

## The Intelligent Dog's Guide To A Troubled World: Home of Randolph, The Labrador Retriever

[An Update on Leona and Trouble](#) by Randolph



From time to time, perhaps until the end of time considering how much money is involved, Yours Truly will be keeping you informed about the fate of Leona Helmsely's billions that are destined to go to the dogs and a tidy sum of which for her dog Trouble (both Leona and Trouble are pictured above).

Today, the New Yorker's Jeffrey Toobin covers the ongoing Dickensian wrangles over the estate and indeed the "rightness" of giving this much money to a dog and to dogs in general (apparently at one point Helmsley's will had children and dogs in it, but the children got cut out). I welcome your thoughts on the ringing question of the article: is it right to give dogs this much money?

Below is a sample of the piece and the link is [here](#):

*Hoffman's enthusiasm obscures the fundamental moral question about how Helmsley hoped to dispose of her fortune. The way Leona altered her mission statement places the issue in especially stark terms. Version one proposed helping dogs and ailing poor children; version two—the final version—cut out the children and gave everything to the dogs. Is there any justification for such a calculation? Or does Helmsley's change, along with the broader vogue for pet bequests, reflect a decadent moment in our history?*

*"In the nineteenth century, when the robber barons started modern American philanthropy, there were no tax deductions, no incentives from the government to give, just the growing idea that with wealth comes social and moral obligation," Vartan Gregorian, the president of the Carnegie Corporation and a veteran of the New York philanthropic scene, said. "They could spend their money any way they wanted, but, once we started giving tax deductions, which*

*amounted to a publicly approved subsidy, you had to prove that the money was going for a philanthropic purpose, but that is so broad that you can give to almost anything.*

*“When you see a gift like Leona’s, it’s individualism carried to iconography,” Gregorian went on. “The whole idea that individuals can do whatever they want is part of the American psyche. It’s left to individual decision-making. That you can give to this sector of society, which is animals, as opposed to the other sector, which is human beings, tells you something about her and about the times in which we live.”*

*The specific nature of Leona’s gift appears consistent with the pervasive misanthropy of her life and her will. This was a woman, after all, who at her trial was quoted as saying about a contractor who was owed thirteen thousand dollars for installing a custom-made barbecue pit at the Helmsley estate and wanted to be paid because he had six children, “Why doesn’t he keep his pants on? He wouldn’t have so many problems.” (In his opening statement at the trial, her defense attorney said, “I don’t believe Mrs. Helmsley is charged in the indictment with being a tough bitch.”) In the light of her vast wealth, the bequests to her relatives were grudging, small, and controlling, particularly the insistence that two of Jay Panziner’s children visit his grave each year. As in life, Leona’s disdain for others contrasted with her nearly fetishistic obsession with her husband. (While Harry was alive, she held an annual ball to celebrate his birthday, known as the “I’m Just Wild About Harry” party.) The transfer of this kind of obsessive affection from Harry to Trouble seems apparent. The twelve-million-dollar trust for the dog is bigger than any other single bequest in the will. On the whole, the will reflects contempt for humanity as much as love of dogs.*

*Under the law, certainly, it was Helmsley’s right to divvy up her money any way she wanted. And she is not the first wealthy person to use a will to show a preference for dogs over humans. Rumors abound about major bequests to pets, although facts are difficult to pin down. Natalie Schafer, the actress who played Lovey, the millionaire’s wife, on “Gilligan’s Island,” is said to have left her estate for the care of her dog. (“It is still getting residuals,” Rachel Hirschfeld said.) Toby Rimes, a New York dog, is said to have inherited about eighty million dollars, and Kalu, a pet chimpanzee in Australia, may have received a bequest of a hundred and nine million dollars. (A widely reported story that a German dog named Gunther IV inherited more than a hundred million dollars appears to be a hoax.)*

*Is it right to give so much money to a dog—or to dogs generally?*

September 25th, 2008

<http://www.adogabouttown.com/?p=396>