

Laws of Life

FALL
2003

E S S A Y C O N T E S T



Sir John Templeton's NOBLE PURPOSE

RECENTLY WE CAUGHT UP WITH SIR JOHN, WHO AT THE AGE OF 91 IS BUSIER THAN EVER MANAGING THE MANY GRANTMAKING INITIATIVES OF HIS FOUNDATION. SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION HAS RECENTLY FUNDED FOCUS ON THE CONCEPT SIR JOHN CALLS "NOBLE PURPOSE." WE ASKED SIR JOHN WHY HE IS SO FASCINATED BY NOBLE PURPOSE, AND WHAT ADVICE HE HAS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THEIR PURPOSE IN LIFE.

Sir John: We live in a spiritual world, and every person in that world may have been created in God's image. We each have unique gifts and a purpose to use those gifts to contribute progress to the world. If we can open ourselves up to what's inside us, we'll discover our gifts and express life to its fullest potential.

Q: Through your foundation you are investing significant resources to explore the benefits of noble purpose. Why are you so fascinated by purpose, and how do you hope the grant projects you support will benefit humanity?

Sir John: Have you ever stood on the seashore and looked out across what seemed to be an infinite expanse of ocean, and then contemplated what wondrous achievements bordered the opposite shore? That is how I see humanity.

We are poised on the shore of expanding exploration and new discoveries of God's purposes for us, but to do so, we have to keep asking questions and keep looking for better answers. That is what we are hoping to accomplish in some small way through the research and projects we are funding at our foundation.

Q: Growing up, do you remember one seminal experience in particular that taught you about purpose? Was there someone important to you who exemplified what it means to live a purposeful life?

Sir John: There were many examples. I learned from others: from my schoolmates, my family, the adults in my community, the farmers. By watching each of them, I learned which things led to success, happiness and productivity, and which did not. I learned what to emulate and what to avoid. I think the greatest lesson I

Q: Sir John, how do you define "Noble Purpose"?

Sir John: Having a sense of noble purpose means devoting our human enthusiasm and efforts, doing our very best every day, to fulfill our role on this earth. Probably, we each have our own special work to do, as part of the divine plan. And to me, having noble purpose means practicing the *Laws of Life* – high moral qualities or ideals – and expressing helpfulness in whatever we do.

Q: You have said that you consider purpose to be a spiritual principle. Why do you think that is the case?

“... the greatest lesson I learned is that the happiest people are those who are most productive in their life's journey and those who bring much happiness to others.”

continued on page 2

“The advice I would give to a young person – or to someone of any age – is, ‘How are you utilizing the wisdom you gain from your experiences?’ ”

continued from page 1

learned is that the happiest people are those who are most productive in their life’s journey and those who bring much happiness to others.

Q: Why do you think it is so important for young people to reflect and write about their purpose in life?

Sir John: The quest to find answers about our purpose may be rooted in the very deepest parts of the human soul. It is never too soon to begin making discoveries! In the early years, values are formed that affect the rest of a child’s life, so young people should think about the *Laws of Life*. Very beneficial for spiritual growth is to put down in writing what we believe. Of course, throughout a lifetime, we are constantly growing in our understanding of our purpose. We can always learn more about ourselves.

Q: To a young person who is struggling to discover a sense of purpose in life, what advice would you offer to him or her?

Sir John: Sometimes we seem to stumble in our life’s journey. Yet, those stumbling blocks can actually serve as stepping stones. We might experience ups and downs, successes and failures, profits and losses, and situations we may term “good” or “bad.” These seem to be a part of the Earth-school experience. The advice I would give to a young person – or to someone of any age – is, “How are you utilizing the wisdom you gain from your experiences?”

Q: At ninety-one years young, what would you say is your noble purpose today?

Sir John: Now that I am in my nineties, I work longer and with more enthusiasm and joy than ever! Through our foundation we are attempting to contribute, in some small way, toward advancing our understanding of divinity. Humanity spends over one billion dollars per day on scientific research. If even one-tenth of that could be devoted to spiritual research, than the discoveries we could make about our Creator might be even more amazing and beneficial than those of the past century in electronics, medicine, genetics and so on. That purpose brings me great happiness.

Q: Do you have a favorite Law of Life you could share with us that expresses the importance of noble purpose?

Sir John: A beneficial motto to keep on your desk is, “**A life without purpose is a life wasted.**” On each New Year’s Day, it is helpful to write down on paper and show to other people your resolutions for more improvements in the new year.



Dear Friends,

Ask anyone who has spent time with Sir John Templeton what strikes them most about him. They might mention Sir John’s energy, his ever-present smile or the infectious passion and intensity that he exudes when talking about his philanthropy. It is clear that Sir John not only recognizes the importance of striving for a sense of noble purpose, he *lives* it.

What does noble purpose have to do with the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest? Stanford University is currently conducting a groundbreaking scientific study on the development of noble purpose among teens. (For more on the study, see page seven.) If youth is “a formative period for acquiring a lifelong purpose” (as the study posits), then shouldn’t we be encouraging young people to think and write about their purpose?

“Wait a minute,” you must be thinking. “It’s hard enough to get teens thinking about the *Laws of Life*, and now you want us to focus them on their noble purpose?”

Well, yes. Believe it or not, we have actual, physical evidence that many young people do think deeply about their noble purpose: over the past sixteen years of the *Laws of Life* program, we’ve read a number of essays in which contest participants have chosen to write about purpose. These writings offer compelling evidence that teens care about striving for a positive and productive life (for two inspiring examples, see pages four and six).

Many have said that living by a positive belief system is like having a compass for our expedition through life, however tumultuous or difficult it can be at times, so that we can remain grounded and know where we are headed. And isn’t having a positive sense of direction what noble purpose is all about? To me, encouraging young people to think about their purpose only serves to enrich the *Laws of Life* activity and inject a further action step. Thoreau sums it up beautifully and says it better than I ever could: “Be not simply good; be good for something.” Hey—that’s a great *Law of Life*!

Peggy

Teaching Teens about Noble Purpose:



School. Family obligations. Part-time jobs. Extra-curricular activities. Peer pressure. Hormones. Just getting through the teen years is stressful enough. Are we asking too much of our young people to focus on their noble purpose? We put that question out to *Laws of Life* teachers around the world who each year encourage their students to write about what they think matters most in life. Here are two different points of view about “teaching purpose” to teens—that may not be so divergent after all.

Teach Purpose; Live Purpose



By Phil Gerkin, Head, Department of English, Gateway High School, Aurora, CO. Phil and his students have been involved in the Denver YMCA contest for the past three years.

Standing in front of my students, I often feel as if I am caught in a Vonnegut novel reliving the same moments over and over again. “Who is your audience?” “What is your purpose?” Those are the “rules” of writing for an effective paper. Several times each day they echo throughout my classroom. But I think their significance runs much deeper than simply a pre-writing exercise. Perhaps instead of asking, “What is the purpose of your paper?” we should be asking students, “What is your purpose?” I believe that our calling as educators is to give purpose to our students—not only by passing on the importance of living a positive and productive life, but also by sharing with them examples and role models for them to consider.

If we are to model purpose to students, the question arises, “What models do we present?” In my classroom, they come from literature. One of my favorites comes from William Wordsworth. In “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth suggests that we practice “little nameless acts of kindness.” I remember reading a bumper sticker with a similar message. He continues, “Amid all the weary weight of this unintelligible world, amid the daily dreary drudgery, acts of kindness can renew the spirit.”

Hamlet exhorts us to higher living as well. Hamlet says to treat people as your good character dictates. The less someone deserves to be treated well, the more character we show when we treat them well. It is easy to reciprocate kindness. But we really grow when we are kind to those who are not.

Perhaps the most compelling characteristic that we can look for in those around us is simply a positive attitude. Milton tells us in *Paradise Lost*, “The mind is its own place and can make a hell of heaven or a heaven of hell.” Or Hamlet again, “There is nothing neither good nor bad but thinking makes it so.” We have no real control of those things that happen to us. We can only control our reactions. To stay positive in the face of adversity inspires the world around us. Purpose changes as perception does throughout life, but while we have our students in class, we have influence. Influencing them to do great good in their life is perhaps our greatest calling.

Don't Lose Sight of the Laws of Life

By Rhonda Wilson, retired English teacher and Director of the Palm Beach County, Florida contest. Rhonda has been involved in the contest since it was first launched in Palm Beach County in 1997.

Having a noble purpose in life is indeed a wonderful thing! However, it is my thinking that not everyone needs a noble purpose to be a productive, giving and positive influence on the world. Most of us have purposes as we go through life, but those purposes change as our circumstances change. For example, while children are growing up, often our purpose is to give them what they need to grow into productive members of society. We try to raise them with the values that we hold dear. Once, however, they are grown and on their own, our influence diminishes, and they make their own decisions. We hope that we have given them guidelines for living that make their choices easier. To me, the *Laws of Life* Essay Contests around the world encourage teenagers to focus on positive guidelines for living, even to test a few of those guidelines in their own lives and then to analyze the effects.

One day recently I took careful notice of the news articles on the home page of my computer, and these are some of the things I found: movies with R ratings for “intense strong violence, sexuality/nudity and language,” a sports hero accused of rape, a video game designed so that the player scores points for shooting people in cars, and a pizza delivery man turned bank robber who was blown to smithereens by a bomb strapped to his neck. When I compare these news items to those I was exposed to as a teenager, it is immediately obvious that young people today live in a very different world—one terribly less positive and exceedingly more violent, one in which there seem to be few rules beyond self-gratification and greed.

So many young people today are cynical. So many feel insecure and see life as a constant struggle against the ugly forces around them. Even those who have a strong religious background and who grow up in loving homes are hungry for ways to live meaningful lives. They have too few examples! So if we as teachers can get them to use some of the guidelines for living that we call *Laws of Life*, they become their own examples. They learn about giving, about forgiveness, about positive thinking in their own lives. They experience the benefits for themselves. Sharing these experiences influences other teenagers to do the same. Maybe the guidelines will become a noble purpose for some or maybe not. Either way, the world surely will reap benefits from our efforts.



Contest

New

This Teen's Got



Purpose!

Kathleen Hua, from Longwood, Florida, is a junior at Seminole High School and the youngest ever director of a Laws of Life Essay Contest. Kathleen's contest will be launched in the spring of 2004, and in the meantime, we asked her to share with us news about the Seminole contest and her thoughts about having a sense of purpose in life.

Q: Tell us a little about yourself.

Kathleen: I'm fifteen and a junior in the International Baccalaureate program at Seminole High. I have a younger brother who is a computer genius and a younger sister who dares to be different. I love tennis, and I'm on the varsity tennis team. My favorite classes are English, French and Chemistry, and all of my teachers are absolutely wonderful.

Q: What made you decide to launch a Laws of Life Essay Contest at your high school?

Kathleen: I wanted to launch *Laws of Life* because unlike other contests, anyone can participate. Everyone has values and beliefs, which means that everyone has the opportunity to enter; this was my strongest incentive to launch the essay contest at my school. I believe that this contest does change lives and makes people stronger, and I want to give everyone a chance to participate.

Q: Who have you asked to be on your contest committee and help organize your contest?

Kathleen: I have enlisted my previous English teacher Ms. Anna Bartholomeo and many fellow students. Ms. Bartholomeo's support has helped immensely, and she always encourages her students to write with thought and heart. Her classroom is filled with inspirational quotes and other words to live by, and this positive setting has also encouraged me to launch the essay contest. The students in the committee are dedicated and enthusiastic, and I am extremely grateful for their support. Their interest has augmented my wish to launch the contest. Through teamwork, I hope we will have a successful first contest at my school.

"I was really surprised because I wasn't sure people would take a fifteen-year-old girl from nowhere seriously—but they did."

Q: Let's talk about funding for your contest. Did you find that it was easier or harder approaching a sponsor because of your age?

Kathleen: At first, I had no idea how to get funding for the contest. I didn't know where to start or who to contact, which made me think, "Hmm... This is harder than I thought." I was really surprised because I wasn't sure people would take a fifteen-year-old girl from nowhere seriously—but they did. Right now, we are trying to get a grant from a school-related organization, and my committee members are contacting people that might be interested. Because we are all fifteen to sixteen-years-old, I admit we are a bit intimidated by big organizations, but by approaching them we are learning that

anything is possible as long as you try. We are still in the process of reaching potential sponsors, and I hope they will realize that teenagers today are actually up to some good.

Q: How do you think your fellow students will respond to the contest?

Kathleen: I think that they might be a little hesitant since they have never heard of this idea before. However, I know that many of them keep journals and do enjoy writing, which I hope will encourage them to participate.

Q: Do you think getting students to reflect and write about the values and principles they think matter most in life will impact them now or in the future?

Kathleen: Yes!!! Sometimes we are so busy that we forget who we are. Getting students to evaluate their values will definitely influence their future, and writing down those values is ideal for getting to know oneself.

Q: How will you involve students in the contest?

Kathleen: Simple. "Prizes Awarded!" Everyone likes prizes! All students will be eligible. All classes. All grades. I want everyone to enter!

Q: What are your plans for the future? Have you given much thought to your purpose?

Kathleen: I am very interested in attending medical school, and I would like to become a dermatologist, which has been my dream since fifth grade. I have several colleges in mind; however, in college, I do not want to be passive and study all day and night. I want to continue to try to help others, and hopefully, I will make a positive difference in their lives. The road to success is still in development, and I hope to enjoy life while I progress toward my destination. I know what I want to do in the future and will jump over any obstacle that gets in my path.



S



Purpose Should Be on Top

By Kathleen Hua, age fifteen

All of us have at one point wondered, "What's my purpose? Why am I here?" The answer lies in you, and it's up to you to find it. Sometimes, your purpose rests on those around you—a loved one, a friend, someone who needs you, etc. Maybe it depends on your own wishes and goals, which is completely understandable as nobody can satisfy you better than yourself. But all in all, purpose is what directs our lives and is a significant *Law of Life*. Without purpose, we'd be nothing but free-floating vagrants and a disruption to the ongoing flow of life.

In high school, it is tough. Not everyone likes you and people will try to put you down. You may feel lost and confused due to an overwhelming schedule or a distressing event. But you have to overcome these obstacles and focus on your purpose in order to succeed. Purpose often lies hidden at the bottom of everything else, and everybody needs to stop, take a deep breath and put their purpose on top. Purpose incites the journey toward goals and dreams. Without purpose, your journey will never start, and you will get left behind. Don't let anyone stop you. You control who you want to be and what you want to do. Purpose is the essence of a happy future, and through your attainment of happiness, you will have achieved more than anyone could offer.

New Contests **In the works**

Just Hatched!

Detroit, Michigan.

In May 2003, United Auto Workers-General Motors Center for Human Resources sponsored the first annual essay contest in Detroit. Approximately 250 Detroit Public Schools students involved in a UAW-GM sponsored service-learning program participated. Contest winners were announced at an annual picnic attended by program participants and UAW-GM employees. The contest will be offered again in the spring of 2004.

Mexico.

The Jesse Helms Center in North Carolina is working with Prepa Tec Santa Catarina to establish *Laws of Life* throughout Mexico. Within the next three years, twenty local contests will be launched in various parts of Mexico. To stay abreast of the new developments in Mexico, visit www.jessehelmscenter.org and soon visit the *Laws of Life* website in Spanish!

South Dakota.

This fall the ten school districts that were awarded Character Education Partnership grants by the South Dakota Department of Education will be piloting the *Laws of Life* program. Each district will have its own awards ceremony and will send one entry to the South Dakota Department of Education for judging on a statewide basis. Cash prizes at the state level will be awarded to the charity of each winner's choice.

Just Hatched!

Philippines.

In the spring of 2003, the Department of English at the University of Asia and the Pacific in Pasig City sponsored an essay contest among the freshman and sophomore students. Medals were awarded to the top three students in each division, and all entrants were honored with certificates. The English Department plans to hold the contest again in 2004 and expand the program so that more students can participate.

the **BLCK** writer's



Satisfactionism

By Cory Ohnesorge

At age seventeen, Cory won fourth place in the Joseph and Wilcox Family Foundations contest, which has been held for the past seven years at high schools in Carlsbad, Oceanside and Pasadena, California.

“Life is too short to just go through the motions.”

I could write an adequate essay restating everything that is already in my transcript; that would be too generic, and it wouldn't satisfy me. Success is most valuable when life is valued as a process, not a goal. I will refer to a motto I live by, an ideology if you will—“Satisfactionism.”

I longed for a purpose in my life throughout my freshman and sophomore years, struggling to separate the important essentials from the material basics. *Satisfactionism* narrows down my life to the things that are important to me and guides my focus toward the goals in my life. My aim is to be completely satisfied with myself, all my accomplishments, my successes and my life, believing there is always a way to better myself as a person and better the world around me. I may not reach this goal anytime soon, but I will strive for it every day. Now with that, I'll proceed with my anecdote...

Approximately two months ago I traveled back to Indiana to my Dad's childhood residence, and I met with family members I hadn't seen since I was a little boy. We met at a funeral home. I went to see half of my father's childhood gone: his mother had passed away. As I stood there in that quiet funeral home, I felt like a boy. I didn't have a clue what death was or even what death really meant. It was the first time in my life that someone close and important to me died.

My grandmother was a great woman. She took time out of her life to talk to me, to send me cards and gifts, to tell me she loved me. She gave birth to my father. What did she ever owe me?

I stood over my grandmother's corpse in silence, thinking, wondering and beginning to realize the value of life. I touched her cold, blue, lifeless hands. I looked at her, realizing her eyes would never open again. Her body would never get out of that coffin. Her life was over. I walked along the path of the cemetery, holding the coffin on my left shoulder, walking my grandmother's body to where it would stay for the rest of eternity. It hurt to have the responsibility to send her body to a place where I'd never again see it. Only images in my heart, in my soul, are what I have to remember. I have pictures from when my grandmother held me in her left arm, cradling me, kissing my forehead, smiling at my innocent giggles. I remembered the last words I spoke to her on the telephone. It hurts to realize she barely had the strength to speak at the time, but she knew she wouldn't have many more chances to speak to me, and she didn't.

A human life is priceless. It took seventeen years of living to realize how lucky I am to be alive. I didn't realize it after two hundred or more people were killed in the Oklahoma bombing. I didn't realize it reading about wars and millions of people

dying. I couldn't begin to comprehend it even when I passed a cemetery every day on my way to school for nine years, where, every day, funerals were being held, and I had no clue what it all meant. Now I know. Life isn't forever. Life is too short to just go through the motions. I'm finally valuing life.

I know that if I die tomorrow, this week, this month or even this year, I will not be satisfied with what I have done in my life. I believe I have so much potential, and I realize I could make better use of my time. I will die one day unknown to me, and I have no control over that, but I can control my life today. I feel I owe my community. With all the things my city, state and country do for me, I want to give back to humanity all that I can. The best way to accomplish these goals is to get educated and gain the knowledge associated with reaching and maintaining *satisfactionism*.

When I see my grandma again, I want to be happy and satisfied with myself. I will know I used all my time with purpose and did all I could to reach my potential, which is potentially anything I want it to be. I know in my heart my grandma is in a better place, that the suffering she went through at her old age was lifted from her. She's in heaven and watches over me every day. In memory of her, I had my jersey number for football be number eighty-six; she lived to be eighty-six. I love her.

“It took seventeen years of living to realize how lucky I am to be alive.”

Ed.'s note: What is Cory up to these days? He writes, “I'm very happy at Occidental College playing football and golf, and pursuing a major in Chemistry with a Math minor. Post-graduate plans are unclear as of now, but I received All-American awards for punting on my football team, and I still wear number eighty-six.”





Science Looks at Purpose in Young People

By Dr. William Damon, Professor of Education at Stanford University and Director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence

WILLIAM DAMON AND HIS RESEARCH TEAM at Stanford University have launched a scientific study designed to discover how young people acquire a sense of noble purpose in today's world. The study begins with the assumption that purpose is essential for a constructive and meaningful life and that youth is a formative period for acquiring a lifelong purpose.

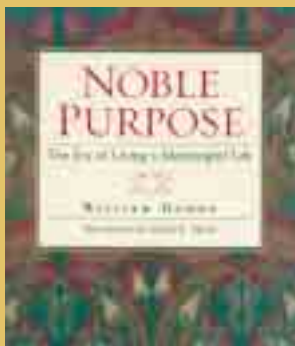
Dr. Damon's study asks: What noble purposes inspire today's young? How are young people being introduced to such purposes? What kinds of noble purposes are today's educational institutions advancing and what kinds are they neglecting? One of the goals of the study is to determine the social, cultural and educational conditions that promote purpose among the young. The results of the study will reveal the extent to which these conditions are present or absent in our schools and other places where young people spend time.

The project was inspired by a previous examination that William Damon and his research team conducted of essays for *Laws of Life* Essay Contests in four American communities. Dr. Damon noted that the student essays offered a unique window into the deepest thoughts and feelings of today's young people. In the essays, the vast majority of students expressed a positive view of life and a great deal of compassion, spirituality, and personal and social responsibility. This suggested that today's young may have a far stronger sense of moral purpose than is presumed in most popular media portrayals. Dr. Damon resolved to investigate this conjecture directly, through the study of youth purpose now underway in his lab.

The present project began with a working conference attended by leading scholars and researchers, during which the theories, questions and range of scientific methods best suited for exploring the development of youth purpose were defined. A summary report of this conference is now available at the Stanford Center on Adolescence. In addition, Dr. Damon has written a short book called *Noble Purpose: The Joy of Living a Meaningful Life*, now available at the Templeton Foundation Press, that draws upon insights gained from the conference, as well as from a wide variety of educational, social, scientific and philosophical sources.

The second phase of the project, a new survey of youth purpose in diverse communities across the United States, will be beginning in October 2003. This survey will be supplemented by case studies of several young people who have demonstrated extraordinary purpose in their lives so far. Dr. Damon will formulate the findings from his investigation into a set of recommendations for creating a new field of scientific inquiry and new methods of educational practice devoted to this important topic.

The Joy of Living a Meaningful Life



William Damon, who for twenty years has written widely on moral development at all ages of human life, examines another dimension of purpose in his new book, *Noble Purpose: The Joy of Living a Meaningful Life*. He talks about "finding large-scale purposes that focus your talents, skills, thoughts and energies in an enduring manner...finding something that you can truly believe in, something so worth accomplishing that you dedicate yourself to it wholeheartedly, without qualm or self-interest...devoting yourself to a cause, or to many causes, that you consider noble purposes."

Drawing on religious, philosophical and literary writings, Dr. Damon defines the qualities that transform purpose into noble purpose. He shows how people from many cultures throughout history have pursued noble purposes by answering God's call as each has heard it, and he looks at the faces of noble purpose—how noble purpose can be found in a variety of activities and settings, from the heroic to the everyday. *Noble Purpose* is available at bookstores or by calling 610-971-2670. The book can also be ordered online at www.templetonpress.org.

Purposeful *Laws of Life*: Share them with your young people!

Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.

- John F. Kennedy

Each one of us has a fire in our heart for something. It's our goal in life to find it and keep it lit. - Mary Lou Retton

Above all be of single aim; have a legitimate and useful purpose and devote yourself unreservedly to it. - James Allen

Find a purpose in life so big it will challenge every capacity to be at your best. - David O. McKay

Each of our acts makes a statement as to our purpose.

- Leo Buscaglia

You can come to understand your purpose in life by slowing down and feeling your heart's desires. - Marcia Wieder

Make your work to be in keeping with your purpose.

- Leonardo da Vinci

Good luck is another name for tenacity of purpose.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Life is a promise; fulfill it. - Mother Teresa

Official newsletter of
the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest,
a program developed by the
John Templeton Foundation
Five Radnor Corporate Center
Suite 100
100 Matsonford Road
Radnor, Pennsylvania 19087
800-245-1285 (US only) or
610-687-8942
Fax 610-687-8961

Editor: Peggy Veljkovic
pveljkovic@templeton.org

Your comments are most
welcome. Please direct them
to Peggy Veljkovic.

Visit our website:
www.lawsoflife.org

In 1987, Sir John Templeton created the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest in his hometown of Winchester, Tennessee to encourage young people to reflect and write about their own *laws of life*. At that time, Sir John never imagined that the contest would spread throughout the United States and around the world, that thousands of students would write a *laws of life* essay each year, or that so many individuals, businesses, community organizations, service clubs, foundations, and colleges and universities would sponsor and organize their own program. We invite you to launch a contest in your community!

Laws of Life Essay Contest
John Templeton Foundation
Five Radnor Corporate Center, Suite 100
100 Matsonford Road
Radnor, Pennsylvania 19087
USA

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 192
Wayne, PA

Check out our website at

www.lawsoflife.org