitate it. Only do this ritual or ceremony if it is helpful to you. I’ll be dead, so at this point, all the focus is on all of you and what brings you comfort, solace, and peace.

OK, here is the ceremony: After I have died, perhaps my death doula or some of you might wash and dress my body (rather than letting my body be taken immediately to a funeral home). Then, if you felt like it, you could anoint my body with lavender oil using the following nurses’ ceremony:

As my hair is anointed with fragrant oil, a family member recites, “We honor Chris’s hair that the wind has played with.” Next, a dab of oil is gently rubbed on my brow as another family member says, “We honor Chris’s brow, the birthplace of his thoughts.” “Chris” would be replaced by “Dad” or “Grandpa” as appropriate. Then the ceremony would continue as follows, with each line said by someone in the room, and my name (Chris, Dad, Grandpa) would be inserted as appropriate in each succeeding sentence.

We honor your eyes that have looked on us with love and viewed the beauty of the earth.
 We honor your nose, the gateway of breath.
 We honor your ears that listened to our voices and concerns.
 We honor your lips that have shared so much wisdom and knowledge.
 We honor your shoulders that have borne burdens and strength.
 We honor your heart that has deeply loved us.
 We honor your arms that have embraced us and held us.
 We honor your hands that have held our hands and done so many things in this life.
 We honor your legs that carried you into new places and new challenges.
 We honor your feet that forged your path through life.
 We give thanks for the gifts you have given us in our lives.
 We give thanks for the memories that we created together.

We have been honored to be a part of your life.

I will write separately about my legacy letter, obituary, memorial service, and how to dispose of my body.

Thanks for reading this letter and implementing it to the best of your ability.

Love,

Chris/Dad/Grandpa
XXXOOO

Attachment: My letter to my doctor

January 11, 2019

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 suddenly die. 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 gone by, this has become less of a worry for us, because you are all growing up and can take care of yourselves.

Back 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 any 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 those with whom you come into contact. Mommy and I know you will continue to live happy, rewarding, and fulfilling lives. We are the luckiest parents in the whole world and we 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 that my biggest sadness is not having the opportunity to be a loving, mischievous, and wise grandfather.

I love you more than I can say.

Your loving Dad
 XXXOOO

[Insert Gail's 2006 letter here.]

As I say, if you are reading this letter, it means that I have died. This letter (the one you are holding in your hand) 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, then 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 so extraordinarily lucky, especially meeting and falling in love with Gail back 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, and 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, and 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, and 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 Fitbit, 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 afterwards 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 to 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 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 me 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 Carmel 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 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 every 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
XXXXOO

Death letter to family

**A LETTER TO MY FAMILY ABOUT ENDING MY LIFE
(IN CASE I EVER NEED IT)**

Drafted on December 7, 2022 (but the date on the final letter, if ever used, would be much later)

To my precious family and friends,

I have decided to end my life because of the continued pain and unbearable suffering from heart disease.

I have lived a full, complete, meaningful, and useful life, but I have had enough and no longer wish to continue.

I am a wreck and only a relic of the energetic, productive, and creative person I used to be.

I have taken advantage of all the available medical care and interventions. I have decided that further medical treatments are useless and will only hurt me and worsen my life.

This decision is mine alone. I am in a rational and calm state of mind and feel completely at ease with this decision. I am not depressed or mentally unstable.

No one has helped me with this decision to end my life, and no one, including the beneficiaries of my estate, has put pressure on me to do so.

I support the Final Exit Network (FEN) and believe in its mission. I have chosen to die now.

If I am discovered before I stop breathing, I forbid anyone, including doctors and paramedics, to attempt to resuscitate me. If I am revived against my wishes, I shall take legal action against anyone who helped in that action.

Please add the following language to my obituary:

“Chris took his own life in a rational self-deliverance toward the end of a terminal disease relating to his heart. He did this not out of cowardice or escapism but because it made no sense to continue living subhumanly with an unacceptable quality of life when nothing good or loving or kind could be accomplished. He died with a heart full of love, gratitude, and appreciation for all those he loved and who had supported him in his life.”

Thank you for your understanding.

Love, Chris/Dad/Grandpa
XXXOOO

PLEASE PUT THIS LETTER IN MY FILE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

Chris Palmer

June 8, 2022

Dear Dr. Watkins,

It is important to me to have excellent and compassionate care and stay as healthy and active as possible throughout my life. Thank you for all you have done, and will continue to do, to preserve my health. When I approach the end of my life, I want treatment to alleviate suffering. Most importantly, I want to ensure that the experience can be peaceful for my family and me as death becomes imminent.

If there are measures available that may extend my life, I would like to know their chances of success and their impact on the quality of my life. If I choose not to take those measures, I ask for your continued support, even if that choice goes against medical advice.

If my condition becomes incurable and death is the only predictable outcome, I would prefer not to suffer but rather die in a humane and dignified manner. Therefore, I would like your assurance that:

- You will tell me candidly and honestly when further treatments are futile.
- If it becomes clear that my remaining time is short regardless of treatment, I want you to do less instead of more.
- If I can speak for myself, my wishes will be honored. If not, the requests from my wife Gail, and my advance directive (which you have), will be honored.
- You will make a referral to Montgomery Hospice as soon as I am eligible.
- You will support me with all options for a gentle death. These include VSED, palliative sedation, and, if medical aid in dying is authorized in Maryland, providing a prescription for medications that I can self-administer to help my death be peaceful and dignified.

I hope for your assurance that you will support my personal end-of-life care choices as listed above.

I am attaching a letter to my family that explains how I want to be treated at the end of my life.

I hope you will accept this statement as a fully considered decision and an expression of my deeply held views. If you feel you would not be able to honor my requests, please let me know now so I can make choices about my care based on that knowledge. Thank you.

Very best,

Chris Palmer

Attachment: June 29, 2022, letter to my family
Death My Letter to Dr. Watkins June 2022

Sunday, June 20, 2020 (Father's Day)

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 if I wrote 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, 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. Sujoy, 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 the job of 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 possibly 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 K and N are each given life challenges and other types of challenge during the Covid-19 shut down. 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

April 21, 2021

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 death bed is a big mistake. Death bed conversations are rarely rewarding.

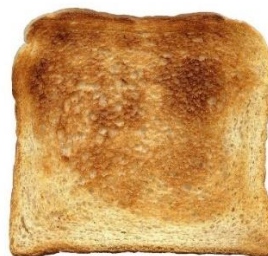
Everyone is grieving and the person dying is usually barely conscious, frail, cognitively impaired, and maybe in pain and discomfort.

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 now, and 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 that 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'm going to select about you is your pregnancy with Aiden and Connor. From the day you learned you were having twins, you resolved that your highest priority would be to take care of those babies. You did everything you could to make sure 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 the immense love you had 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 the love you have for each other. You care about each other and are each other's best friend. 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