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Estates & Wills & Trusts

Robin Williams estate dispute settled



By [Charles Ticker](#)

I have been following the story of the Robin Williams estate dispute and it appears to have come to an amicable end. After his death by suicide on August 11, 2014, he left a vast estate to his family estimated to be at \$50 million. As I wrote in my initial [post](#), a claim was filed in a San Francisco court by his widow, Susan Williams. It was alleged that Robin Williams' children from his first marriage removed items from one of the family homes shortly after the actor's death. Among the items allegedly removed were jewelry, watches, and other memorabilia. Additionally, some reports suggested that there were almost 1,200 items that had to be sorted. The cost of proceeding with [estate litigation](#), accounting for, and sorting out all the possessions in dispute would have likely been vast.

It was later reported on March 30, 2015 that the parties would attempt to resolve the matter out of court. A judge gave the parties until June 1, 2015 to attempt to resolve the matter.

In early October 2015 it was reported that the parties had finally settled the dispute out of court. Although the terms of the settlement are confidential, several media outlets have reported that as part of the settlement Susan Williams would continue to live in the San Francisco home she shared with Robin Williams and she would also receive living expenses to maintain the home. Additionally, Ms. Williams would receive a few items of great sentimental value to her, specifically a watch that belonged to Robin Williams, gifts from their wedding, and a bicycle they purchased on their honeymoon.

It seems like the parties in this dispute were reasonable when it came to reaching a settlement. Many reports suggested that they all recognized the emotional toll associated with estate litigation and that Mr. Williams was a private individual. Unlike other estate disputes where wealthy parties become entrenched and utilize their vast resources against each other, the parties to this dispute were not looking for a protracted legal battle.

It has been my experience as an [estate litigation lawyer](#) and [mediator](#) that resolving an estate dispute through [estate mediation](#) is usually the quickest and most cost-efficient way to proceed. A sudden death in a family may leave family members stunned and upset and a bitter estate dispute may ensue. Some of the parties may even attempt to use the litigation process to achieve moral victories against family members in relation to disputes that date back decades. The estate litigation process may last many years with no tangible benefit to anyone.

Settling out of court also results in a timely end to the dispute. The initial claim was filed by Susan Williams in 2014 and approximately a year later, the Robin Williams estate dispute has been resolved. This likely saved vast legal expenses and emotional harm. Furthermore, the details of the settlement remained confidential, which would not happen if the parties proceeded ahead with litigation and there was a published court decision. The litigation process often exposes intimate details about the family life of the parties and it often leads to embarrassment and humiliation. Mediating to a confidential settlement avoids all of that. This is also likely to minimize the damage to the relationships within a family as opposed to a situation where litigation is used as a tool to cause embarrassment.

The Robin Williams estate dispute has not tarnished Robin Williams' legacy. The same cannot be said about many, many other celebrity estate disputes that drag on for many years and become magnets for media attention. It seems like the parties were respectful to one another, and to Mr. Williams' memory.

For more news on the Robin Williams estate dispute click [here](#).

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