

“Girl with the Dragon Tattoo” Author Died with an Invalid Will

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Unless you don't watch TV or use the Internet, you have probably heard of the popular movie and book, “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo,” written by a Swedish investigative journalist, Stieg Larsson.

When he died of a heart attack in 2004, at the age of 50, Mr. Larsson left behind three finished crime novels that were published posthumously as the “Millennium” series. Those books made him an international writing sensation; four years after his death, he was the second best-selling author in the world, and by March 2010, his Millennium trilogy – “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo,” “The Girl Who Played with Fire” and “The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest” – had sold over 27 million copies in more than 40 different countries.

In 2008, it was announced that Mr. Larsson had written a Will in 1977, leaving his assets, including future publishing royalties, to Sweden's Socialist Party. His personal belongings and writings were to go to his companion of 32 years, Eva Gabrielsson. Mr. Larsson and Ms. Gabrielsson never married because, in Sweden, couples must register a public document with their home address. Because of Larsson's work as an investigative journalist, he received frequent death threats; they decided against marriage out of safety concerns.

Unfortunately for Ms. Gabrielsson and Swedish socialists, Mr. Larsson's Will was not witnessed and ultimately was ruled invalid. Instead, his entire estate – worth \$30 million and growing – passed to his brother and father instead of to his intended devisees.

Lesson. Stieg Larsson is not the first author whose works created a sensation after death. And while he couldn't have anticipated his eventual fame and fortune, a valid Will would have made disbursing his considerable assets much simpler.

Sometimes an estate can unexpectedly grow after death. Unpublished manuscripts, artwork and even certain businesses can exponentially increase in value. Solid estate planning documents, including a valid Will, can prevent most legal fights between heirs and make the originator's final wishes crystal-clear to a court of law.