

## ***Soap star's handwritten will challenged, family divided in grief***

Longtime daytime drama star [Kristoff St. John passed away on Feb. 3](#). St. John played Neil Winters for nearly 30 years on CBS Television's *The Young and the Restless*.

The 52-year-old actor's estate planning efforts are coming apart at the seams, [according to several reports](#). Lawsuits and counter suits. Creditor claims, ex-spouses, and family disagreements. It's all sadder than any of the melodramatic storylines St. John portrayed on the show.

The enormous stress and confusion his survivors are feeling today could likely have been considerably less if the actor had hired an experienced estate planning attorney to draft and file a will or a create a trust to protect assets for his loved ones.

### **No plan or barely a plan?**

In March, the actor's oldest daughter, Paris, filed to be named administrator over his estate, citing he died without a will.

However, within days, St. John's father, Christopher St. John, submitted a handwritten will to a probate court that called for him to be named as executor and for all monies to be divided among the actor's two daughters, Lola and Paris, with a split of 75 and 25 percent.

Paris is Kristoff St. John's oldest surviving child. She is a product of St. John's first marriage. Lola is a minor child from the actor's second marriage. At the time of his death, St. John was engaged to a 25-year-old Russian model, Kseniya Mikhaleva.

The late actor's first ex-wife, Mia St. John, who is Paris' mother, [has stated she is the sole beneficiary of his life insurance policy](#).

Paris filed an objection to the handwritten will submitted by her grandfather, contesting it was written inside a private diary and not intended to be seen by third parties. She also claims that a page had been removed from the will and argues that it raises a suspicion as to the document's validity.

In response to her objection, on April 22, the actor's father submitted a text message from August 2017 between the actor and his girlfriend at the time, in which St. John wrote:

*"I've been up all night. I drafted a hand written [sic] will, just in case. Leaving Lola and Paris my savings. I've also left you something. In my nightstand, top drawer, in the notebook, I left two checks. I made them out to you. You are to deposit these checks accordingly. Just in case."*

The judge involved appears to be directing the family to unite by recently naming Paris and her grandfather as special co-administrators "for the limited purposes" of selling a condominium the actor owned, and to manage the assets inside that dwelling and a rental unit where St. John resided.

The court case may take months to unravel, and in the meantime, St. John's family may see his few remaining assets eaten up by court costs and legal fees.

### **Financial mess**

The late actor's estate (a net value of \$122,000) isn't much, considering his long career starring on a popular television show. And, creditors are already coming out of the woodwork filing claims on the estate, including American Express, [which is suing over an unpaid credit card bill of more than \\$33,000](#).

### **History of depression**

St. John's cause of death was determined as hypertrophic heart disease, and his heart showed signs of long-term alcohol abuse, according to the Los Angeles County coroner's report.

While the actor's death was officially ruled accidental, just two days prior he was released from a mental health facility, following a 72-hour hold after making statements of harming himself, [according to several reports](#).

St. John had openly struggled in dealing with the turmoil surrounding the death of his 24-

year-old son Julian, who died by suicide in 2014. Some of the actor's final social media posts reflected on his son's death.

### **Go the extra mile**

The lessons for advisors in this family's drama are many. You never know what's going on beneath the surface unless you ask.

St. John's public face was all smiles and warmth. Fans adored him. Fellow actors admired him. He was a two-time Emmy winner who was respected as a professional and as a loving father. On the surface he appeared, strong, happy, and successful.

However, depression, heavy drinking and grief over the loss of a child can tear apart even the strongest of families. If one of your clients is suffering emotionally, do whatever you can to help them seek treatment and don't let them forgo proper planning because they're "just too stressed to deal with it now."

We hope this information is useful to you and helps your clients and their families. If you have a specific case or a question, please don't hesitate to call our office.

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