BEACH CITIES®
ESTATE LAW

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LOVE ISN'T ENOUGH

Your Family Needs More Than Good Intentions for Estate Planning



When it comes to family, many of us believe that love will carry the day. We trust that our loved ones will do the right thing, that relationships will remain strong, and that good intentions will be enough to guide important decisions. But when it comes to estate planning, love alone is not a legal plan.

In fact, relying on love alone can create chaos instead of harmony. The law doesn't operate on intentions. It operates on documents. Without clear, written, legally enforceable instructions, even the most loving families can find themselves in conflict or in court. This is especially critical in certain common family situations.

Unmarried couples, for instance, are often shocked to learn how vulnerable they are under the law. Without proper planning, an unmarried partner may have no legal right to visit you in the hospital, to make medical decisions, to manage finances, or to inherit assets. No matter how long a couple has been together, love and shared history do not create legal authority. Hospitals and courts rely on documents, not relationships.

Blended families face similar risks. In second marriages, it's common to assume that everything will "work itself out" — that a surviving spouse will take care of children from a prior relationship, or that everyone's interests are aligned. Unfortunately, the law's default rules rarely reflect the emotional realities of blended families. Without careful planning, children can be unintentionally disinherited, and relationships can be permanently damaged. Blended families don't fail because of a lack of love; they struggle because of a lack of clarity.

Additionally, parents sometimes rely on their children to honor their verbal instructions after they're gone. They may tell their children that they want a certain amount to be given to each grandchild before the remaining assets are divided for their children. Similarly, they may track financial help given to children over the years, keeping personal notes or records of loans or gifts, intending to balance things later, assuming these notes will guide the final distribution. In both cases, unless those intentions are reflected in legally binding estate documents, these notes or verbal instructions may have no legal effect. Many assume their kids will "do the right thing," especially if they've had open conversations about intentions. But grief, stress, and money can change family dynamics quickly. What one child sees as fair, another may see as deeply unfair, or a child may simply decide to take this opportunity to try to take more than what was intended.

Estate planning is not about expecting the worst. It's about protecting the people you care about most. Clear, legally enforceable documents reduce

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The Price of Planning Ahead

INFLATION'S HIDDEN IMPACT ON YOUR ESTATE

Most of us notice inflation when we check out at the grocery store, not when we think about our estate plan. Prices for everyday items are creeping up, but those same price changes can also impact the value of what we own. When that happens, our estate plan may need a second look.

Inflation means that money doesn't stretch as far as it used to. A dollar today buys less than it did a few years ago. Homes, cars, and investments all fluctuate in value due to inflation. In the 1950s, the average home sold for about $7,400. Today, it's well over $370,000. Wages have also increased, albeit at a slower pace. That gap explains why inflation matters when estate planning.



When the cost of goods and property rises, the total value of our estate rises with it. That sounds positive, but it can also push an estate closer to federal or state tax thresholds. A house valued at $1 million today might be worth $1.5 million in a few years, and that extra half-million could create new tax questions. Families sometimes find themselves paying more in taxes, only to watch those assets drop in value soon after.

The best way to handle this issue is to plan early and keep your plans updated. We can start by reviewing our estate annually and comparing it to current tax limits. Adding beneficiary designations to accounts, such as life insurance or retirement funds, keeps those assets outside the taxable estate. Giving modest gifts to family or charities can reduce overall value while allowing us to see the results in our lifetimes.

Inflation is constantly changing, and our plans should adapt to it accordingly. Reviewing what we've built every year helps ensure that our loved ones receive what we intend, without unwelcome surprises when the time comes.

A SECOND CHANCE FOR VASI

MEET THE BEAR WITH A BIONIC PAW

On the outskirts of Bengaluru in India, a rescued sloth bear is getting around on all fours again. His name is Vasikaran (Vasi, for short), and after years of moving gingerly on three legs, he's making history. At the Bannerghatta Bear Rescue Center, Vasi recently became the first animal of his kind in the world to receive a prosthetic paw, and his caregivers say he's taken to it with ease.

Vasi's story began with tragedy. Years ago, he was caught in a poacher's wire snare that left his back paw so badly injured it had to be amputated. Wildlife SOS, a nonprofit that rescues and rehabilitates India's wildlife, brought him to the rescue center over five years ago. Once he recovered, the staff realized he couldn't survive in the wild with only three working legs, so they built him a permanent home. Vasi, who's known for his calm personality and love of peanut butter, quickly became one of the team's favorite residents.

Then came the chance to give him something more. Derrick Campana, founder of Bionic Pets and known for fitting prosthetics on everything from raccoons to elephants, took on the challenge of designing one for a wild bear. First, the team helped Vasi adjust by wrapping his leg in soft cloth. Once the bear grew comfortable, Campana created a mold and built a custom paw using plaster for flexibility and crampons to mimic claws.

When Vasi tried it on, he stood taller. Soon, he was walking evenly and balancing his weight on all four legs. Caregivers say it improved his confidence, posture, and mood. The device is removed occasionally to keep it from irritating him, but most days, he strolls through his enclosure without any issue.



Vasi's now walking around the way he was meant to and thriving because of it. For him and everyone who helped him get there, that's what a happy ending looks like.

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conflict, preserve relationships, and remove guesswork during emotionally charged moments.

Love may start the conversation, but planning and documenting your wishes are what actually protect your family. If your plan relies on everyone getting along, the harsh truth is that it probably isn't a plan at all.

Good planning is an act of love. It provides clarity, reduces conflict, and ensures your intentions are carried out exactly as you hope. Love sets the intention, but legal documents make it real.

Happy Valentine's Day!

- Angela Klenk

Mouthwatering Mini Cheesecakes



Ingredients

- 12 oz package vanilla wafers
- 16 oz cream cheese, softened
- 3/4 cup white sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 21 oz can cherry pie filling

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 F.
2. In two 24-cup miniature muffin pans, line each space with a paper liner.
3. Using a food processor or resealable plastic bag, crush vanilla wafers into a fine crumb.
4. Press 1/2 teaspoon of crumbs into each paper liner.
5. In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, sugar, eggs, and vanilla until light and fluffy.
6. Fill each miniature muffin liner with this mixture, almost to the top.
7. Bake in the preheated oven for 15 minutes or until the cheesecakes are set.
8. Cool completely in the pan.
9. Top each mini cheesecake with about a teaspoon of cherry pie filling before serving. Enjoy!

Inspired by AllRecipes.com

Puppets Behind the Iron Curtain

Fraggle Rock's Cold War Breakthrough

In 1989, a children's show featuring singing puppets managed something no politician had. It slipped quietly across the Iron Curtain. For the first time, "Fraggle Rock" appeared on television in the USSR, bringing Jim Henson's underground world of Fraggles, Doozers, and Gorgs into Soviet living rooms.

The story began years earlier. By the early 1980s, Henson was already famous for "The Muppet Show" and "Sesame Street," but he wanted to create something bigger than ratings. He dreamed of a show that carried a message of peace and wasn't bound by national borders or languages. Puppets, he believed, were the perfect characters for that type of program. The result was "Fraggle Rock," a hopeful experiment in connection.

The Fraggles didn't reach Russia overnight. During the Cold War, few American programs managed to cross the Iron Curtain. But in 1982, Henson's fantasy film "The Dark Crystal" became a surprise hit at the Moscow Film Festival. There were sold-out screenings and crowds lined up outside theaters. That success opened a door. As the Soviet Union began to change under Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, Soviet television grew more open to ideas from outside countries.

On Jan. 8, 1989, Soviet audiences saw their first episode of "Fraggle Rock." The response was overwhelming. Ratings were unprecedented, and later that year, the entire first season began airing, dubbed with a Russian narrator. It arrived months before the Berlin Wall fell. For Henson, who died the following spring, the Fraggles' appearance on Soviet airwaves was one of his last great accomplishments.

After Henson's passing, his dream lived on. A few years later, Russia produced its own version of "Sesame Street." For a time, children on both sides of the world grew up watching the same small creatures solve problems with laughter. Maybe that was the peace Henson hoped for all along.



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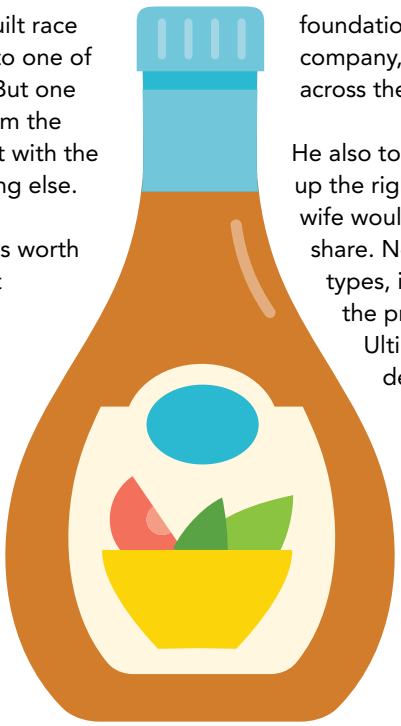
Estate Lessons From Paul Newman

THE PLAN BEHIND THE LEGEND

Paul Newman was more than a movie legend. He built race cars, funded hospitals, and turned salad dressing into one of the most successful charitable brands in the world. But one of his quietest accomplishments happened away from the spotlight. When he planned his estate, he handled it with the same thought and discipline he brought to everything else.

When he passed away in 2008, Newman's estate was worth hundreds of millions of dollars. That alone isn't what makes his plan remarkable. What stands out is how carefully he put it together. He had a detailed will, a private trust to keep his finances out of the public eye, and two trusted people ready to manage the details. Newman even included a clause discouraging legal disputes because he knew arguments over money can divide even the closest of families.

His decisions reflected what mattered in his life. Newman's wife, Joanne Woodward, kept their home and personal belongings. His Oscars, Golden Globes, and other awards went to the foundation that still bears his name. Newman's image, his company, and the earnings that continue to fund projects across the country also went to the foundation.



He also took care of the practical side of things. By setting up the right trusts, he delayed certain taxes, ensuring his wife would be cared for before the government took its share. Newman even included provisions for various asset types, including his race cars and airplanes. He directed the proceeds from those to his residuary estate. Ultimately, his plan was practical, generous, and designed to last.

Most of us don't have a Hollywood fortune to divide, but we still face the same questions. Whom do we trust to handle things when we're gone? What should continue to work long after we stop? Newman showed that good planning has less to do with money and more to do with making things clear for the people you care about. And his name still funds good work, which is a legacy worth having.