


5-28-2014

Where Are Your Papers?

Rebekah McCloud
University of Central Florida

 Part of the [Communication Commons](#), and the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating. UCF welcomes suggestions on how to improve UCF Today and correct errors. UCF provides no warranty, expressed or implied, as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of furnished data.

STARS Citation

McCloud, Rebekah (2014). Where are your papers?. UCF Today, 2014-05-28. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/papers/>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.



Where Are Your Papers?

By Rebekah McCloud
UCF Forum columnist
Wednesday, May 28, 2014

My friend of 30 years died recently. Her husband called one Sunday in February to say she was gone.

Not understanding the euphemism, I said, “Gone? Gone where? When is she coming back? She didn’t tell me she was going anywhere.”

In almost a whisper, he said, “She died this morning.”

Her death was so sudden and so unexpected. I lost my friend I talked to everyday and traveled with to 40 states, two U.S. territories and two countries. We lived through kids (both of us), grandchildren (mine), two husbands (both hers), the loss of a parent (her mother), career changes, college degrees and retirement (both of us; although I went back to work). Thirty years is a long time.

Her death rocked me to my core. Although I am not a weeper, I found myself weeping everywhere: at church, at work, the grocery store and on an airplane going out west for a conference. We were like sisters. I had not felt that sense of loss since my dad died in 1979. I now have a better understanding of how my mom, 90, must feel when she loses a friend.

In the days following my friend’s death, her family called me a number of times to ask if I knew where she kept her “papers.” I told them what I knew and they did their best to pull together her papers—her life insurance policies, will, deed to the house, bank-account information, etc.

Their search caused me to think about my own papers. Did I know where all of my papers were kept? My answer was: sort of. I had some in a box, some in a drawer, and

some in a file cabinet. I set to work sorting, organizing and assembling my papers in a coherent and accessible manner.

When I opened the box marked “will,” the first thing I saw was a publication titled *Five Wishes*, which is produced by Aging with Dignity, a national nonprofit organization that deals with end-of-life issues. My friend and I picked up the form a few years ago when we attended a seminar hosted by a funeral home. We both went for the free dinner at Seasons 57. However, we left with a great deal of useful information and *Five Wishes*, which lets your family and doctors know:

- Who you want to make healthcare decisions for you when you can’t make them.
- The kind of medical treatment you want or don’t want.
- How comfortable you want to be.
- How you want people to treat you.
- What you want your loved ones to know.

It is the best resource I have ever received at one of these kinds of seminars. I was so impressed with it that I picked up extra copies for my family and friends.

I gingerly lifted *Five Wishes* out of the box and sat with it for a few minutes before I opened it to review the wishes I had written years ago. I used the book as a guide to be sure that every document was accounted for and every wish noted. When I finished, I called my daughter and told her I had something to share with her.

When my daughter arrived, we went back to my bedroom to talk. She was immediately alarmed because we usually go to the kitchen or the family room to talk. Before I started, she said, “Are you going to tell me that you’re dying?”

”No,” I assured her, “Not anytime soon if I have anything to say about it or do with it.”

“Ok, just checking,” she said. “This is starting off like it’s going to be a serious talk.”

“It is,” I said and proceed to share my “papers” with her. When I was finished, she said, “Wow, you obviously put a lot of thought into this. It’s very thorough. I know it will be useful when the time comes. But this is very uncomfortable for me.”

I admitted that it was uncomfortable for me as well. But I thought about my friend's family. Not only were they overwhelmed by grief, but the situation was exacerbated by looking for and completing the mountains of paperwork that accompanied her death.

Always the Momma, I want to do what I can to make things easy for my family. And, as a baby boomer, I realize that time marches on and at some point, the bell will toll for me.

The Pew Research Center notes that more than half of the older parents surveyed indicated they had spoken with their children regarding end-of-life matters:

- 76 percent discussed their will and disposal of property.
- 63 percent discussed how to handle medical care if they could no longer make decisions.
- 55 percent discussed what to do if they could no longer live independently.

Additionally, about 70 percent of parents indicated they had initiated the conversation with their children. I'm glad I talked with my daughter. The talk was very liberating. We have moved into a different space with one another. She now talks with me about the serious things in her life. I love it; I now feel less like a meddler and more like an advisor.

I have shared my experience with all of my family and friends. Reception to organizing their papers and having "the talk" has been mixed. Some were encouraged and said they would do the same, some said they would think about it, and others did not want to discuss the topic.

Nevertheless, I advised them all to find their papers (a few needed to create some paperwork), organize their affairs, clean out their closets, take a good picture of themselves, and have courageous conversations with their loved ones.

Rebekah McCloud is director of the University of Central Florida's PRIME STEM/Student Support Services Program. She can be reached at Rebekah.McCloud@ucf.edu.