



How to Laugh at Death and Taxes: What Executors, Willmakers, Heirs, and Beneficiaries Need to Know

Barbara Amsden

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How to Laugh at Death and Taxes is a thorough estate planning resource that's narrated with panache.

Barbara Amsden's comprehensive, funny reference text *How to Laugh at Death and Taxes* is a detailed planning guide for will makers, executors, heirs, and beneficiaries.

Based in the context of Canadian policies and laws, this book covers in depth the process of passing an estate on to one's spouse, family, or other beneficiaries. Organized by subject for easy reference, it includes practical tips for estate management and navigating an inheritance, and outlines legal, accounting, and tax issues. Its tools include checklists, sample lists, reminders, and templates to help when it comes to distributing money to heirs, paying the deceased's bills, and taking care of property. Comprehensive in its approach, it covers obligations and obstacles with clarity too, and it ends with appendixes that compile sample letters, inventories, distribution trackers, and final distribution statements to further equip its audience.

Humanizing its work, the book draws upon personal experiences of dealing with funeral homes, attorneys, cemeteries, and tax professionals, as well as illuminating anecdotes and trivia (Archbishop Desmond Tutu requested an eco-friendly disposal option, aquamation, when he died; Charles Dickens's will was ignored and he was buried in Westminster Abbey instead of in Kent as requested). Questions like "Why might it make sense to outsource even if you can do what's required?" are anticipated and addressed as well, if sometimes in a winking manner: when it comes to picking an executor, the book says, you should go for "someone with a pulse [and] a brain."

Dry humor leavens the book from the get-go: its goal is to preserve the sanity of someone choosing an executor, and it acknowledges that the "probability that you or someone you know will die [is] 100%." Elsewhere, death is called a value proposition; the book cites an "A+" self-written obituary by a man who was "survived by all the people who didn't die before him"; and a drawing of a dragon snarls when it's noted that *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* author Stieg Larsson failed to craft a will, leaving his common-law wife with "diddly squat." Whimsical illustrations further enliven the book, complementing its lighthearted popular culture references to *Alice in Wonderland*, *Don Quixote*, and *Dirty Harry*.

How to Laugh at Death and Taxes is a winking economic resource that covers most of what people need to know about estate planning and inheritances.

JOSEPH S. PETE (August 28, 2024)

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