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Aretha Franklin Didn't 'Respect' Estate Planning How Her Handwritten Wills Caused Strife

The world lost a legend when the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, died in 2018. And in their grief, her family got an enormous headache. Unlike many, Franklin did plan for her eventual death — but her DIY approach to the matter proved disastrous. Her four conflicting, handwritten wills cost the estate millions, pitted relatives against each other, and exposed family secrets.

Franklin didn't trust others to handle her money and personal affairs. She'd even demand upfront cash for her performances and stash it under her piano onstage. So, it may not have surprised her family that she decided to handle her estate plan herself. While they initially thought she died intestate (without a will), conflicting documents emerged.

Franklin's niece and estate executor Sabrina found three handwritten wills while cleaning

the singer's home. Two were dated 2010 and locked in a cabinet. The third, dated 2014, had been written in a spiral notebook, and Sabrina found it under the Queen of Soul's couch cushions. The wills split her assets differently — but crucially, none of the three were signed. A fourth unsigned will, dated 2018, emerged in 2021.

The documents proved Franklin knew the value of estate planning, but she never completed the legal requirements, and the fallout has been enormous. Her oldest son has disabilities, and Franklin missed the opportunity to establish a special needs trust. Further, while Franklin kept her oldest son's father a secret her entire life, she revealed his identity in one of her wills — perhaps not realizing it would be made public. Meanwhile, Franklin's four sons have fought each other in court, and the estate racked up a \$7.8 million tax bill.



A trial, initially scheduled for August 2020, was delayed due to the pandemic. However, the estate resolved the IRS debt in June 2022. Despite their earlier battle, her sons requested their mother's remaining assets be split equally, but it is unclear whether a judge has approved their request.

A comprehensive estate plan could have shielded Franklin's substantial intellectual property, reduced the estate's tax burden, and properly cared for her family. This cautionary tale should remind you to do more than "say a little prayer" to protect your assets after death.

Born Reading the Fine Print. Meet Jay, Our New Attorney!

St. Juliana's Catholic School. Second Grade. Brown corduroy for boys and plaid skirts for girls were de rigueur. Nuns were our teachers and yard sticks, their discipline. Like the military, humor and individualism were discouraged. I was 7, and about to discover my calling.

One morning during recess, I ran afoul of Ronald, the biggest, meanest 8 year old ever to prowl the playground. Whether his monkey bars were usurped, or sand kicked in his general direction, will never be known. But clearly, Ronald preferred fists over pesky words, and I was the target. It was a quick dust-up: torn shirts, a bloody nose, and then the nuns dragged us off to the principal by the ear.

Sister Marilyn was an old-school nun; white lace and crisp habit, she was not to be trifled with. She instantly apportioned blame equally: "I will write up a contract, and both of you will sign," she said, yard stick at the ready. Ronald grabbed a pencil and quickly obliged. When it was my turn, she looked at me, expecting the same blind obedience. Instead, I actually read the contract: "I promise no more fights at school," it said.

Treading carefully with measured tone, I dared speak: "Sister, this says 'fights,' but this is my only fight, ever. Also, fighting is wrong everywhere, not just at school. I will sign, but only after the 's' and 'at school' are removed." Accuracy seemed important, and if Ronald signed, too, I might be able to escape his fury everywhere, not just the playground.

Then, something magical happened. A hint of a smile appeared across the head nun's countenance. "You're right," Sister Marilyn replied, and she revised the contract accordingly.

It was then and there, in the company of Sister Marilyn and the astonished Ronald, that I knew: Some day, I was destined to become a lawyer.

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Today, 38 years later, I'm fulfilling my destiny as a licensed attorney in two states. I'm privileged to advocate for the many wonderful clients of the Steffens Law Offices. Each day, our team fights for the injured to obtain full compensation from the jaws of the insurance companies.

We bring creativity, tenacity, and even frivolity to each day's mission in service of those who, without our advocacy, would likely be forced to fend for themselves. And the insurance company, like Sister Marilyn, is an adversary not to be taken lightly. The days are long, the fight is tough, and the stakes are high for our clients. But if there's a better, more fulfilling career out there, I have yet to find it.



Balancing hard work and arguing the just cause means taking the time to enjoy some hard play as well. Along with my wife, daughter, and golden retriever Sunny, I enjoy the good life that Nebraska offers: paddle-boarding, bike riding, camping, and even a date night once in a while. When I'm alone, you'll find me motorcycling, mountain biking, snowboarding, or playing a tune on the five-string banjo.

Our 6-year-old daughter keeps me busy with forest bike rides, pre-bedtime wrestling matches, and at least a hundred other daddy-daughter adventures, each moment of which I savor like a fine wine. She is a great teacher of wisdom, constantly reminding me to be humble, learn more, and laugh often.

I leave you with this: Wherever you are, whoever you be, if you are hurt through no fault of your own, if negligence has caused you injury and pain, our team is always and anytime, just a phone call away.

I'll look forward to fighting for you, too.

- Jay Schrecengost



Choosing the Right Moment

The Perfect Time to Claim Social Security

earned. But there's an incentive to wait even longer. Benefits increase by roughly 8% for each additional year you wait until age 70. CNBC further calculates that someone who doesn't begin receiving benefits until 70 will receive 76% higher benefits than someone who takes them at age 62.

If you only look at the amount of your monthly benefit, it's clear that waiting until 70 is ideal. But you should consider other factors. For example, some people have minimal savings that will not allow them to make ends meet. But if they're laid off or pushed into early retirement, claiming Social Security might be the only option, despite the downside.

Everyone considering claiming Social Security should also evaluate their health. Someone in good health with a reasonable chance of living a long life will generally benefit from waiting. However, someone in poor health at age 62 may want to receive benefits while they still can. (Even then, experts remind you to weigh the impact of survivor benefits.)

Before claiming Social Security payments, discuss your long-term plans and goals with your family. Additionally, discussing the matter with your financial advisor is extremely wise. They can evaluate your circumstances and guide you through your options.

Most of us pay into Social Security our entire working lives, but how much we each benefit from this mandatory investment depends on when we start claiming benefits. Whether you start claiming Social Security at age 62, 70, or somewhere in between is a highly personal decision. But everyone should consider several factors before deciding when to start receiving their checks.

The earliest age someone can start claiming Social Security benefits is 62. Many people don't want to work longer than they have to, so immediately cashing in might seem like a great idea. But there is a catch: People who collect Social Security at 62 receive reduced benefits. According to CNBC, someone who turns 62 in 2023 and begins claiming benefits will receive a 30% lower monthly benefit than if they wait until 67 — and the reduction is permanent.

The full retirement age is 67 for most people still waiting to claim, at which point they can receive 100% of the benefits they've

A Workshop of Wonders

Making Kids' Dreams Come True

What do you get when you combine goofball builders, a grumpy boss, and kids with wacky ideas? In Netflix's 2022 reality show "Making Fun," experts actually create high-concept, nonsense inventions that children dreamed up! The result is a playful and educational show that's perfect for all ages.

"Making Fun" follows Jimmy DiResta, a master builder, and his misfit band of "makers" as they bring children's imaginative creations to life. The team members know their way around a workshop and use wood, metal, foam, fabric, and more to create mechanical wonders that ultimately serve no purpose other than to make kids' dreams come true.

The first of eight episodes in the series follows the crew as they build a dinosaur that spits out tacos. In others, the builders create a pirate ship pizza cannon and a device to fling cat poop. (Remember, these were kids' ideas!) Throughout the episode, viewers watch as designs are conceptualized and brought to life even as hiccups are addressed along the way.

It's not all fun, though; this show is also surprisingly educational. The builders explain why they use specific materials, the basics of how the machines in the shop work, and how experts make common

items. Unlike most reality shows, there is no time crunch. The builders take as long as they like to build something that makes them proud.

Jimmy's crew also provides plenty of entertainment. Graz tells bad jokes, and Derek is capable but clueless. Jackman, the engineer, provides technical know-how. And you can count on Canadian Pat to work wonders with a lathe while being very strange. The group regularly mocks each other, and the editors frequently add funny songs or graphics to the scenes.

"Making Fun" involves some potty humor and censored swear words, and not all parents appreciate Jimmy's gruff (though likely scripted) demeanor with the kids. The show is generally appropriate for children ages 8 and up, but it's also fun for older kids and adults. Gather around the TV for a laugh and a new sense of what's possible with the right tools.



ROASTED SWEET POTATO ARUGULA SALAD

Inspired by [Nutriciously.com](https://www.nutriciously.com)



Ingredients

- 3 medium sweet potatoes, cubed
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 3 small radishes, thinly sliced
- 1/2 tsp turmeric
- 2 cups arugula, thinly sliced
- 1/2 tsp cumin
- 1 1/2 cups cooked lima beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- Balsamic salad dressing of choice
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Line baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a bowl, toss sweet potato cubes with smoked paprika, turmeric, cumin, cinnamon, salt, and pepper. Transfer to prepared baking sheet and arrange in a single layer.
3. Roast for 25–30 minutes until sweet potatoes are nicely browned and fork-tender.
4. In a large salad bowl, combine onion, bell pepper, radishes, arugula, and lima beans.
5. Toss the salad with dressing, then top with roasted sweet potatoes.

COMFORT IN AN EMERGENCY

Why You Need a Power of Attorney

Estate planning is about much more than determining what will happen to your assets after you pass away. It's also crucial to plan for medical emergencies. In fact, designating financial and health care powers of attorney (POA) should be an essential component of any estate plan.

A POA gives someone the legal right to act on your behalf. These documents also outline the specific type of decisions the designated agent can undertake and sometimes detail a single event. For example, if you become incapacitated, designating financial power of attorney will allow someone you choose to handle your finances on your behalf, while a health care power of attorney grants someone the right to make decisions about your medical treatment.

Before designating an agent, consider whom you trust with your money and health. Some people might select the same family member to be their financial and health care agents, but others could choose separate individuals. Each situation is different, and you know what's best for you. While a relative who cares deeply about your well-being may be an ideal health care agent, this person might make a terrible financial agent if they can't balance a checkbook.

Each state has methods for determining who will make decisions for an incapacitated person when they do not have a predesignated power of attorney. But the process is less than ideal. Having to hash out who should be your representative can cause strife within your family when they need each other the most. Further, an incapacitated person no longer has the ability or right to determine who will take on these crucial responsibilities and make monumental decisions about their care, finances, and life.

Creating power of attorney documents while you are of sound mind gives you some measure of control over your future. Fortunately, many POA designations will never take effect, but if the worst happens, you'll be better off having a power of attorney in place.



TAKE A *BREAK*



- Blossom
- Derby
- Emerald
- Fertilize
- Gemini
- Horse
- Lightsaber
- Mother
- Nature
- Parade
- Seedling
- Veterans