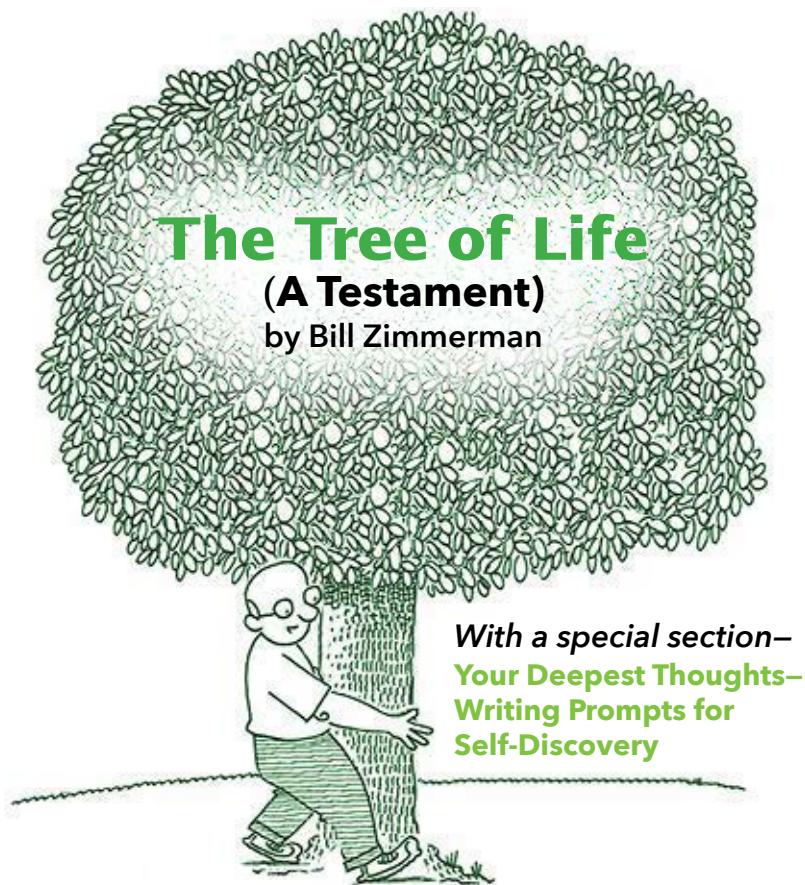


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The Tree of Life

A Testament



With a special section,
**Your Deepest Thoughts–
Writing Prompts for Self-Discovery**

Created by Bill Zimmerman
Art by Tom Bloom

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Dedication

For my wife, Teodorina,
and the healthcare workers
who saved my life.

Dear reader,

I wrote this poem while undergoing treatment for cancer; it conveys my love of life and my desire to survive my illness. I took much comfort in writing it as I hope you will in reading it.

In the poem I share with you what has been most important in my life and express my wish to cling to life, rather than let go. In its own way, the poem is a prayer which I desperately needed to say. Perhaps there are thoughts in it that will resonate with you or someone you love.

Full disclosure now: I finished writing the poem in the early part of 2020 when I was making good progress in my chemotherapy. But, then, things changed abruptly and I started to suffer severe side effects from the chemical infusions which made me very ill. By midyear I was deeply depressed and did not want to go on living. It was at that point, feeling overwhelmed, that I tried to take my life but was rushed to hospital where I was revived and given a second chance at treatment, I am resumed my life with **new day is a gift and I** life. Changing my medical much better now and have gusto and pleasure. **Each try to use my time well.**



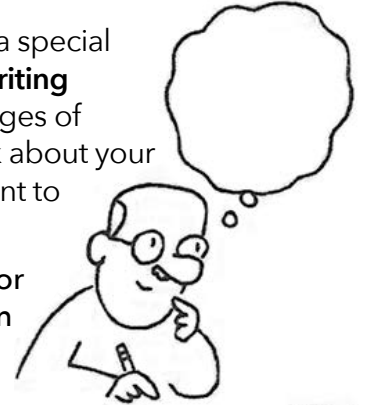
At the end of this poem, you also will find a special section titled **"Your Deepest Thoughts–Writing Prompts for Self-Discovery."** It features pages of writing prompts to encourage you to think about your own precious life and what is truly important to you. Space is there for you to write.

I do not know what the future will hold for me, but I still cling to life with full passion and hope this little book will give you comfort.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Zimmerman

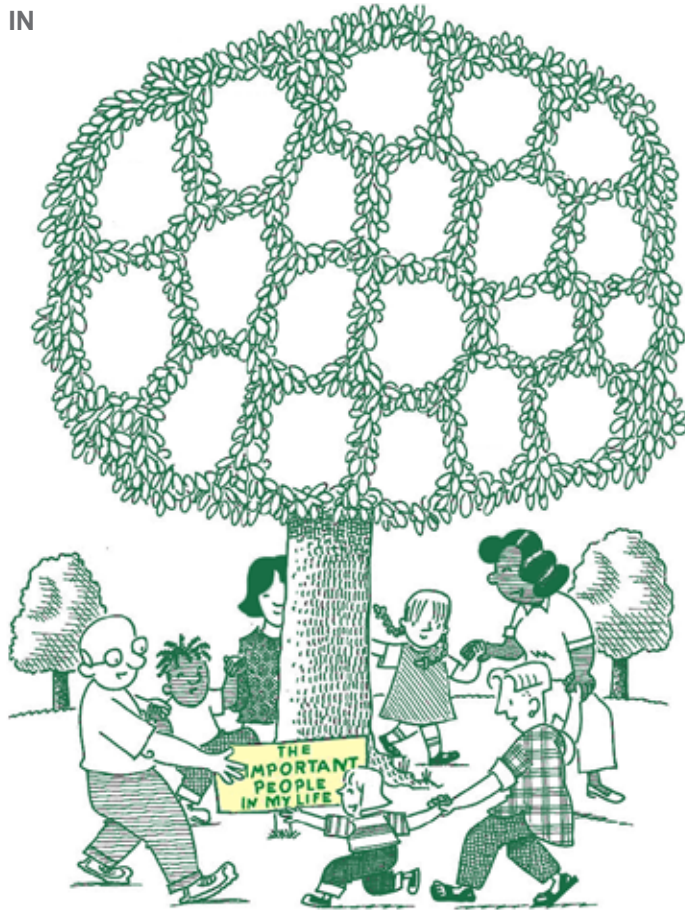
Bill Zimmerman
August 6, 2021



P.S. To get your own copy of the book, you first need to download it from the website.

You can fill in the answers to the writing prompts by typing on your computer screen and saving the file, or you can print out any pages and fill in the answers by hand. If you wish to share all your special thoughts in the completed digital book with someone, you can email the file to them.

FILL IN



I cling to the Tree of Life

I don't want to let go
—so much do I want to remain on this earth
and partake of life and what the world offers.
This blessed Tree of Life, and all trees which protect us
and save the world from our folly, they shelter us and
inspire us to be our best selves; they bring beauty and
nurturing to our lives. They offer us sanctuary.
Oh, precious tree, I adore you. Protect me, I beg you!

Hear me out, my tree:

I have tried not to be just a taker, squeezing life
for my selfish end,
Instead I have tried, when able, to repair the world
and to help those in need
I have offered love and caring to others
I, too, have nurtured, and in my own quiet way have tried
to shore up the Tree of Life and water it with my tears
I now find myself so afraid of dying and being
no longer here.

In living my last days I ask big questions:
Have I used my precious time well?
Did I do a good job?
Was I a responsible person?
Was I a good husband?
A loving father?
Was I kind to others?
Did I help in some way to heal the world?
God gave me the gift of life. But did I live a deserving
one for Him? Was I worthy of His love?
It all comes down to this question: What could I say
I achieved with my life were it to end today?
I want my answers to be pleasing to God.
I want, too, to be proud of what I answer.

What makes the Tree of Life so important?

Its branches protect and shelter us,
Its trunk anchors us,
Its roots steady and sustain us and other creatures.
It brings beauty to our lives.

The Tree's Branches

I look up at the tree's branches. I want to climb
to the top to touch the sky, embrace the clouds
and sing, "Hallelujah!"

I wish to signify that I have been here on Earth,
that I have seen its beauties and experienced
its wonders, that I am alive.

What a great gift from God!

I revel in Life's munificence

"Holy, holy, holy," I sing "Holy!"

Oh, what a wonderful life this is. Sing Hallelujah!

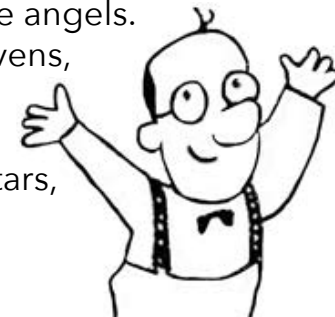
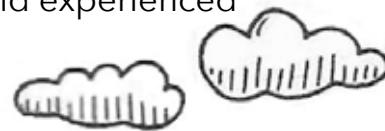
I climb the tree branch by branch to review my life,
to replenish my soul.

I hug the tree to pray and sing to the angels.

I climb the branches to see the heavens,
to reach for God although I know

He is within me, too.

From the top I look to the sky and stars,
I enjoy the mystery of the universe.





I talk to the birds and ask
where have they been.
"China," sings one.
"Africa" says another.
"America," another tweets.
I wish that I knew how
to fly, too, but I would
always want to return

to my beautiful Tree of Life.

I want my spirit to soar and yet I cling
tearfully to the tree's branches.

I put my hands around the tree's trunk
and hold on with all my might.

I whisper, "Let me live."

"Let me continue."

"Let me be."



I want the branches to display the entirety of my life. I want
to remember my steps where I have journeyed. It has
been a wonderful adventure that I wish would never end.

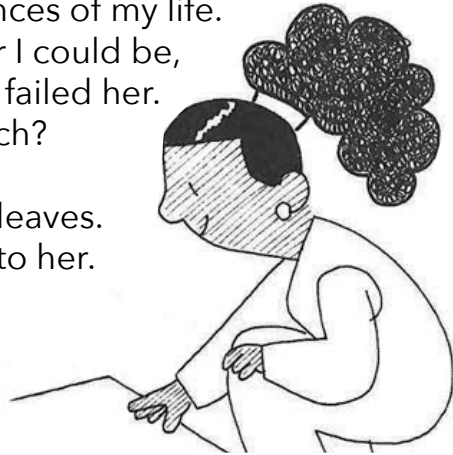


The highest branch is dedicated to my wife
who has loved and comforted me
throughout our many years together.
Like a little bird perched in the branch,
she sweetly croons
as the branches sway in the wind.
To ease her pain she sings for me
the song, "I Remember Sky."
So beautiful, with so much feeling
and sweetness.
She makes my heart weep
with love.



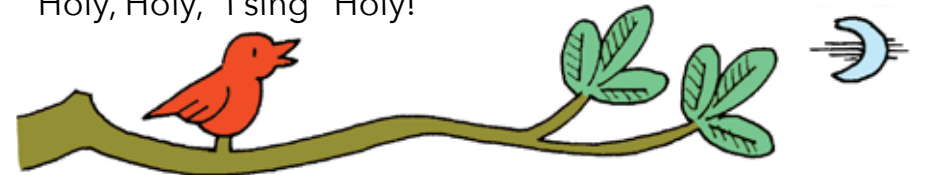


The next branch is for my daughter;
it is adorned with all the dreams and hopes
I had for her when she was born—
she was my future.
Seeing her arrive, holding her tiny hand
were the greatest experiences of my life.
I tried to be the best father I could be,
but I wonder if somehow I failed her.
Can one ever love too much?
I am no longer sure.
Her restless spirit stirs the leaves.
I pray that life will be kind to her.



On this limb are vessels holding the tears I have shed
over the sadness and pain that came with the years.
This is a branch where I have wailed many times.

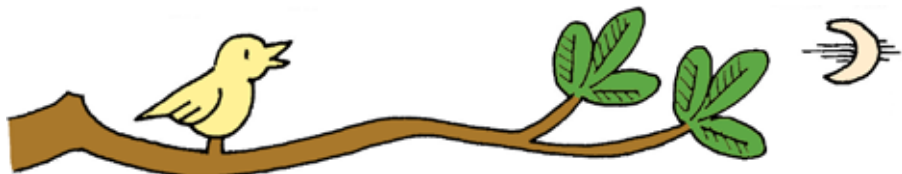
The underlying branch holds some of my smiles and
laughter for the pleasures which are always part of life,
too. I can hear my laughter echo in the leaves.
"Holy, Holy," I sing "Holy!"



This limb honors the people whom I have loved and
lost as Time came for them; their spirits linger forever in
my heart. The sparrows nestling there signify all those
who have departed. The branch carries memories
of my mother, my father and brother—all lost to me now,
but still in my heart. I can never give them up.
I miss them so.

On this branch below are placed the shoes
I walked in to discover the beauty and magnificence of our
world. I have also felt great loneliness throughout my journeys.





On another branch I store some of my life force which has sustained me through days of woe and loss. I will need my strength for the remaining days ahead. And what may be left I offer to those whom I love.

This next branch carries my hopes and dreams, many of which came true—to have a wife, a child; to do good work; to write and publish; to travel; to find happiness; to overcome my many fears; to have good health; to make a better world; to help young people find their way and realize their potential.

And on this small branch

is a resting place for the spirits of my beloved dogs who comforted me.



The leaves on this limb are heart-shaped, signifying the love I have felt toward others and the love which was granted to me, too. The leaves turn color, blaze and surrender their beauty. Nothing seems to last forever.

This is a branch of consciousness, signifying my being able to navigate the world and my attempt to comprehend its wonder and immensity.



And here is a branch that celebrates my life's work of writing and creating new, wondrous things. Without my imagination I would never have survived—it has sustained me. I have been blessed with my need to create new things.

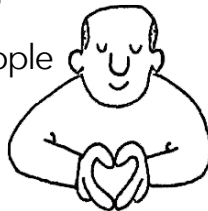




On this branch are shards of glass. They represent some of the sadness I have felt in seeing inequality among people in the world and the terrible sufferings of others. How do we awaken ourselves to others in need? How do we make life fairer to all?

And on this branch rest the kindnesses of most people who want to do the right thing. These are the people who know we must come together and that we share a common humanity. It is not hard to love others, is it, if only we will look fully into one another's eyes and hearts? If only we will feel for one another?

These lower branches are set aside for the people who have shown me great generosity and friendship and who helped me survive. I will never forget their good spirits. I have tried to honor them by offering kindness to others, too.

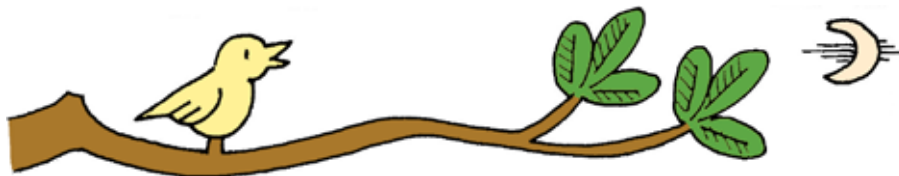


Another branch holds some of my secrets, my dreams, my hopes, my stories, my prayers, my blessings, my misery, my lamentations and joys. They are what I am made of.



This sturdy, encompassing branch is dedicated to Bach who has been my savior over the years. He is the highest of humans. His music has seen me through my terrible times of need. He offers me succor.





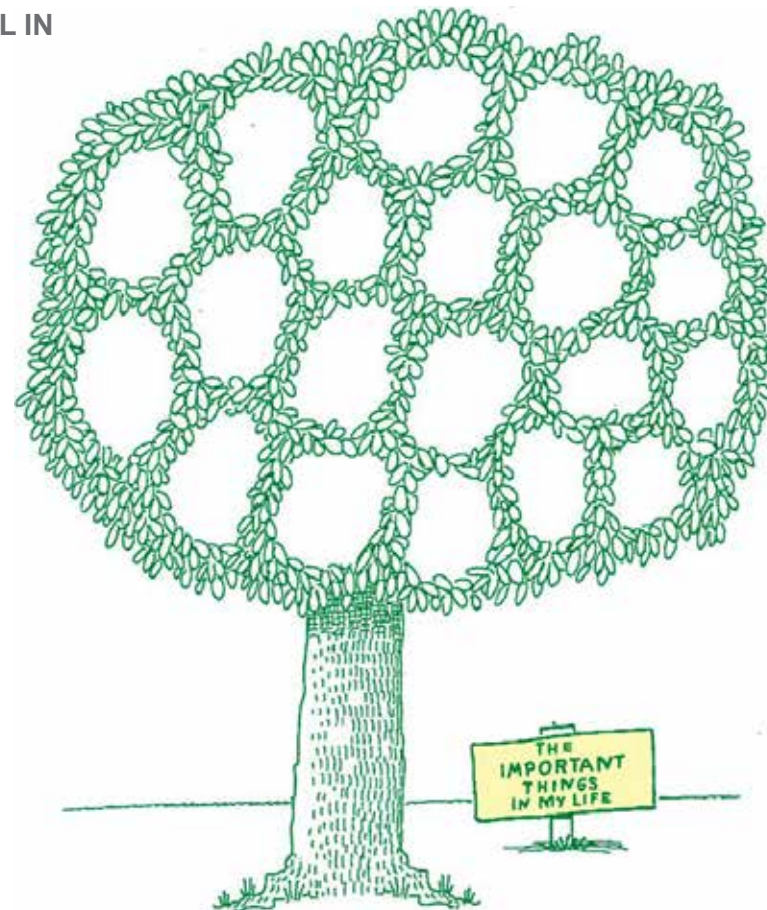
On this other branch I place some of my books. They comforted me as a frightened boy and also brought pleasure and wonder to me when I was grown. Without the written word all is lost. The books have fed my hunger to learn and experience new things. I bless them. When I was a child I never thought that one day I would write books, too.



And on this branch hang colorful flags signifying the moments of ecstasy which are always present in our lives as we share the pleasures of life and this world. Would you like a turn now? If so, then answer me:

What are the important things that you would place on your branches of the Tree of Life? Are they so different from mine? Name them.

FILL IN



How do we nurture the Tree of Life?

We do so by offering our love, with our tears of hope and sadness.

We and the tree are bound to each other for some time until we are called to let go.

What is our responsibility to life?

To live well

To do no harm

To love, to care, to help others

To repair what is worn and torn.

Meanwhile, I cling tightly to this tree of life

I embrace and hug it

I give it all my gentle kisses.

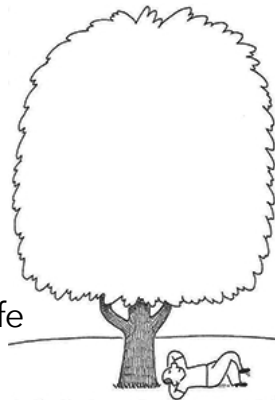
I want to embrace the tree with all my passion

as long as I can, but I know, most unwillingly, that

the time will come when my hands and arms

will weaken as they encircle the trunk and I will need

to let go and rest under its branches.



I beseech Thee, my God:

Do not pry my hands loose from this tree until I am ready to let go.

I ask now whether something of me will live on when I am gone. Will my spirit, my body mix with all other things and be part of the universe? I just want to hold on a little longer! How can I let go? When do you know life is over?



Why I don't want to let go of the Tree of Life:

I want to be with my loving wife and care for her till the end of her time.

I want to see my child lead a fulfilling life.

I still want to create so many new things.

I want to experience more days—they are all so beautiful, even when it rains.

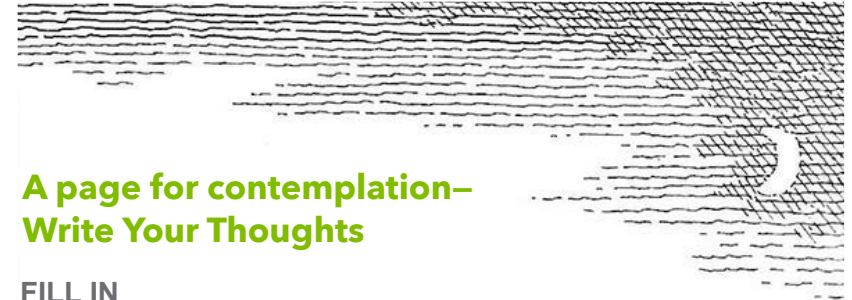
I want to keep my fierce spirit.

I want to experience joy and happiness, even if that means I must also suffer pain and illness and loss because they are also part of life.

I am so afraid of Death and yet, somehow I must
learn to accept humankind's fate, to let go at last.
I am thankful for the time, the so precious time,
which I did have living under the Tree of Life.
Oh, precious tree, I adore you.
I bless my God who has given me life.
Never, not ever, have I taken my time here for granted.
There never is enough time, is there?
I thank God for my life. But why, oh why, does
our time here have to be so short?
I stubbornly, selfishly pray for more days to come.
I come to rest under the tree's branches.
"Let me live. Let me live," I cry.
Let me stay. Shelter me, tree.
Nurture me, tree.
Comfort me, tree.
How does one know when to let go?
For never have I loved life more.
Thank You, my God, for what You have given me.
I say Amen.

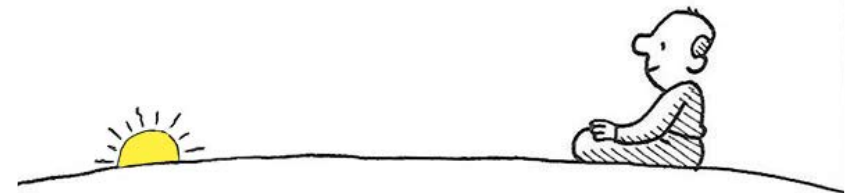


—Written in the years 2019-2020



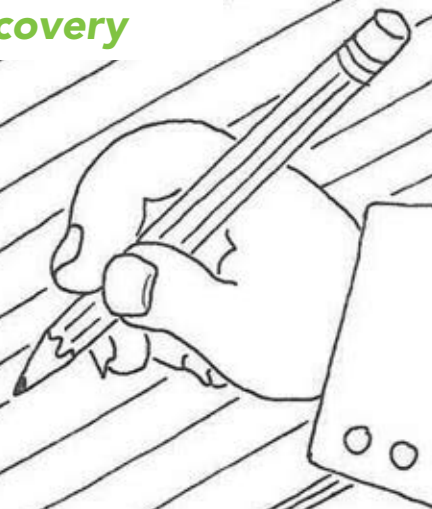
A page for contemplation— Write Your Thoughts

FILL IN



Your Deepest Thoughts –

*Writing Prompts
for Self-Discovery*



What do you want to accomplish with your precious life? What is your legacy, the things about your life that you want to be remembered for?

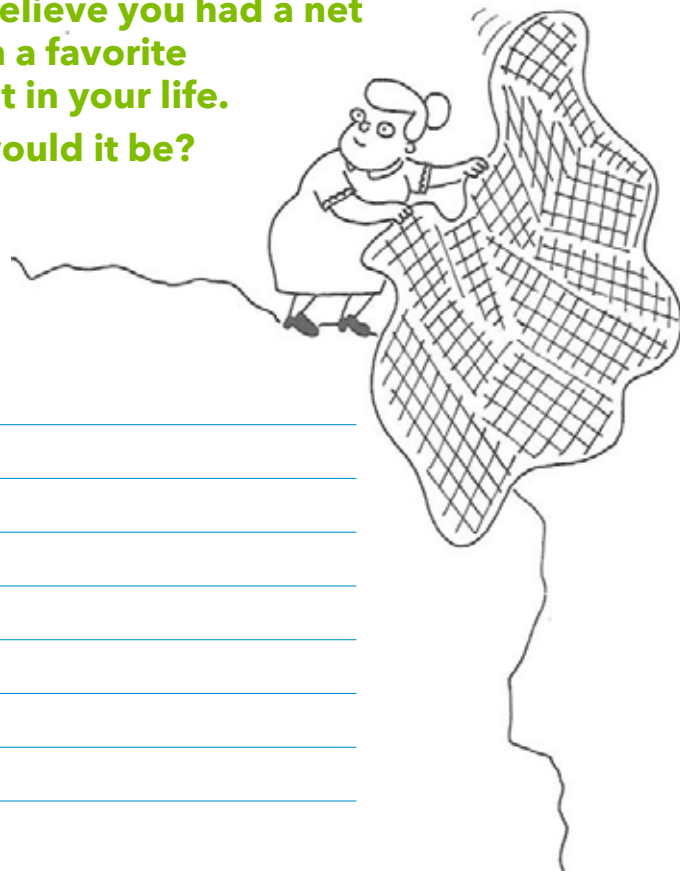
FILL IN



**Make believe you had a net
to catch a favorite
moment in your life.**

What would it be?

FILL IN



FILL IN

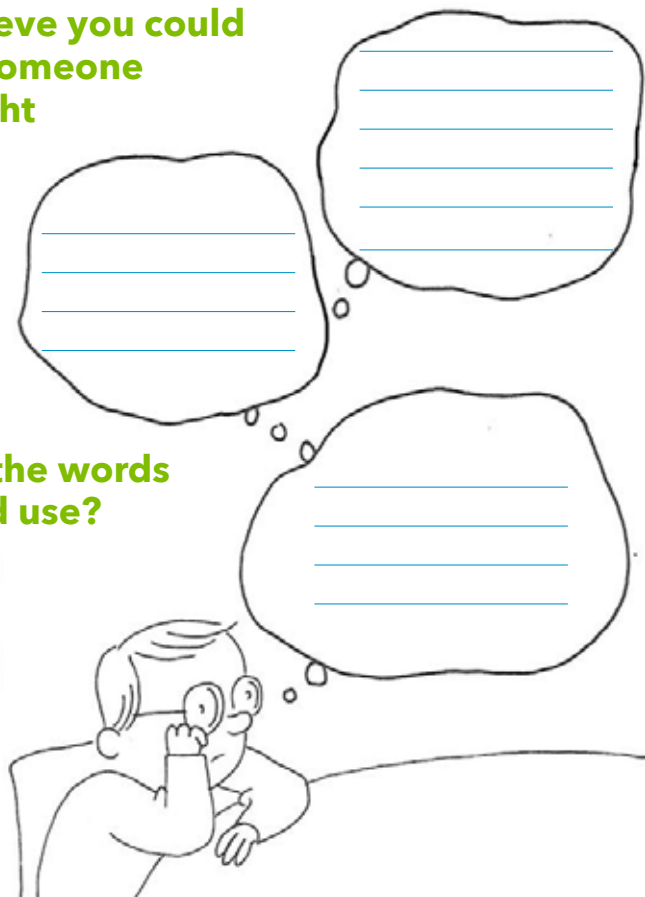
» My Life Story «



**Make believe you could
speak to someone
you thought
was lost
to you
forever...**

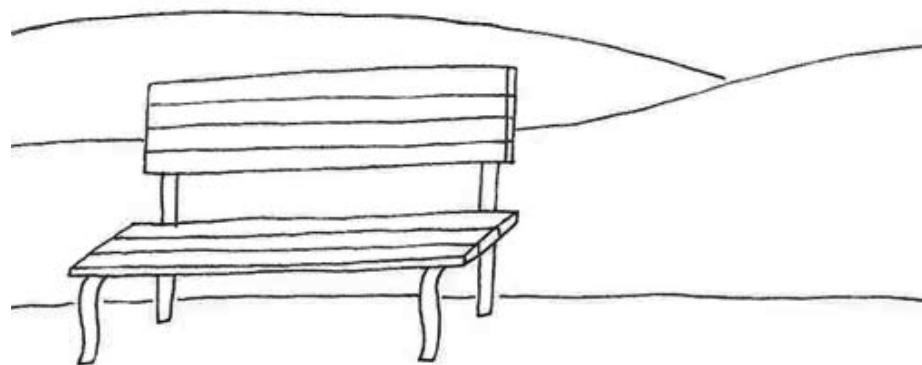
FILL IN

**What are the words
you would use?**



A page for pause...

FILL IN



Random thoughts...

FILL IN

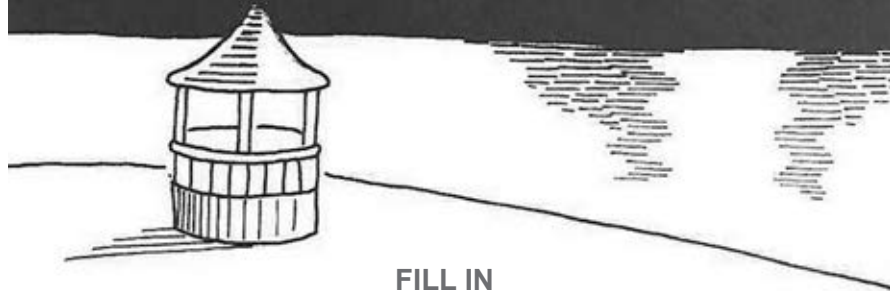
Three hand-drawn boxes for writing. The top left box is vertical with five horizontal lines. The top right box is vertical with five horizontal lines. The bottom box is horizontal with five horizontal lines. Small circles are drawn around the top right box, suggesting a thought bubble.

A place
for
smiles...

FILL IN

A hand-drawn shelf with five shelves. The top shelf has a small smiley face drawn on it. The bottom shelf has a larger smiley face drawn on it. Each shelf has five horizontal lines for writing.




A place for hopes...



FILL IN

A page for wishes...

FILL IN



After thoughts...

[illegible][illegible]

**Here is space for you to write
your own testament to your life:**

FILL IN

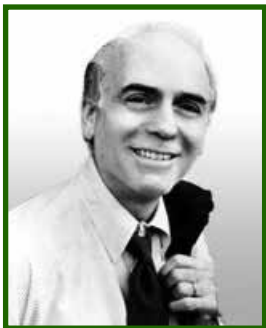
**Here is space for you to write
your own testament to your life:**

FILL IN

**Here is space for you to write
your own testament to your life:**

FILL IN

[illegible]



May each day provide a new beginning for you. Be reborn!

In his many books as well in his work as a newspaper editor, **Bill Zimmerman** has pioneered innovative writing techniques to help people express all the important things within them. His books and web sites are used in literacy and English Language Learning programs around

the world and to encourage creative thinking and expression.

His web sites are:

<http://www.billztreasurechest.com>, which features excerpts from all his books; <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com>, which enables visitors to create their own online comic strips, and <http://www.somethingtowriteabout.com>, a writing-prompts blog for students.

Among his popular books are:

Pocket Doodles for Kids; Pocket Doodles for Young Artists; Make Beliefs: A Gift for Your Imagination; Lunch Box Letters: Writing Notes of Love and Encouragement to Your Children, and How to Create Instant Oral Biographies.

Zimmerman's work has been featured on The Today Show, on the acclaimed PBS Ancestors Series, and in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and such magazines as Family Circle, Esquire, Business Week, Reader's Digest and Essence.

For more joy in writing reflections on your life, please look at our other free e-book, [Writing to Find Comfort](#): A Way for Elders to Reflect on Our Lives.



Tom Bloom is an artist who has brought joy to the world with his cartoons and illustrations which have appeared in many publications, such as The New York Times. He has collaborated with Bill on many other books.

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The Tree of Life

A Testament

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