

Did Gary Coleman Update His Will and Advance Medical Directive? By Rudy Wartella

The most recent celebrity to die an untimely death and have a “questionable” will or estate plan is Gary Coleman.ⁱ A year ago, Michael Jackson’s untimely death reminded us of the need to make sure our Wills are updated. We are reminded again, with the untimely death of Gary Coleman, to update our wills and our estate plans.

Both Michael Jackson and Gary Colemanⁱⁱ seemed to have out of date wills. Wills and Advance Medical Directives do not have expiration dates, so they can still be valid a great many years after they are executed. Gary Coleman’s ex-wife made the decision to discontinue life support on him pursuant to an Advance Medical Directive.

It is recommended that you review your will at least once a year to ensure that it still accurately reflects your personal circumstances and desires. One way to remember is to review your will each year on your birthday. If there have been no major changes during the past year, then the will can be placed back in the fireproof box until next year’s review or until there is a significant change in your life.

A significant change would be a change in your marital status, the number of children you have, your state of legal residence, or any of the named individuals in your will (beneficiary, guardian, or trustee). Gary Coleman’s ex-wife contends that she maintained a “common law” marriage with Gary. In any event, did Gary Coleman still want his ex-wife to be his beneficiary? Did he still want her to make health care decisions for him? These are some questions that an updated estate plan would have answered. Changes to your will or advance medical directives should never be made by pen-and-ink corrections to the documents themselves – anyone who wants to revise their estate planning documents should make an appointment to see a legal assistance attorney to get them updated.

A will or advance medical directive can be many years old but still accurate if nothing has changed. There is nothing that says that a will made ten years ago, for example, needs to be re-done simply based on the age of the document. On the other hand, a will could have been made six months ago, but if you have divorced since then, it may be a good time to update your will. A major change in your life such as divorce, marriage, or birth of your first child, means it is time for a new will regardless of when the last will was made. To remove any doubt, Gary Coleman should have updated his Will and Advance Medical directives when he divorced his wife.

If you have reviewed your will and would like to make some changes, the Torii Station Legal Assistance Office can prepare a new one for you. Please call 644-4332 for an appointment. August, 2010.

ⁱ Gary Coleman was the childhood star of the TV Series "Diff'rent Strokes" (1978-1986). His most famous line was to his TV brother: "What you talkin' about, Willis?" Gary Coleman's will left everything to his ex-wife.

ⁱⁱ Gary Coleman's will was made before he married his ex-wife, and he didn't change it after he divorced her.