

The Very Important Box

When I was a little girl, my mother used to tell me the story of the Very Important Box. It was a beautiful box, she told me, handcrafted from fine dark wood, and inlaid with an intricate geometric design in mother-of-pearl. It had been handed down through the family, from mother to mother, for generations. Her own grandmother, my great grandmother had brought it with her from the old country; the Very Important Box and the clothes on her back. It was supposed to be an heirloom.

Of course I wanted to see the Very Important Box. I wanted to touch it, I wanted to hold it, and most importantly, I wanted to look inside it. Surely something Very Important must be in the Very Important Box. Nothing doing. The Very Important Box was not a toy. In any case, my grandmother still had the Very Important Box. She kept locked up in a safety deposit box in the big bank downtown and my mother would inherit it when she died. As I would inherit it when my mother died. And under no circumstances would I dare open it when I finally did come into possession of it. It had always been locked and would always stay locked. The important thing, my mother told me, was to pass the box down as a symbol of all the women in our family who came before us. What was inside didn't matter.

Needless to say, this was the craziest thing I had ever heard. And it was also completely untrue. There was no Very Important Box, as I discovered after my mother died and I went through the contents of her safety deposit box at the big bank downtown. No box, only papers. It was just a story my mother told me. Was it just to entertain me, to stimulate my

imagination, to conjure images of who the women in my family had been? Or was there some sort of lesson I was supposed to have learned?

I don't know the answer and I come up with a new one every day. But I do know that many of us treat our wills and estate plans like the Very Important Box. As something we have because we know we should, but not something we share with others, not something we take out and look at to see if it needs updating. Not something we explain. It's something we keep locked away in the safety deposit box at the big bank downtown and let our heirs worry about it after we're gone.

Our wills really are our last testament. They are an opportunity not only detail how our earthly possessions should be distributed after we're gone, but also to make a statement about our Christian values for our families and descendants, so they will know what was important to us. And this is not something they should learn about after we're gone, we should discuss our plans freely and openly with our loved ones. I don't want my daughter to wonder what lessons I was trying to share with her while she's trying to settle my estate. I want her to know who I was, who and what I held dear, and what kind of legacy I wanted to leave.

*If you don't have a will, or haven't updated your will recently, the booklet *Planning for the End of Life* from the Episcopal Church Foundation might be helpful. And if you would like to include a planned gift to support your congregation, they can help you choose the one that's right for you and your family. Call them at 800-697-2858 or visit their website at www.EpiscopalFoundation.org.*