

Tales from the depths of estate law in Canada

By Irene Seiberling, The Leader-Post October 7, 2014



Toronto wills and estates lawyers Les Kotzer (left) and Barry Fish are co-authors of *The Wills Lawyers: Their Stories of Money, Inheritance, Greed, Family and Betrayal*. To run with story by Irene Seiberling. Handout Photo

Where there's a will, there's ... anything from greed, betrayal and anger to smiles and even laughter.

Toronto wills and estates lawyers Barry Fish and Les Kotzer have heard and seen it all - the good, the bad, and even the humorous. In their new book, *The Wills Lawyers: Their Stories of Money, Inheritance, Greed, Family and Betrayal*, the duo take readers into their world, sharing a compilation of stories.

"I know this book will touch a lot of lives," Fish said.

And in so many different ways, Kotzer said.

The book is targeted at both those who love and those who hate their family.

"It's written in plain, easy-to-read language. It's not legal gobbledeygook," Kotzer pointed out.

"You may see what you have gone through, or what you may be going through in the future."

"I have been a wills lawyer since 1973," Fish said. "Through the passage of 41 years, there is a lot that I can share. It is no coincidence that the title of our new book reflects not only what Les and I have seen, but also what we feel: the deep impressions which intrude from the effects of money, inheritance, family, greed and betrayal."

Some of the stories will shock you, Kotzer said, "showing just how low some people can go, putting family second to money and personal effects."

These include stories about financial elder abuse.

"Everyone thinks 'It couldn't happen to me!' But from what we have seen, it can happen to anybody," Kotzer cautioned.

Some stories will touch your heart by showing people's kindness, compassion and generosity, he said

And some will educate you by highlighting fundamental things you need to think about when making your will, and problems that may be in a will, he said. These stories are intended to help you avoid mistakes that others have made.

"These are stories from our life and law practice. The names and careers have been changed, but the stories are there," Kotzer explained.

In addition to stories, the book features a section on the 26 ABCs of will planning, discussing problems Fish and Kotzer have found in wills, such as outdated information, wording that is too vague, or naming multiple executors that could result in a deadlock in the decision-making process.

The book also features stories intended to bring a smile or a laugh, including inheritance-related jokes, reflecting the lighter side of a wills practice.

"One story which had an impact upon me, and which shows how low some people can go, is entitled Knife in Dad's Heart," Fish said. "This story is about how Dad died twice: his daughter's greed took away his smile, and Dad died before he ever had a chance to get it back."

One of Kotzer's favourite stories is about how another woman was able to use a childhood memory to "hear mom's words" so she could make a difficult decision about her mother's medical care after a tragic accident - despite her mother never having discussed or documented her wishes.

It was the contrast between his experiences at his family's hardware store and his work as a wills and estates lawyer that inspired him to write *The Wills Lawyers*, Kotzer said.

At the hardware store, he witnessed the pride families took in maintaining their homes. But in his law practice, he saw families battling over properties and possessions.

"I saw the two sides of life," he said. "I thought it was important to share some of these stories."

Fish and Kotzer have also co-authored *The Family Fight*, *The Family War*, and *Where There's an Inheritance*. Unlike the first three books, *The Wills Lawyers* will not be available in bookstores. It will only be available at www.thewillslawyers.com or by calling 1-877-439-3999. The hardcover book will be available for \$18.95 (plus tax and shipping) in mid to late October, Kotzer estimated, and the digital version, which can be downloaded for \$9.95 (plus tax), is expected to be available by November.

Videos of several of the stories being read by Fish and Kotzer can now be viewed at www.thewillslawyers.com. And Kotzer's song about inheritance battles is featured at www.touchyourheartsongs.com.

iseiberling@leaderpost Twitter/ISEiberling

© Copyright (c) The Regina Leader-Post