ASSET PROTECTION & ELDER LAW CENTER
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"At our Firm, Your Estate Plan is Not Business, it's Personal..."



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*"What you want to ignite in others must first burn inside yourself."*

*- Charlotte Brontë*

## THE LEGACY OF STORYTELLING IN FAMILIES



To celebrate another year together, let's get more personal and dare I say, practical… As we gear up to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas, why not share a tradition that not only has shaped human history, but in my own family as well – storytelling. I might not be the best, but my kids are still too young to decipher, so it works in my favor! 😉

Every family has a story worth telling. Some stories are repeated so often that everyone knows them by heart: the immigrant parents who arrived in a new country with little money but a lot of determination, the small business that began at a kitchen table, or the difficult years when the family somehow found a way to persevere. Others are less familiar. They live in old photographs, handwritten letters, favorite recipes, or memories that have never quite found their way into conversation. Unless someone takes the time to ask, those stories may disappear with the people who lived them. Personally, those are the ones I find most impactful.

As estate planning attorneys, we spend considerable time discussing how families can protect their homes, businesses, investments, and other assets for the next generation. These are important conversations, and careful planning can make an extraordinary difference. There is however, another form of inheritance that rarely appears on a balance sheet: the experiences, principles, and lessons that give a family its identity. An estate plan may explain who receives a particular asset. A family story can explain why that asset mattered in the first place.

Consider the family business passed from a father to his children. The legal documents can provide for an orderly transition, but they cannot, by themselves, communicate the years of sacrifice that made the business possible. Perhaps the founder worked two jobs, borrowed money from relatives, or endured several failures before finding success. Without that history, the next generation may inherit a valuable company without fully appreciating the perseverance behind it.

Family stories also help younger generations understand that adversity is not unusual, nor is it necessarily permanent. Research on family narratives has suggested that children who know more about their family history may develop a stronger sense of identity and resilience. There is comfort in learning that parents and grandparents faced uncertainty, made mistakes, recovered from disappointment, and continued forward.

These stories need not be polished accounts of uninterrupted success. In many instances, the most meaningful lessons come from moments of regret, poor judgment, financial setbacks, or unexpected changes in direction. Such honesty teaches humility, perspective, and the possibility of beginning again.

The good news is that preserving these memories does not require an elaborate project. A conversation over dinner, a recorded interview with an older relative, or a few pages describing childhood experiences can become a treasured family record. Ask how your parents met, what their first home was like, which family traditions they remember most fondly, or what advice they wish they had received when they were younger. Save the answers, along with the names and dates behind old photographs.

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## INTRODUCTION

As tradition would have it, this is our last newsletter of the year… We know, we know, you don't like it when we get too emotional… Well too bad! 😉 We truly believe we are the luckiest firm around! We have been blessed with incredible clients, and many of you who have become part of our extended family. Thank you falls so short of how we truly feel, really.

As we close out the year, remember this is the season of gathering (Well, at least we think so!), of remembering what mattered most, and of preparing both practically and emotionally for the holiday season ahead. In our work, November is when clients review charitable strategies, finalize plans before year-end, and consider how their legacy will be carried into the future. These are the weeks when families gather around tables and build traditions; and tell stories that bind generations together. This newsletter explores storytelling as legacy, charitable giving as strategy, and the art of closing the year with both peace and preparation. But in case we don't say it enough, we truly appreciate each and every one of you…

## CHARITABLE GIVING IN 2026 - SMART STRATEGIES



As 2026 closes, tax planning carries unusual weight. The sun setting of prior tax provisions has reshaped brackets, deductions, and estate exemptions. For individuals and families, October is the last practical window to make moves before the calendar locks them in. 2026 has seen an uprise in advanced tax planning for some reason. Well, we do live in Southern California I suppose, and 6-figure salaries are considered, as the youngsters say these days, rather… "mid". The unfortunate behavior I have noticed is that many of these clients 1) Do not fully grasp the amount of time and energy it takes to plan for such an undertaking. After all, avoiding the 40% estate tax does take deep thought and intentional engineering of advanced legal documents. Also however 2) Because it is a time-consuming endeavor, people mean well by starting out strong, but unfortunately 'disappear' when work is required. In any event, I may be digressing a bit, let's discuss in broader terms.

Income tax strategies begin with timing. Deferring income into 2027 or accelerating deductions into 2026 can tilt outcomes, particularly for those on the margin of higher brackets. Charitable giving offers leverage: donor-advised funds allow bunching of deductions, while appreciated stock gifts avoid capital gains altogether. For business owners, equipment purchases and retirement plan contributions remain powerful tools for lowering taxable income.

Estate tax planning is urgent. With exemptions lower than in prior years, more estates face potential taxation. Lifetime gifting strategies, such as using the annual exclusion per recipient, allow significant transfers before December 31. Intrafamily loans, sales to grantor trusts, and GRATs (grantor retained annuity trusts) remain sophisticated vehicles for moving appreciation out of estates while rates remain favorable.

Retirement accounts also deserve review. Maximizing 401(k), IRA, and HSA contributions before year-end builds long-term tax efficiency. Roth conversions may be especially strategic in 2026 for those in temporarily lower brackets. Coordinating conversions with charitable giving can smooth tax impacts.

Capital gains require attention, particularly for those considering real estate or investment sales. Harvesting losses in portfolios can offset gains, while installment sales spread recognition over time. Families who ignore capital gains until April discover too late that opportunities were seasonal.

October is the time to meet advisors. Waiting until December often leaves too little runway. Proactive planning now, before holidays and year-end rushes, ensures that opportunities are captured. The close of the tax year is not simply about compliance; it is about stewardship. October reminds us to finish wisely.

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Invite children to ask questions of their own.

The holiday season provides a particularly meaningful opportunity.

Ultimately, thoughtful estate planning is so much more than simply deciding where property will go. It is about preserving what matters and giving future generations a foundation upon which to build. The most enduring legacy may not be the wealth we leave behind, but the wisdom and memories we take the time to pass along. My Dear Reader, thank you again for another wonderful year, may you have an incredible Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas… See you in… 2027!!!

## FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

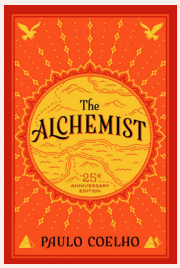



At our firm, we believe that thoughtful estate planning is about more than just documents; it is about protecting families and their futures. To celebrate the personal stories behind our work, we continue our "Family Spotlight" series with Avery, a junior at CSArts and the eldest child of attorney Valerie Pasion. As the leader of the pack, the oldest of four siblings, and a newly licensed driver, Avery naturally commands the room with a fearless, strong-willed spirit and the unshakeable determination to go out and capture exactly what he wants.

A born performer, Avery has spent years mastering his craft through extensive musical theater and show choir experience. He has already starred in several noteworthy roles, including Hans in Frozen, Lord Farquaad in Shrek, and Chad in High School Musical. His creative drive also runs deep; he has been writing his own original music since the young age of ten, and you can listen to one of his songs on Spotify today. This coming December, Avery will take the stage as the lead character, Bobby Strong, in his school-wide production of Urinetown. Playing the revolutionary hero of the show is an immense honor, particularly given that CSArts is widely recognized as one of the top performing arts schools in California.

What makes Avery truly special is the incredible example he sets for his three younger siblings. He models a powerful life philosophy: never be afraid to chase your dreams, and remember that there is no failure as long as you use it as fuel to learn and grow. Whether he is writing a new melody, hitting the road, or leading a major production, Avery approaches life with bold ambition and purpose. Watching young leaders like Avery step into the world with such confidence and drive inspires everything we do. Estate planning is ultimately about protecting the dreams, safety, and bright futures of the ones we love most. This ensures that dynamic, visionary kids like Avery always have a secure foundation to soar from.

## BOOK REVIEW




### PAULO COELHO: THE ALCHEMIST

What better book to end the year than this classic! For those who know, no explanation is needed! This is a book that should be read by all generations and kept by your bedside if it has once spoken to your heart. It is that good!

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* is less a novel than a parable, reminding readers that the pursuit of personal legend — one's unique calling — is both journey and destination. The story follows Santiago, a shepherd boy who dreams of treasure, only to discover that true riches lie not in gold but in wisdom, love, and the courage to follow his path. We all may be struggling to let go of the chase for gold, but no judgment there! 

The book resonates because it affirms that life's detours are not accidents but teachers. The people Santiago meets — the king, the alchemist, the merchant — all shape his understanding of purpose. The desert itself becomes a crucible; refining him into someone who can recognize treasure when it appears. For readers navigating uncertainty, the novel whispers encouragement: listen to your heart, trust the process, and stay open to wonder.

In estate planning and leadership alike, the message applies. The "treasure" is not only the account balance or the deal closed. It is the wisdom passed to children, the courage to align money with meaning, the love that anchors families across generations. *The Alchemist* is a reminder that when we live faithfully into our purpose, the world conspires to meet us there. Now that's a powerful way to end the year, isn't it?!

## BUSINESS / HEALTH / WEALTH

### Preparing For The Holidays Without Stress



The holidays are meant to refresh us, yet too often they leave us exhausted. Between family gatherings, shopping, travel, and the pressure to make everything memorable, the season can begin to feel like another list of obligations. A more peaceful holiday does not happen by accident. It begins with a few deliberate choices: deciding what matters, simplifying what does not, and leaving enough room to actually enjoy the people around us.

Start with priorities. Ask your family which traditions they would most like to preserve this year. Perhaps it is Thanksgiving dinner at home, a favorite holiday service, or an afternoon spent together baking. Choose a few meaningful moments and build the season around them. There is no rule requiring every invitation to be accepted or every tradition to be repeated. Sometimes, saying no to one more activity is what allows us to say yes to the experiences we will remember.

Financial preparation also makes a difference. Holiday expenses have a way of arriving all at once, particularly when gifts, meals, and travel are left until the last minute. Establishing a realistic budget in November, and setting aside funds for each category, can help avoid unwelcome surprises in January. Generosity need not be measured by price. A handwritten letter, a family photograph, or an afternoon devoted entirely to someone we love may be remembered long after a costly gift has been forgotten.

Equally important is protecting time to rest. Before the calendar fills, reserve a few evenings with nothing scheduled. Take a walk to enjoy the neighborhood lights, gather for a board game, or share a meal without phones competing for attention. These quiet intervals are not empty spaces to be filled; they are often where the most meaningful conversations occur. A family that makes room for rest is more likely to begin the new year feeling connected rather than depleted.

It also helps to let go of the expectation that every celebration must look perfect. The meal may run late, a guest may cancel, or an old family disagreement may surface. None of these moments needs to define the holiday. Children and grandchildren learn as much from how we handle disappointments as from the traditions we carefully plan. Patience, humor, and a willingness to adapt can become traditions of their own.

Finally, make gratitude a regular practice rather than a single moment at the dinner table. Invite each person to share something good that happened during the week, thank someone who quietly helped the family, or write a short note to a friend or neighbor. Such gestures shift our attention from what is missing to what is already present. As November gives way to December, perhaps the greatest gift we can offer ourselves and those we love is a season with less pressure, more presence, and enough space for joy to grow.



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As we close the 2026 newsletters, we want to thank you for walking this year with us! Our firm has faced its share of challenges; we have continued to grow and, believe it or not, we have begun to see years of experience work in our favor. The years of exuberance are slowly being replaced by whispers of wisdom. We are aging together dear Reader. Might as well accept it with grace!

We have explored topics from resilience to reflection, from trusts to taxes, from sleep to storytelling. Each month has been an invitation to think deeply about how we live, plan, and lead. Now, as December's pause approaches, we bid you farewell until January. May the season ahead be one of gratitude, generosity, and renewal. We look forward to rejoining you in 2027 with fresh insights, renewed energy, and the same commitment to serving your journey well.

