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DYING FOR A LAUGH – STRANGER WILLS MAKE A GOOD POINT SAYS THE IPW

Leading Willwriting organisation, The Institute of Professional Willwriters, has taken a look at the lighter side of its profession, to reveal some of the stranger Wills people have made.

A Will is usually a huge benefit to loved ones of the deceased, but that is not normally a dog. Despite this, one particularly devoted pooch, Gunter III, did become the beneficiary of the Will of Countess Carlotta Liebenstein, who left her best four-legged friend a cool 80 million dollars.

In 1926, Canadian Vance Millar died with no family to whom to leave his sizeable estate. His final wish was for it to go to the Canadian woman who gave birth to the greatest number of babies in the ten years after his death.

This Will started something known as the Stork Derby, which some Canadians viewed as downright immoral, as women strived to out-do each other on the baby front. It ended with 36 babies being born to four women, who each shared Millar's fortune.

Wills are sometimes used to teach people a lesson, exact revenge, or just have the last laugh, according to the IPW. In California, a man named Robert Brett had suffered all his life at the hands of a wife who banned him from smoking his beloved cigars at home. When he passed away, his wife was the beneficiary to his estate, but only on the proviso that she religiously smoked five cigars a day, for the rest of her life.

Another gentleman, went to the IPW to get a watertight Will produced when he fell out with one of his sons in a very big way. He wanted to ensure that a point was made when his Will was read and needed the IPW's expert advice in wording it.

Distributing his estate to those who had cared for him, it was a surprise to find the prodigal son, who had hardly ever visited him, even mentioned in the Will, until the facts were laid bare. This son had been left a can of beer and one pence, so he could raise a glass to his father. The penny was for his thoughts as he was drinking it!

The most bizarre Will is a spoof document supposedly drawn up by Keiko, the killer whale star of Free Willy. The Will, printed in Outside Magazine, in April 2004, left the island of Iceland to Keiko's co-star, Jason James Richter, future royalties to Squad 23 – the pod from which Keiko was stolen – and to Cetaceans Against Nuclear Weapons, the Anti-Flensing League and It Takes a Pod to Raise a Calf Foundation. An extensive collection of Hummel figurines was also supposedly left to Ellen DeGeneres, for her work in the film Finding Nemo, which Keiko supposedly loved!

IPW Chairman, Paul Sharpe, says: "All of these case studies are fun, but also have a serious side to them. They demonstrate that it is better to make a Will, to have your wishes enacted, rather than dying intestate and letting a Court who has not known of your personal family history, or life, decide to whom an estate should be left, according to the law.

"If you have fallen out with someone, have no family to whom to leave your estate, or want to assist a charity, a Will can help you make your wishes known, so that those who you do wish to benefit can do so, whilst those you do not wish to remember do not prosper from your legacy."

To find an IPW member who can help draw up a Will for you, contact 08456 442042. More information about the IPW is available at www.ipw.org.uk

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