

Finding Family: Using Foundations to Establish Family Values

by Dr Robb Musgrave

His wife's death, after an 18 year battle with illness, initially drove a wedge through Robb Musgrave's family. But the creation of a charitable foundation based on her values is helping to draw them back together.

"I remember sitting with my kids around the dining table trying to hold a civilised family meeting, but things had turned ugly. Their mother had just passed away and the grief was palpable. One of my sons was sobbing, another was shouting and slamming his hand on the table. My daughter was scowling and my youngest son just stared down at the floor trying to ignore us all...."

My wife Judith first underwent surgery for cancer of the bowel when she was 36. It was 1988 and at that time we had four children under the age of six. When we received news that she had a 50/ 50 chance of being alive in five years time, we didn't know whether to feel encouraged or devastated.

Fast forward to 2002, the year Judith celebrated her 50th Birthday. She had survived the bowel cancer against the odds and wanted to celebrate her Birthday in Times Square, New York. She had fond memories of a trip there years ago and decided to relive them with me instead of having a party. As part of the trip we decided to travel onto Nashville and attend an international conference for financial service professionals.

It was a session that I chanced upon, led by a 75 year-old man named Millard Grauer that grabbed my attention. Millard spoke about his life and how he was still trying to change and improve it every day. Hearing him I made the decision that from now on, I would focus on what was most important to me and my family.

I started studying again and began writing a PhD thesis on "Creating Personal Legacies", with the aim of helping people to empower their own lives. I was also developing a system to help people discover their dominant life values. Through it all Judith was supporting and motivating me, while raising four teenagers and running her own business.

And then, suddenly the illness was back. Judith had cervical cancer which was treated with endless rounds of chemotherapy and radiation. It was during this time that I graduated and had planned to take Judith with me to Cambridge in the U.K where my graduation ceremony was being held, but at that time she was far too sick to get out of bed most days, let alone travel overseas.

It was around this time that I turned my system for discovering values into a values profiling tool and I used it for the first time to capture Judith's dominant values in life. We also had an extremely painful conversation about creating a family foundation or Prescribed Private

Fund in her name once she passed away, as a way for the children to remember what was important to their mother, and to give continuing donations to charities whose values matched her own.

We both wanted to put all our energy into believing she would beat her illness yet again, but we had to prepare for a different reality.

She fought on and endured two other major cancers before passing away in August, 2006. And that was it! After years of her support, love and endless belief in all of us, my kids and I were suddenly without our wife and mother. Individually and collectively, we fell apart.

In those difficult months after she passed away, I watched my children grieve and with a broken heart began the formal process of setting up the Judith Musgrave Family Foundation.

My children and I miss Judith deeply and anger and emotions still crop up from time to time, but we have learned ways to put the pain off and concentrate on being together as a family once more - using meals out or at home, weekends away and renting apartments on the coast in summer to come together and enjoy each other's company.

We meet a few times a year formally to discuss business concerning the foundation. While I act as the overseer, it's the children's responsibility as trustees to take care of the ongoing governance, to negotiate with each other and to decide which charities will receive the annual donations.

As trustees of Judith's foundation, the children are learning about philanthropy and discovering its benefits to society while carrying on their mother's values, philosophies and beliefs. But most importantly the work they do is helping to build her legacy and is keeping our memories of her alive.

I have found the foundation meetings are usually all business when they begin formally, but as they progress we all start to remember Judith and reminisce over old stories and jokes - like how she loved beach holidays, but couldn't spend much time on the beach because she was so fair and watching the waves would make her dizzy! At these times I can look around at my family and know she hasn't gone anywhere.

Dr Musgrave is the CEO of Legenis, a Brisbane-based legacy and foundation consultancy business. Robb, has been working in the insurance and financial advising industries for more than 30 years and has significant expertise in both the tangible and intangible aspects of estate, succession and philanthropic planning. Both his recently published book, *When Success Isn't Enough* and his values test, valgenics®, are available online at www.legenis.com