

Division without Divisiveness

***The Settlement Game: How to Settle an Estate Peacefully and Fairly* by Angie Epting Morris. \$14.95 original trade paperback, ISBN 0-9769934-2-2, published by Voyages Press, Inc., 11193 Big Canoe, Big Canoe, GA 30143. (877) 835-8449.**

You've probably heard the horror stories—how sometimes families are torn apart by hard feelings stemming from the inequitable division of estates or even from the perception that the division was not fair. As an outside observer, it might be easy to dismiss such cases as pointless, petty, and avoidable. But how easy it is for all of us to repeat the same mistakes that led to these tragic consequences! Now, there is a resource that helps you avoid such conflicts. Angie Epting Morris's *The Settlement Game* provides clear, useful advice about how to divide the family estate of deceased parents in a fair and peaceful manner. Even though it addresses a topic most of us don't particularly like to think about, this book is potentially helpful to just about everyone. Morris points out that not thinking about this situation beforehand and not having an adequate plan to deal with it are what often cause most of the all-too common heartbreaks that result from the division of estates. *The Settlement Game* will get readers thinking clearly about problems they might never have anticipated, and it will also help turn what could be a very trying experience into something positive and memorable, a time to cel-

brate family relationships rather than to destroy them.

Angie Epting Morris has worked as a cartographer, an English teacher, and a travel agent. She is also the daughter of noted attorney Eugene A. Epting, who argued the celebrated *McDaniel v. Barresi* busing case before the Supreme Court. Growing up, she heard her father's stories about the estate settlements he handled and his seasoned opinions on how family conflicts can be avoided. When both her parents died, she and her siblings found it time to put their father's advice into practice. The result, as Morris writes, is that "They emerged from the process as better friends than they had been when they started and remain close still." Now, she has made her father's advice, tested and refined by her own experience, available to everyone.

Morris establishes a tone that mitigates the seriousness of her subject matter, without becoming flippant, by structuring the book around her "game" metaphor. Early chapters describe the "ground rules," the "game setup," how to prepare "the field of play," and "keeping score." Crucial points, such as that nothing should be removed from the home or premises, are established early on, and a practical methodology for dividing the estate is lucidly presented. (You'll just need some dice, some color-coded tags, and a few forms conveniently provided in Morris's own appendix.) Throughout, the author keeps her eyes firmly on the prize: that is,

providing the conditions that will lead to a fair and peaceful settlement.

The final sections of the book usher the reader through a crucial "to-do" list, which takes into account everything from banking to taxes to credit cards to life insurance policies and Social Security. This section will be a great logistical boon to heirs stuck working their way through all the loose ends and complex arrangements of modern life. This section alone, which is really only a footnote to the game itself, is worth more than the price of the book for the lost time and headaches it will help one to avoid. The book's appendix provides useful forms that will help you to play "The Settlement Game" and to keep track of items and miscellaneous expenses. In addition, the book comes highly recommended, with a foreword by Judge Griffin Bell, who served as Attorney General in the Carter administration and recently was appointed by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld to an ad hoc Advisory Committee on new rules governing military tribunals.

The Settlement Game is one of those rare books that can benefit just about everyone—because we all will have to deal with the unfortunate passing of loved ones. Why not do so in an informed and prepared manner? Morris's clear, compact book, a model of its genre, will provide readers with just the tool they need to avoid conflict and to achieve an equitable estate division.

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