

Last Wishes

To secure your beloved companion's future, know your legal options.

Robert Newman

When billionaire real-estate investor and hotel operator Leona Helmsley died in August 2007, she left behind disgruntled former employees, a history of legal problems, disinherited grandchildren and one very rich bitch named Trouble, her beloved and reportedly ill-tempered Maltese.

Despite the media frenzy that ensued over the \$12 million bequeath to Trouble, Helmsley wasn't the first dog owner to attempt to leave her surviving animals a sizable inheritance. In 1968, Quaker State Oil heiress, Eleanor Ritchley, left \$4.2 million for the care of her 150 dogs. In 1931, Ella Wendell of New York, left her Standard Poodle, "Toby," \$15 million. In 1996, Sydney Altman of California left \$1 million to "Samantha," his Cocker Spaniel.

Although it was likely unintended by Helmsley, who appears to have had less than a generous disposition, she raised awareness across the country about an important and all-too-often overlooked question: What will happen to your animals if you die before they do?

We are familiar with options available if our animals predecease us. We can choose burial, cremation, entombment – all with formal memorial services available. Some owners even opt for the less-traditional taxidermy and mounting, or cryogenic freezing. However, most pet owners never consider what would happen to their animals in the event that they die first.

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