



Ethical Wills skip the finances and share life's wisdom instead

Baby Boomers seeking to leave a legacy may be a fueling trend

By Stephanie Hoops

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As the end of Willa DeLay's life nears, she is preparing to leave her children an ethical will.

It isn't legally binding. It isn't a necessity for distributing her assets. But it is a statement of her most deeply held values, which will be passed down to her family.

"I wanted to leave something behind for my kids," DeLay said.

Born May 28, 1917, DeLay is almost 90 and feels the time is right to take care of this. The main message she wants to get across in her ethical will is the importance of an education.

"Get your education first before getting married because it's much harder to get it after you're married and have kids," she said.

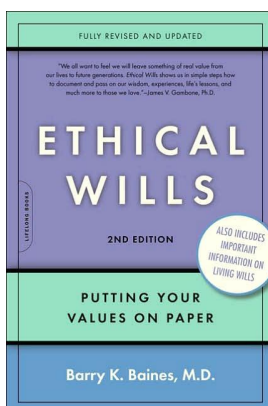
It might seem simple, but it is important to DeLay, who struggled to work an education into her life around the time she spent with three husbands, three children, three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

"Everything in my life comes in threes," she said jokingly.

Ethical wills have centuries-old roots in Christianity and Judaism. They were once a tradition communicated orally that gradually developed into written documents. In ancient times, ethical wills typically contained burial instructions, blessings, and a list of personal and spiritual values.

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There has been a resurgence in ethical wills in recent years primarily because of the work of a Minneapolis physician, Dr. Barry Baines, who is involved with Hospice of the Twin Cities. He published a book in 2001, "Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper."

"He did a lot of work with cancer patients and found that by having them write ethical wills it gave them kind of permission to leave," said Libby Atwater, a Ventura historian who writes ethical wills and knows Baines.

The cost to write one varies, Atwater said, but hers start around \$500. She's written them for individuals, and has had requests from businesses interested in creating statements to retain the founding values of a company.

"But people could do it themselves by getting (Baines') book," she said.

Atwater believes the resurgence of the ethical will may also be a response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the aging of the baby boomers.

"We want people to know we've been here and lived through challenging times," she said.

"Also, when 9/11 happened it made people realize how temporary life is and if you have something to say to future generations, you should say it now."

Estate planning lawyers stress that ethical wills aren't replacements for regular wills, but are accompaniments.

Ventura lawyer Susan Siple said they can provide information the regular will cannot. A will, she said, "is kind of a cold legal document."

It's important to remember what an ethical will does, and what it doesn't do, said Camarillo lawyer Cheri Kurman.

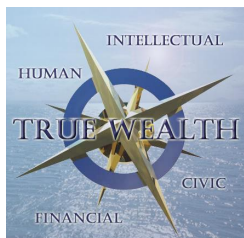
"An ethical will is not a will," she said. "It's not a who-gets-what. It's how do I want to be remembered? And what I hope you learn from me."

To put that kind of information into a trust or estate document would muddy the water, she said.

"A legal will is legal," she said. "They are cold and analytical but they have to be because of what they're doing."



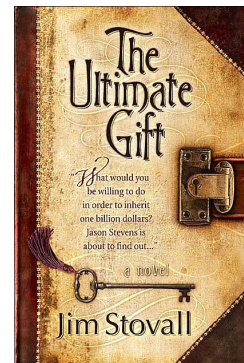
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OFG: Recently adapted into a movie, *The Ultimate Gift*, by Jim Stovall, is a powerful example that uses a story to convey the message of ethical wills.

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