

Amy Winehouse's Will: Singer-Songwriter Played It Smart

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Despite the tumultuous life Amy Winehouse led in her 27 years, she managed to stabilize matters after her death with an ironclad will, according to reports. Let this be a lesson to both the famous and the obscure: A will is a good idea at any adult age.

"The issue is, you never know when you will pass away," estate attorney [Kenneth Meskin](#) of Norris McLaughlin & Marcus in Bridgewater, N.J., told *DailyFinance*.

"Particularly when you're young and your life is unsettled, it may be more important."

The question of who would reap the spoils from the singer's creative output, which includes two albums and an [as-yet-published third](#), had at first pointed toward her ex-husband, the jailed thief Blake Fielder-Civil. [English law tends to favor an ex-spouse](#) if no new will has been written since the divorce, according to *Forbes.com*.

[But Winehouse's most recent will did omit Fielder-Civil](#), the *Daily Mail* reported Tuesday, so her fortune, [estimated](#) between \$9.8 million and \$32.8 million, will go to her parents, Janis and Mitch, and her brother Alex. (The *Mail* put her assets at \$16.4 million.)

The prospect of Fielder-Civil, who reportedly introduced Winehouse to hard drugs, benefiting from her passing was one of many uncomfortable scenarios that could have played out without a will in place. "I can envision that there's a number of significant legal issues arising out of her assets," said Meskin, who has no relation to the case.



Brian Kersey, AP



Matt Dunham, AP

But Winehouse made her wishes known in the most legally airtight way possible, and you don't need to have royalties from a Grammy-hogging album like *Back to Black* to go the same route. A will is a commonsense precaution for grownups with something to lose after they're gone. "The more assets you have, the more important it is," Meskin said.

In this country, the states decide on the pecking order of beneficiaries in the event someone dies without a will, Meskin said. "Instead of you making your decisions, your state in which you reside makes the decisions."

Here are a few other facts about wills that you should know:

- **Any adult who is accruing assets should think about a will.** But once you've accumulated \$100,000 or more in assets, you should get serious about it, Meskin said. There are several do-it-yourself methods that can help. One reputable one is Quicken WillMaker Plus, sold at www.Nolo.com for \$41.99, according to [Janet Novack of Forbes.com](http://JanetNovack.com). If you have more than \$200,000 in assets, seek the help of a professional, Meskin advised.

- **One of the more important determinations in a will is the executor.** This is the person you trust to carry out your wishes. Again, each jurisdiction has a designee in place based on familial relationships, if you didn't choose for yourself. If the lawful order assigns someone you didn't trust while you were alive, you're stuck with that person when you're dead. How's that for resting in peace?

- **It's all about the kids.** Perhaps the most important question you will face if you're a parent is who would take custody of your minor children if both you and your spouse have passed. Put it in the will, or the court will decide. Getting that choice down in writing can eliminate the guessing, fighting and expense of a court battle, Meskin said.

On many fronts, having a will makes sense -- even for those without a lot of dollars and cents. Said Meskin: "Those without significant assets should have their wishes known, or a court will decide."