A FAMILY HISTORY IN MY OWN WORDS

My Life Story

Ama Grace Mensah — Fictional Demo

12 April 1962 · Cape Coast, Ghana

Memories · Family · Beliefs · Lessons · Legacy

DEDICATION

For the Family

For Leah and Michael, and for the family still to come.

These pages hold the ordinary moments, turning points and people who shaped my life. May they encourage you to ask your own questions and preserve your own memories.

With love, Ama

DEMONSTRATION ONLY: This parent, family and story are fictional. The sample image cards illustrate the photo layouts and can be replaced with your own photographs.

FAMILY ROOTS

Our Family Tree

Kofi Mensah (1920–1988) & Abena Mensah (1925–2001)

Paternal grandparents

Joseph Owusu (1918–1985) & Grace Owusu (1924–2005)

Maternal grandparents

Daniel Mensah (1938–2011)

Father / father figure

Evelyn Owusu Mensah (1940–2014)

Mother / mother figure

Samuel Mensah (born 1960) · Married 1989

Spouse / partner

Leah Mensah (born 1993) Michael Mensah (born 1997)

Children

Ama Grace Mensah was born in Cape Coast and grew up with her brother Kojo. Her family roots extend to Kumasi. Ama and Samuel moved to Britain in 1990 and settled in Brighton in 1995. These names, dates and relationships are fictional demo data, rather than a researched genealogy.

Family history note

Life Timeline

1962 ◯ Born in Cape Coast, Ghana

1966 ◯ Early memories with grandmother Grace

1967 ◯ Started primary school

1972 ◯ The famous homemade birthday cake

1980 ◯ Finished secondary school

1981 ◯ Began teacher training and met Akosua

1984 ◯ Qualified and started teaching

1986 ◯ Met Samuel at a graduation gathering

1989 ◯ Married Samuel

1990 ◯ Moved to London

1993 ◯ Daughter Leah was born

1995 ◯ Settled in Brighton

Life Timeline

1997 Son Michael was born

2004 Moved into adult learning support

2008 Family visit to Ghana and the swimming picnic

2011 Remembering father Daniel

2014 Mother Evelyn died; began preserving her stories

2018 Helped expand the community reading programme

2023 Celebrated thirty years of parenthood

2026 Recorded this life story for the family

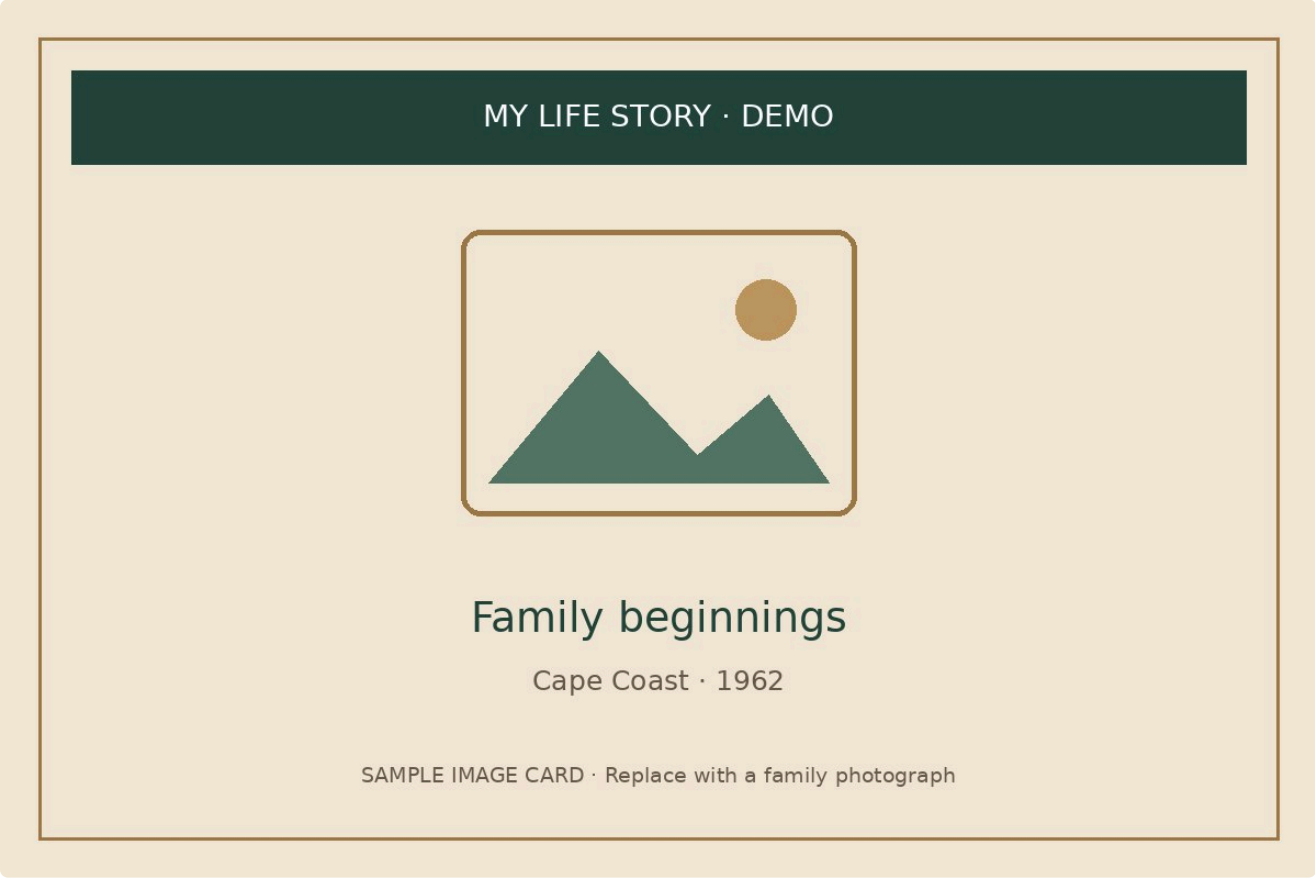
CHAPTER 1

Origins & Family Roots

1. Origins & Family Roots

Where and when were you born, and what have you been told about the day you arrived?

I was born on 12 April 1962 in Cape Coast, Ghana. My mother said it rained that morning and my father arrived at the hospital carrying a small bag of baby clothes and an enormous smile. My aunt liked to say that I announced myself loudly. I cannot remember that day, of course, but hearing the story made me feel welcomed long before I understood what belonging meant.



Sample image card: family beginnings in Cape Coast, 1962.

What do you know about how your name was chosen, and does it have a special meaning?

My name is Ama Mensah. Ama was chosen because I was born on a Saturday. My middle name, Grace, honoured my maternal grandmother, who helped my mother through the early weeks. At school I sometimes wanted a name nobody else had. Now I treasure the connections in mine: a day of the week, a grandmother's kindness and a family whose story began before me.

What is your earliest clear memory?

My earliest clear memory is sitting beside my grandmother while she sorted beans into a wide bowl. I must have been four. She gave me a handful to inspect and treated my small contribution seriously. I remember the cool floor, the rhythm of her hands and the smell of food cooking nearby. It was an ordinary afternoon, but it remains my first picture of feeling useful and loved.

What do you know about the lives of your grandparents or older family figures before you were born?

My father's parents, Kofi and Abena Mensah, supported their household through fishing and trading. My mother's parents, Joseph and Grace Owusu, lived near Kumasi; Joseph worked as a carpenter and Grace grew vegetables and sold produce. Much of what I know comes from family conversations rather than written records. Their lives taught me that skill, patience and mutual help can build something lasting even when money is scarce.

What would you most like younger generations to know about the people who raised you?

My parents, Daniel and Evelyn, were imperfect people who worked hard to give us choices. Dad repaired furniture and Mum taught young children. They expected courtesy, but also encouraged questions. I want younger generations to know that their firmness usually grew from concern rather than coldness. They made room for neighbours, shared what they could and showed love through a hundred practical acts that never received a photograph.

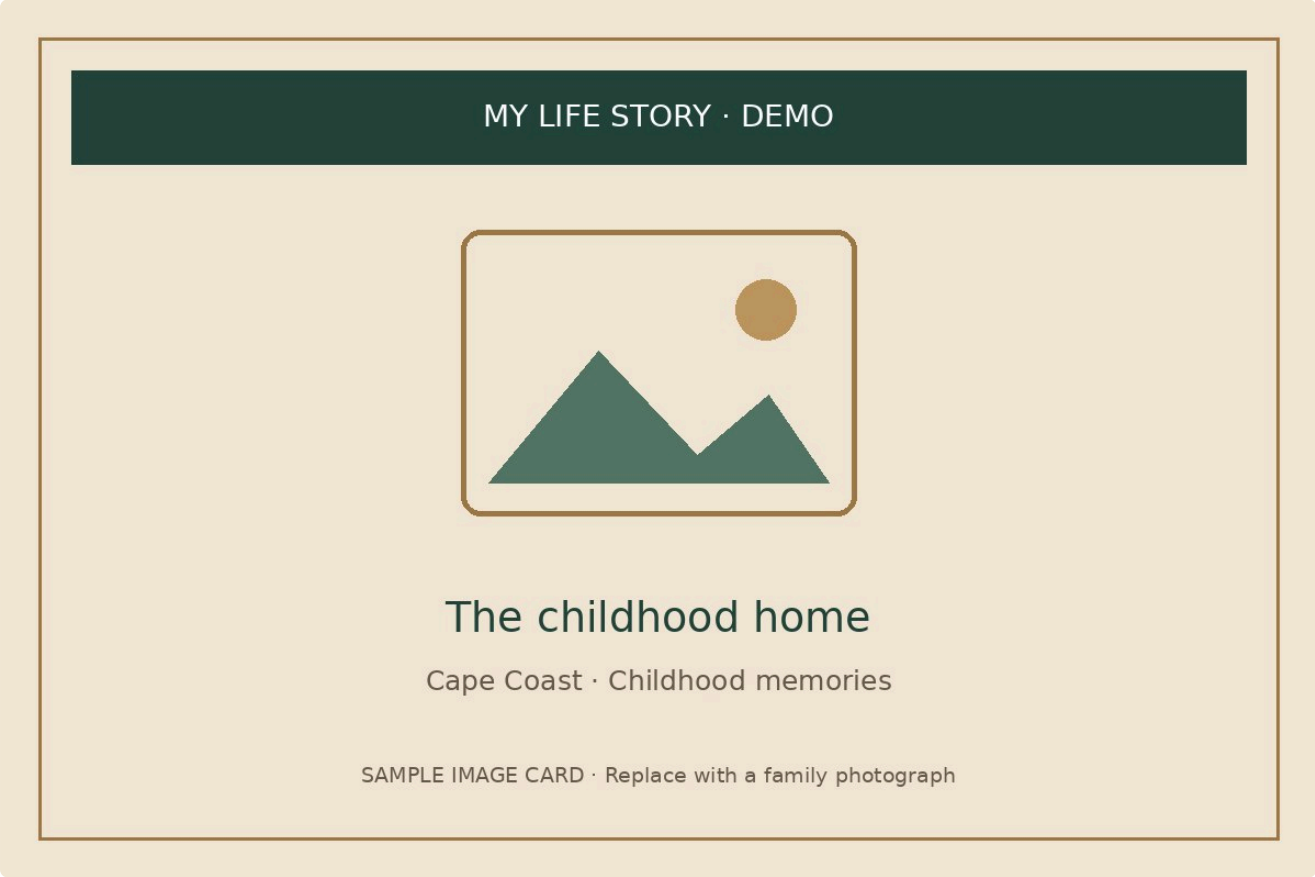
CHAPTER 2

Childhood & Home

2. Childhood & Home

Describe the childhood home you remember most vividly.

Our home in Cape Coast had cream walls, a small veranda and a courtyard where washing fluttered above our heads. My brother Kojo and I shared a room. The kitchen was the busiest place, especially when cousins visited. During heavy rain we moved a basin beneath a persistent leak. It was not a grand house, but I remember it as full of conversation, familiar smells and people arriving without needing an invitation.



Sample image card: the family home and courtyard in Cape Coast.

Where did you play most often, and what games did you enjoy?

We played in the courtyard and along the lane once our chores were finished. I enjoyed ampe, skipping and elaborate pretend shops made from empty tins. Kojo preferred football, and I joined when his team was short of players. Our toys were simple; our arguments about rules were anything but. Those afternoons taught me negotiation, friendship and the pleasure of inventing something together.

How did your family celebrate birthdays, holidays, festivals, or special occasions?

Birthdays usually meant a favourite meal, singing and a homemade cake when ingredients allowed. Christmas brought church, family visits and extra chairs around the table. We also joined local celebrations and listened to older relatives explain their meanings. In my own household we kept the spirit of gathering, while adding traditions from our life in Britain. The most important ingredient was always making somebody feel expected and welcome.

What lesson from a parent or guardian stayed with you longest?

My mother taught me to leave a place a little better than I found it. Sometimes she meant washing a borrowed saucepan. Sometimes she meant listening carefully to a lonely neighbour. As a teenager I thought it sounded small compared with changing the world. Now I understand that dependable small actions are often how change begins. I have tried to pass that lesson to my children without turning every moment into a lecture.

What is one unforgettable memory involving a sibling, cousin or someone who felt like family?

When I was ten, my cousin Efua and I tried to bake a birthday cake for my mother. We misread the measurements and produced something closer to a sweet brick. Kojo decorated it with slices of banana to hide the cracks. Mum ate a little and thanked us sincerely. We laughed about it for years, but what stays with me is that she saw the love before she noticed the failure.

CHAPTER 3

School & Growing Up

3. School & Growing Up

What is your first clear memory of starting school?

On my first day at school I gripped my mother's hand and worried that she would forget to collect me. My teacher, Mrs Boateng, showed me where to put my bag and gave me a red pencil. Another child asked whether I wanted to sit beside her. By lunchtime I had stopped watching the doorway. I remember discovering that an unfamiliar place could become safe through a few kind gestures.

Which teacher, mentor or other person had a positive influence on your learning?

Mrs Boateng noticed that I liked explaining things to other children. She asked me to help a younger pupil practise reading, then reminded me that helping meant being patient rather than showing off. Years later, a college tutor encouraged me to apply for teacher training. Both women took an interest before I had much confidence. Their example shaped the kind of teacher, and later parent, I hoped to become.

What changed most about you when you became a teenager?

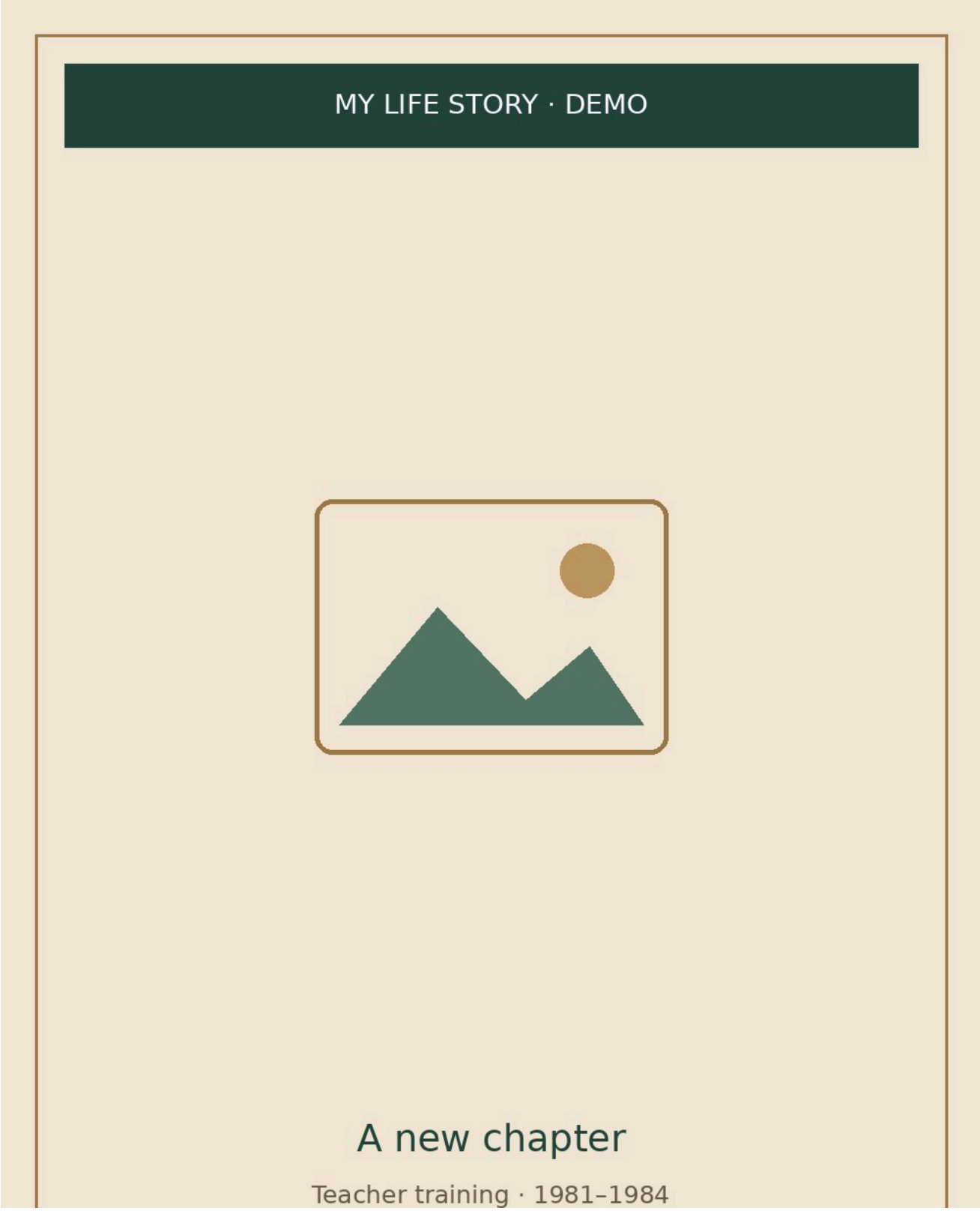
As a teenager I became more outspoken and much more conscious of how others saw me. I wanted independence while still relying on the security of home. Music, friendships and books widened my world. There were awkward disagreements about clothes and coming home on time. Looking back, the biggest change was learning that I could have my own opinions without needing to reject everything my parents had taught me.

What dream did you have for yourself at eighteen?

At eighteen I wanted to become a teacher and travel beyond the places I already knew. I imagined a confident adult who would always understand what to do next. Real adulthood has been less certain and more interesting. The teaching dream came true, and travel became part of building a new home. I wish I could tell my eighteen-year-old self that uncertainty does not mean you are falling behind.

What path did you take into adult life, whether through study, training, work or other experiences?

After secondary school I entered teacher training in 1981 and qualified in 1984. I taught in Ghana before moving to Britain in 1990. Settling in a new country involved further study, applications and several temporary jobs. Progress was not a straight line. Each stage added something: classroom experience, resilience, humility and the courage to ask for help when I did not yet understand the system.



Sample image card: celebrating the completion of teacher training in 1984.

CHAPTER 4

Work, Friendship & Community

4. Work, Friendship & Community

What was your first experience of work or responsibility, paid or unpaid, and what did it teach you?

My first regular responsibility was helping my aunt at her market stall during school holidays. I carried supplies, checked change and learned to greet people properly even when I was tired. My first paid teaching post came in 1984. Both experiences taught me that reliability matters: people need to know you will arrive, prepare and take their concerns seriously. Those lessons applied just as much at home as at work.

Did you ever change career direction? What caused the change?

After years in classroom teaching I moved into adult learning support in 2004. Raising children and helping newcomers settle had made me interested in how adults rebuild confidence. The change meant learning new methods and accepting that I was a beginner again. I missed parts of school life, but found deep satisfaction in helping people read letters, complete forms and pursue qualifications they had once thought impossible.

What achievement in your work, caring responsibilities or everyday contributions are you proudest of?

I am proud of helping a small adult reading group grow into a lasting community programme. One participant later read a story aloud to her grandson for the first time. At home, I am equally proud that our children felt able to bring difficult news to us. Neither achievement belongs to me alone. They grew from teamwork, repeated encouragement and showing up long after the exciting beginning was over.

Which friendship has lasted the longest, and why?

My friendship with Akosua began at teacher training college in 1981. We have lived in different countries and sometimes gone months without a long conversation, but the warmth remains. We can celebrate each other's success without pretending life is perfect. When my mother died, Akosua called regularly and let me repeat the same stories. Our friendship has lasted because we make room for change and never keep a score of kindness.

What community, group, team, neighbourhood or shared activity has given you a sense of belonging?

A neighbourhood community centre in Brighton gave me a strong sense of belonging after our move. I first attended a family event, then helped with a reading group and shared meals. People came from many backgrounds, and nobody needed an impressive title to contribute. Later I helped organise cultural evenings. Belonging grew gradually: learning names, keeping promises and finding that somebody noticed when I was absent.

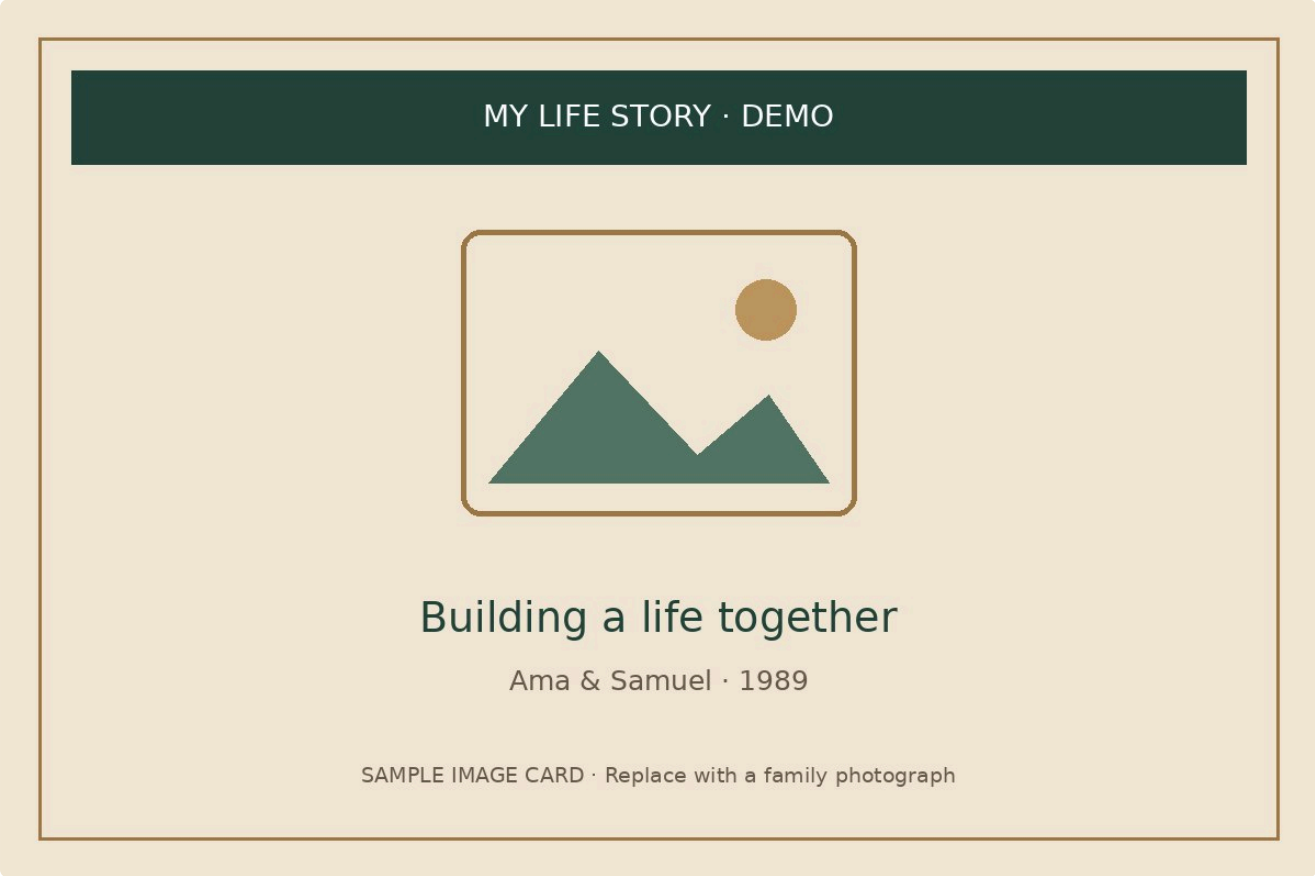
CHAPTER 5

Relationships & Parenthood

5. Relationships & Parenthood

If you have had an important partner, how did you meet? You can reflect on more than one relationship.

I met Samuel at a friend's graduation gathering in 1986. We spent most of the evening discussing music and laughing about our different ideas of cooking. Our friendship developed before romance. We married in 1989 and moved to Britain the following year. What I remember most is not a dramatic first moment, but the ease of talking to him and the feeling that I could be myself.



Sample image card: Ama and Samuel's wedding, 1989.

What have relationships taught you about love, companionship and supporting one another?

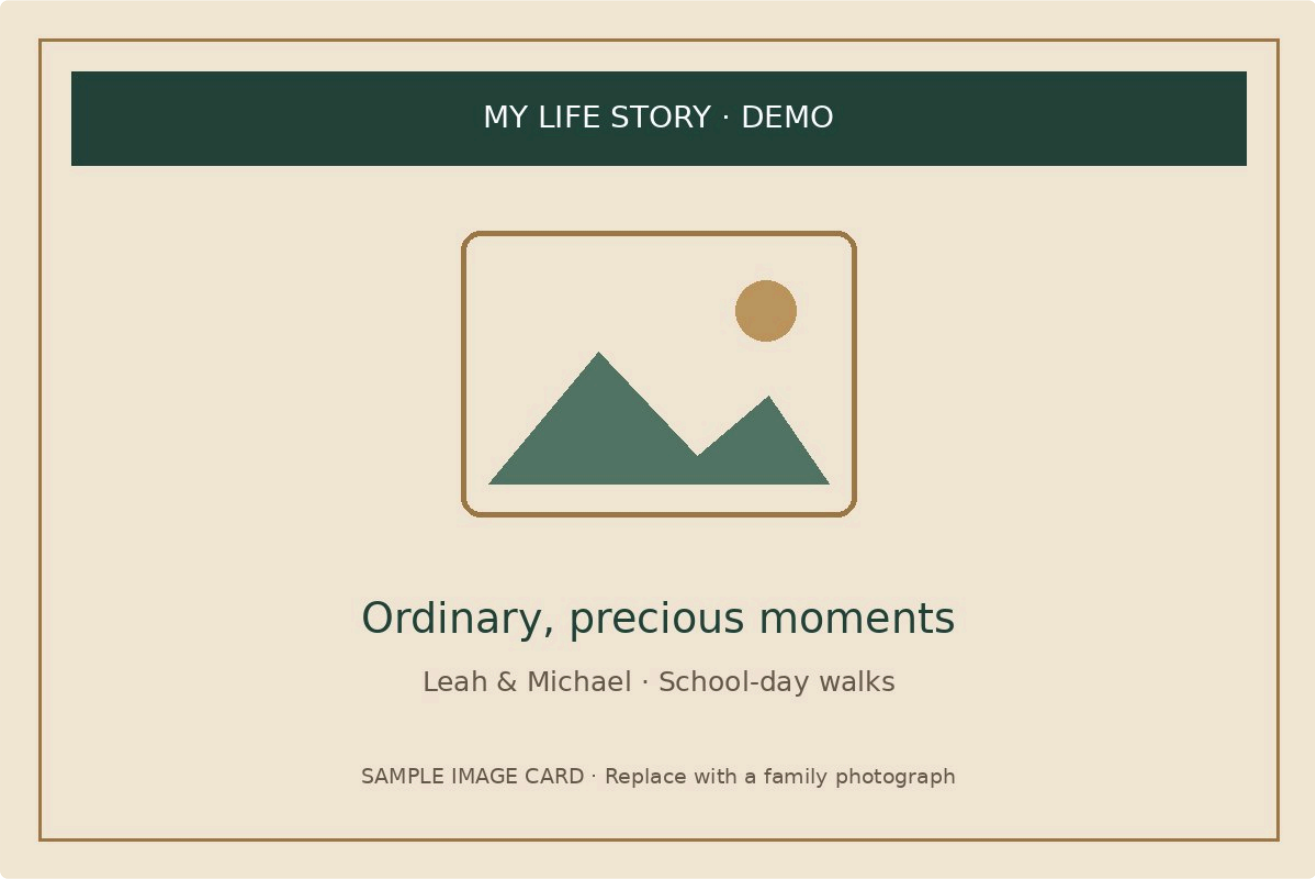
Relationships have taught me that love needs attention as well as affection. Samuel and I have sometimes disagreed about money, family obligations and how quickly to make decisions. We learned to pause, explain what frightened us and apologise clearly. Companionship has also meant ordinary comforts: making tea, sharing a joke and being present during illness. Supporting somebody does not require solving everything; sometimes it means staying beside them.

What do you remember about first becoming a parent or parent figure, whether through birth, adoption, a blended family or another path?

Our daughter Leah was born in 1993, and our son Michael in 1997. Becoming a parent brought joy and a surprising sense of vulnerability. I remember checking Leah's breathing while she slept and wondering how anybody trusted me with somebody so small. With Michael I was more confident, but still learning. Parenthood changed how I measured a good day: sometimes a calm meal and a warm cuddle were enough.

What everyday moment with your child or the children you have helped raise feels especially precious?

One of my favourite memories is the walk home from school. Leah would describe every detail of her day while Michael searched for interesting stones. We often arrived home with muddy shoes and pockets full of discoveries. At the time it felt like a routine between more important tasks. Now I recognise it as precious: unhurried minutes when the children let me into their world without needing a special occasion.



Sample image card: walks home from school with Leah and Michael.

If your child or the children you have helped raise read only one answer here, what would you want them to understand about what they mean to you?

Leah and Michael, you have never needed to earn your place in my heart through grades, careers or being easy to raise. You are loved as yourselves. Parenting you has stretched me, delighted me and taught me to listen more carefully. If I have sometimes worried too loudly, please hear the love beneath it. My greatest hope is that you build lives where you can be kind, curious and fully yourselves.

CHAPTER 6

Places, Adventures & Everyday Joy

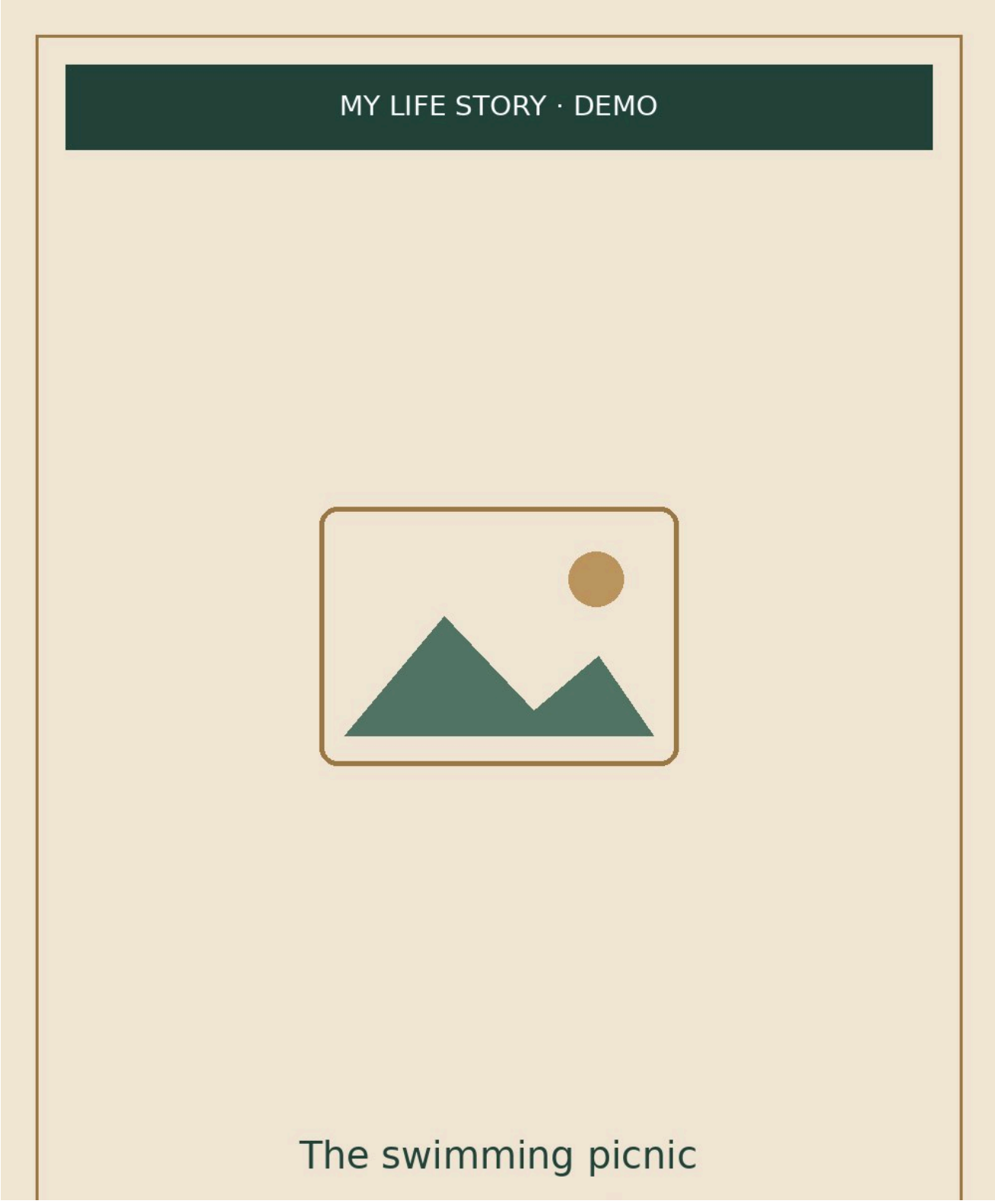
6. Places, Adventures & Everyday Joy

Which places have you lived in, and what did each represent in your life?

Cape Coast was my childhood foundation; Accra represented the independence of early work. London was our first British home, full of possibility and bewildering journeys. We moved to Brighton in 1995 and gradually put down roots near the sea. Each place holds a different version of me. I no longer think I must choose a single place to belong: home can include where you began and where you learned to grow.

Which holiday or journey became a favourite family story?

In 2008 we took the children to Ghana for a long family visit. Michael tried to carry everyone's bags to prove how strong he was, and Leah filled a notebook with relatives' names. A sudden downpour interrupted a beach picnic, sending us running for shelter with food wrapped in towels. We still call it the swimming picnic. More than the adventure, I treasure seeing the children connect faces with stories they had heard at home.



Sample image card: the family holiday in Ghana, 2008, and a picnic interrupted by rain.

Which political, social, cultural, or technological change affected your everyday life most?

Affordable international calls, then video calls, changed our family life more than any other technology. Early in our time in Britain, a short call home required planning and careful attention to cost. Later my mother could see the children, not just hear about them. Technology did not remove the distance, but it helped ordinary family contact survive it. I try to use it to strengthen relationships rather than fill every quiet moment.

What small pleasure can improve almost any day for you?

A cup of tea near a window improves almost any day. I like watching the weather and listening to a familiar song while the kettle cools. A brief walk by the sea also helps me recover perspective. These pleasures cost little and ask very little of me. As life has become busier, I have learned to protect small pauses instead of waiting for a holiday to feel refreshed.

What hobby or interest would you happily spend more time on?

I would happily spend more time gardening and sorting family photographs. Gardening reminds me that growth has its own pace, and a stubborn plant can teach humility. With photographs I enjoy adding names and dates before they disappear from memory. I also like learning simple ways to record spoken stories. My ambition is not a perfect archive, but a collection the family will actually want to explore.

CHAPTER 7

Challenges & Life Lessons

7. Challenges & Life Lessons

What was one of the hardest periods of your life?

The years around my mother's illness and death in 2014 were among the hardest. Living far away made every decision feel heavy, and I worried about whether I was doing enough. At the same time, everyday responsibilities continued. Grief did not follow a neat timetable after she died. Writing down small memories helped me hold onto her personality, beyond the sadness of losing her.

What helped you keep going when circumstances were difficult?

Samuel, the children, friends and my wider family helped me keep going. Practical kindness mattered: somebody preparing a meal or making a call when I had no energy. Prayer and quiet walks gave me space to feel what I was feeling. I also learned to ask for help rather than waiting for others to guess. Strength, for me, became the willingness to lean on trustworthy people.

What difficult decision ultimately proved to be the right one?

Changing work in 2004 was difficult because I had invested so much of my identity in classroom teaching. I worried that moving into adult learning would look like stepping backwards. It proved the right decision for our family and for my sense of purpose. I learned that a familiar path is not always the most suitable one, and that taking experience into a different setting can be a form of growth.

What does forgiveness mean to you?

Forgiveness means loosening the hold an injury has on my life, while being honest about what happened. It does not automatically restore trust or remove the need for boundaries. I have had to forgive others and face the discomfort of asking forgiveness myself. Sometimes it is a slow process. I want my family to know that compassion and self-respect can exist together.

What three values would you most want your descendants to carry forward?

I hope our descendants carry kindness, integrity and curiosity. Kindness means noticing how your actions affect others. Integrity means being dependable even when nobody is watching. Curiosity means asking questions before making judgements and remaining willing to learn. None of us practises these perfectly. I would rather the family inherit a habit of returning to good values than a story that pretends we never made mistakes.

CHAPTER 8

Faith, Beliefs & Meaning

8. Faith, Beliefs & Meaning

How have your faith, beliefs or outlook on life developed over the years?

I grew up in a Christian household where church was part of the rhythm of the week. As a young adult I began asking what I believed for myself, beyond familiar routines. Moving countries and meeting people of other faiths and no religion deepened those questions. My Christian faith remains important, but I hold it with greater humility. I try to express it through how I treat people, not only through words.

Which people, traditions, communities or experiences have shaped your beliefs most?

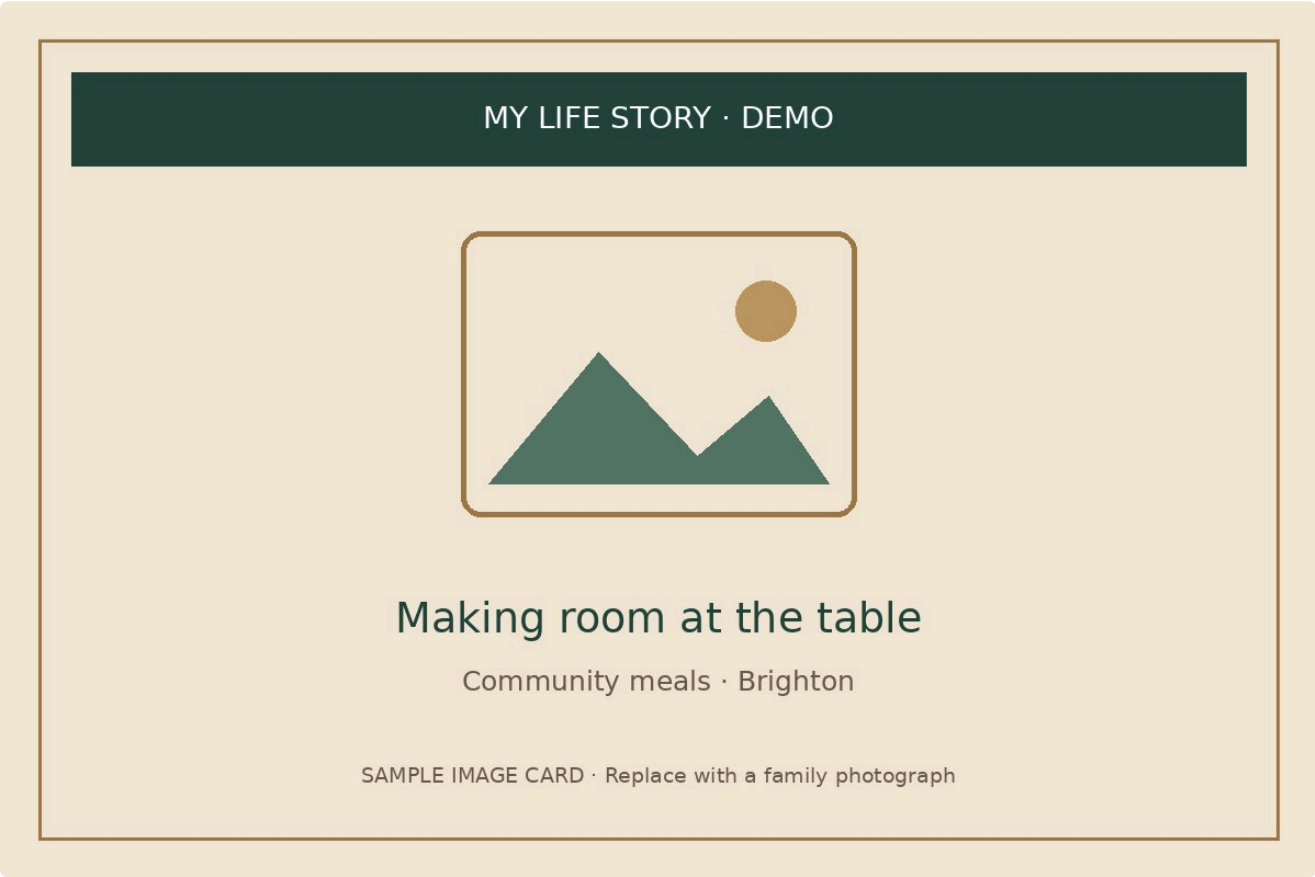
My grandmother Grace shaped my beliefs through her quiet generosity. A teacher encouraged me to ask difficult questions, and later a church friend showed me how to listen without rushing to offer answers. Friends with different beliefs have also influenced me by sharing their own sources of hope and meaning. I have learned from conversations where nobody was trying to win. Respect has often opened a deeper door than certainty.

What place have prayer, meditation, reflection, ritual or quiet contemplation had in your life, if any?

Prayer has been a place to bring gratitude, fear and confusion, especially when I cannot find tidy words. I also value quiet contemplation by the sea and writing a few lines in a notebook. My practice has changed through different seasons of life. Some days it is structured; other days it is simply sitting still. I do not see those pauses as escaping responsibility, but as making space to meet it more thoughtfully.

Have you expressed your beliefs or values through service, leadership or helping others? What experience stands out?

Helping with a weekly shared meal stands out. We cooked, set tables and welcomed people who might otherwise have eaten alone. Some guests wanted conversation; others preferred quiet company. Serving alongside people with different beliefs reminded me that common values can become practical action. The most meaningful moment was hearing somebody say they felt remembered. It was modest work, but it expressed something central to my faith.



Sample image card: helping at the neighbourhood shared meal.

What would you like your family to understand about your faith, beliefs or personal search for meaning?

I would like my family to understand that faith has helped me seek hope and meaning, but has not made me free from doubt or difficulty. I hope you feel able to ask your own questions and follow your convictions honestly. Please never mistake agreement with me for a condition of my love. What matters deeply to me is that belief, whatever form it takes, leads towards compassion, responsibility and respect for others.

CHAPTER 9

Gratitude, Wisdom & Legacy

9. Gratitude, Wisdom & Legacy

What is the best advice anyone ever gave you?

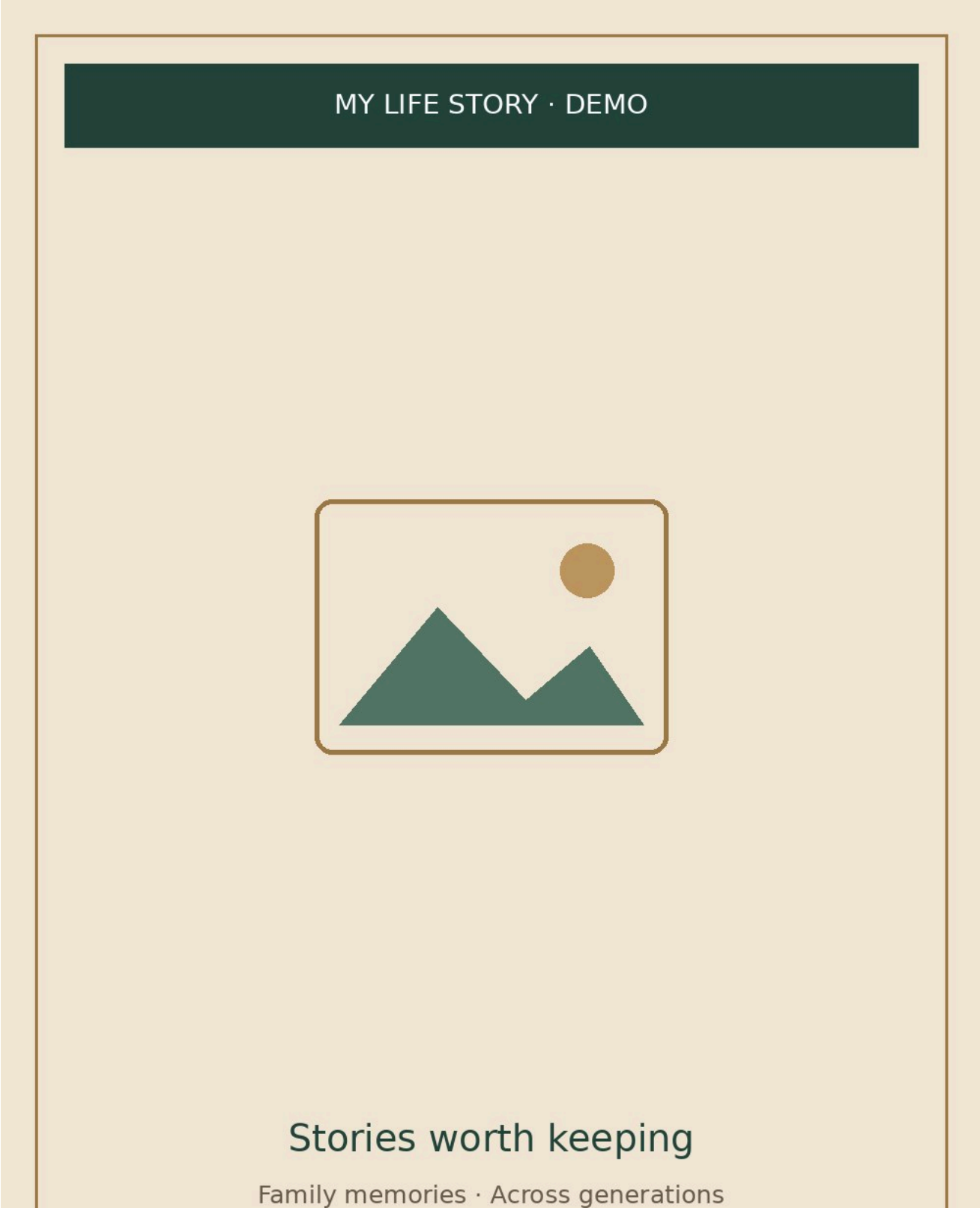
The best advice I received was: do the next useful thing, even if you cannot see the whole road. A college tutor said it when I felt overwhelmed by decisions. It has helped during moves, work changes and family crises. Sometimes the next thing is a phone call, an application or washing the dishes. Small action can create enough clarity for the step after it.

What are you most grateful for when you look back over your life?

I am grateful for the people who made space for me: my parents, teachers, friends, Samuel and our children. I am grateful for opportunities to learn and for health that has allowed me to contribute. I am also thankful for ordinary days that once seemed unremarkable. Looking back, a life is held together by more shared meals, conversations and acts of patience than dramatic milestones.

What family stories must never be lost?

Please keep the story of Grace teaching me to sort beans, the birthday cake that became a brick and our rain-soaked family picnic. Preserve the less amusing stories too: why we moved, how relatives supported one another and what our elders sacrificed. Names and dates matter, but so do voices, expressions and favourite sayings. Ask different relatives for their versions; a family story can hold more than one perspective.



Sample image card: the family album, ready for names, dates and stories.

What do you hope people remember when they think of you?

I hope people remember that I tried to make them feel welcome and took an interest in what they had to say. I would like the children to remember laughter as well as advice, and friends to remember that I could be relied on. I do not need the family to make me sound perfect. A warm, truthful memory would mean more than a polished account without the difficult bits.

What message would you leave for family members reading this many years from now?

To those reading this years from now: you come from people who kept learning, loved imperfectly and helped each other begin again. Take pride in your roots without allowing them to limit your future. Ask questions, record stories and make room at your table. You do not have to repeat our lives to honour us. Build your own, and carry forward the kindness that helped us reach this point. With love, Ama.

With love, for those who come after

This story was preserved so that names, memories, beliefs, laughter, lessons and family history can continue beyond a single generation.