



Your 15-Minute Will

When Aretha Franklin, Prince and Howard Hughes died without wills, they left their estates in a mess. You don't have to

By LYNN ASINOF

MY GREAT-UNCLE, a bachelor and bon vivant, wrote his will on a cocktail napkin. It probably took less than 15 minutes to complete. When he died 14 years later, at age 90, the will was ruled valid in his state because it was properly witnessed by two people at a bar.

But you can write your will quickly and inexpensively without resorting to a napkin.

Laurie Macdonald, 66, had put off writing a will for years when she discovered FreeWill, a no-fee, online will-writing service. The former Florida program director of Defenders of Wildlife had once begun drafting a will with an attorney but never finished. FreeWill allowed her to

get it done, Macdonald says: "It took more than 15 minutes, though probably not more than half an hour."

1 WHY BOTHER?

Die without a will, and your state's laws determine who gets your assets—your bank accounts and everything else. A will is where you can make sure your camera collection

goes to your nephew and your jewelry is divided among your daughters. Most important, if you have young children, a will is also where you can name a guardian for them should you die before they reach adulthood.

"For many people, state laws don't exactly meet their needs," says attorney Paul Kassabian, legal product counsel at LegalZoom, which offers online will-writing packages. Macdonald's longtime partner, for one, wouldn't inherit anything at Macdonald's death if there were no will. Still, many people die without this document, leaving their heirs to battle over their estates. And you don't need to have Aretha Franklin's millions for such fights to get nasty.

2 IT'S EASY TO PUT OFF ...

Forty-five percent of Americans 55 and older don't have a will, according to a new survey from Merrill Lynch and Age Wave. Why might that be? In 2017, when Caring.com, a senior-care resource, asked adults without a will why that was so, the most common answer was, "I just haven't gotten around to it." The arrival of children didn't seem to have much impact: Only 36 percent of respondents with children under 18 had end-of-life plans in place.

3 ... BUT EASY TO GET DONE

Do-it-yourself sites and software can smooth the process. Says Macdonald about FreeWill, for instance: "It was really clear, really simple." Supported by nonprofit organizations that might benefit from philanthropic commitments made in

LOW-BILL WILLS

Where to go for a will when on a budget:

- **FreeWill** This no-cost service also allows you to draw up a new will gratis if your wishes or circumstances change. (freewill.com)

- **LegalZoom** Services range from a \$69 will to a \$149 package that includes a living trust and related documents. (legalzoom.com)

- **Quicken WillMaker Plus 2019** This \$80 software package can

create a will and other estate-planning paperwork. (nolo.com)

- **Rocket Lawyer** A membership giving you access to estate-planning documents is \$40 per month. (rocketlawyer.com)