



SELLING A LOVED ONE'S HOME

What to Know, What to Expect, and How to Move Through
the Heartbreak, Decisions, and Details After a Death

By Dr. Deena Stacer

Selling A Loved One's Home

What to Know, What to Expect, and How to Move
Through the Heartbreak, Decisions, and Details
After a Death

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Dedication

To the decision-makers whose real stories shaped this book, and who carried the grief, uncertainty, responsibility, and pressure of selling a loved one's home with strength, commitment, and heart.

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A LOVED ONE'S HOME BECOMES YOUR RESPONSIBILITY?

Understanding The Burden, The Decisions, And What No One Tells You At The Beginning

This is the new beginning to the chapter.

It may come in a phone call. It may come in a quiet conversation with a family member. It may come while you are still in shock, still grieving, still trying to understand what just happened. Somewhere in the middle of the loss, someone says the words no one feels ready to hear:

What are we going to do with the house?

That question sounds practical. It sounds simple. It sounds like the kind of thing that should have an obvious answer.

But it is rarely simple.

When a loved one dies, the home they leave behind is not just a piece of real estate. It is often full of memory, responsibility, confusion, pressure, and emotion. It may hold a lifetime of belongings. It may still hold the presence of the person who lived there. It may be the place where holidays were celebrated, children were raised, illness was endured, arguments were had, and life was lived. And now, suddenly, someone has to decide what happens next.

That is where the burden begins.

Most people do not realize how much is wrapped up in selling a loved one's home until the responsibility lands on them. What looks like one decision from the outside is often many decisions at once.

The person carrying the burden may be grieving while handling legal paperwork they do not understand. They may be dealing with family members who do not agree. They may be sorting through a house full of belongings while also worrying about mortgages, bills, taxes, insurance, repairs, timing, and what the house is even worth in its current condition.

In many cases, one person ends up carrying most of that burden.

That person may be the surviving spouse, an adult child, a close friend, the trustee, executor, administrator, the family member who lived closest, the one who was already doing the caregiving, or simply the most responsible person in the family.

Whoever that person is, the burden is usually far heavier than other people realize.

That is one of the reasons I wanted to write this book.

Over the years, I have helped families and other decision-makers sell homes after the death of a parent, spouse, sibling, or friend. Some of those sales involved conflict, delay, legal complications, hidden repair issues, deferred maintenance, difficult occupants, out-of-state decision-makers, overwhelming cleanout, or financial pressure. Some families worked together beautifully. Others could barely get through a conversation.

Every home had its own story. Every family had its own pain.

But over time, I began to see the same patterns repeat.

The person in charge often felt overwhelmed. The family often underestimated how hard the process would be. The home itself was often more complicated than expected. The legal and financial realities were often unclear at the beginning. And the emotional weight of the home was almost always greater than people expected.

That is why this book is built around real stories.

I did not want to write a book that only talked about forms, steps, and procedures. I wanted to write a book that helps families recognize themselves in the process.

I wanted to show what really happens when a loved one's home has to be sold, what makes these sales difficult, what patterns repeat, what mistakes families often make, and what helps the process go better.

Most of all, I wanted to help the person carrying the burden feel less alone and more prepared. Because that person is often trying very hard to do the right thing.

You may be trying to honor the person who died. You may be trying to be fair to the family. You may be trying to avoid conflict. You may be trying to avoid mistakes, spending too much money, being taken advantage of, or making things worse. At the same time, you may be feeling exhausted, sad, confused, angry, pressured, or unsure what to do first. That is normal.

Selling a loved one's home is very different from selling your own home.

In a traditional sale, people are usually selling their own home, their own belongings, and their own future plans. They have more freedom to decide what they want to keep, what they want to move, what they want to fix, and how they want to prepare for the next chapter.

Selling a loved one's home is different.

You are often dealing with someone else's belongings, someone else's life, someone else's unfinished business, and someone else's memory, while also trying to manage your own grief and responsibilities.

The home may still be occupied. It may be overfilled. It may be outdated. It may need repairs. It may have financial obligations tied to it. It may have legal delays attached to it. And even when everyone agrees the home needs to be sold, that does not mean the family is emotionally ready, legally ready, or practically ready to do it.

That distinction is important.

One of the biggest mistakes families make is assuming that once they decide to sell the home, the rest will be straightforward.

It rarely is.

In my experience, the sale of a loved one's home becomes much easier to understand when families recognize that certain conditions are already in place before the property ever goes on the market.

Those include the condition of the home, the financial obligations tied to it, the legal authority to sell, the level of family cooperation, and the freedom of the decision-maker to actually move the sale ahead. You do not have to solve all five at once, but it helps to know they are already shaping the sale.

When families do not understand those pre-existing conditions from the beginning, frustration builds quickly. They may not understand why the house cannot be listed right away, why more money may be needed before it can be sold, or why a sale that looked simple from the outside is becoming delayed, emotionally draining, or unstable. They may also not understand why one family member responds with anger while another is sad.

You may not know all of these answers yet, but these are the kinds of questions that help the situation become clearer.

That is why, when I begin helping a family, I am not just looking at the house. I am trying to understand the whole picture. I begin with questions like these:

Who passed away?

Who is now responsible for the home?

Is the legal authority already clear, or is that still being worked out?

Is anyone living in the property?

What kind of condition is the home in?

Are there mortgages, reverse mortgages, taxes, HOA issues, liens, or unpaid bills?

Is the family cooperative, or is conflict already brewing?
What feels most overwhelming to the person carrying the burden?

Those questions matter because they reveal what kind of sale this is really going to be.

Some home sales are emotionally difficult but legally straightforward. Some homes have financial issues, but the family is cooperative. Some sales involve homes that are physically distressed but easy to repair. Others are tangled in legal delays, family conflict, occupancy problems, limited funds, and emotional strain all at the same time.

Every story is different, but understanding the true starting point changes everything.

That is also why I do not believe in rushing families blindly onto the market.

Sometimes a quick sale is exactly the right decision. Other times, the wiser path is to step back, understand the true situation, identify what must happen first, and create a plan that fits the actual conditions surrounding the home.

A family may need cleanup. It may need legal guidance. It may need help sorting through belongings. It may need repair decisions. It may need someone steady enough to help them understand what matters most and what does not.

My role is not simply to put a sign in the yard and hope for the best. My role is to help families understand the home they are selling, the burden they are carrying, the obstacles in front of them, and the best sales strategy under the conditions that are already in place.

That may mean discussing and recommending preparation and certain repairs. It may mean advising a family not to spend money on repairs that will not change the financial outcome. It may mean helping the person in charge stop carrying decisions that do not belong on their shoulders.

It may mean recognizing that the real problem is not the house at all, but the conflict surrounding it. It may mean helping a grieving widow decide whether the home still fits the life ahead. It may mean helping an out-of-state daughter feel less alone while handling everything from far away.

The sale requires work, but first it requires helping people who are grieving, overwhelmed, and carrying a great deal of emotional weight.

That is why stories about others who have gone through the same thing matter so much here.

Stories help us see what principles alone cannot always show. They help us understand how grief affects timing, how conflict affects decisions, how hidden damage changes a sale, how loyalty and resentment can distort the process, how delay quietly drains the home's value, and how the right guidance can keep a family from feeling completely lost.

In the chapters ahead, I am going to walk you through eight real-life situations involving families, homes, grief, pressure, and difficult decisions. Each story reveals something important.

Each story shows a different side of what can happen when a loved one's home must be sold. And each story points to a deeper principle I have seen again and again in this work.

Those principles became the seven secrets in this book.

They are not secrets because no one has ever heard them before. They are secrets because most families do not fully see them at the beginning, even though those truths are often shaping the sale from the very start.

Some have to do with the home itself. Others have to do with emotional burden, family dynamics, delay, decision-making, and the hidden pressures that shape the sale long before the sign ever goes in the yard.

Many families do not realize, at first, how much the home's condition and financial obligations will affect the strategy.

They do not realize how much burden the decision-maker is carrying, how quickly old family conflict can turn the home into the next battleground, how emotionally difficult it will be to sort through belongings and let go, how much delay can cost, or how much easier the process becomes when the right person is helping them see the situation clearly and move through it one step at a time.

That is what I hope this book will do.

I hope it helps you feel calmer, understand why this process feels so heavy, recognize what matters most early, and avoid unnecessary confusion, pressure, delay, and guilt.

Most of all, I hope it helps you see that selling a loved one's home is not just about getting through escrow. It is about understanding the home, the family, the burden, the process, and the emotional reality well enough to handle it with more wisdom and less chaos.

If you are the one carrying this responsibility now, I want you to know something very clearly:

You do not have to understand everything all at once.

You do not have to make every decision today.

You do not have to carry every part of this alone.

We can begin by helping you understand what kind of situation you are in, what is really being asked of you, and what needs attention first.

That is where the process starts to make more sense.

THE 7 SECRETS THAT SHAPE THE SALE OF A LOVED ONE'S HOME

Before I walk you through the stories in this book, I want to share seven truths I have seen again and again in the sale of a loved one's home.

I call them secrets because most families do not fully see them at the beginning, even though these truths are often shaping the sale from the start.

When the family is guided through these seven things early, the strategy for the sale begins to make more sense, and the process becomes far less overwhelming for the decision-maker and the family.

Secret #1

The sale becomes more predictable when the family understands all five conditions and sets realistic expectations for how the transaction is likely to unfold.

Before a loved one's home can be sold, five conditions are already shaping the sale:

- the condition of the home
- the financial realities tied to the home
- the legal authority to sell
- the family's level of cooperation with each other
- the decision-maker's freedom to move the sale ahead

When these conditions are understood early, the family can better predict the likely timing, cost, difficulty, and pressure points of the sale. That makes it easier to understand what kind of transaction they are really in and what they are likely to face before the sale is complete.

Secret #2

The right plan of action for preparing and selling the house is based on those five conditions.

Once the family understands the five conditions shaping the sale, the next step is deciding what to do with the house.

Some homes need cleanout, hauling, selected repairs, or time before they go on the market. Some should be sold quickly in their present condition. Some justify spending money to improve the outcome. Others do not.

The right plan depends on the condition of the home, the money available, the time pressure surrounding the sale, and the kind of buyer most likely to respond. This is where the family stops guessing and begins to act with direction.

Secret #3

The way the home and the process are handled can either support the family or create more pain.

A loved one's home is not just a structure. It often carries years of memory, meaning, history, identity, and emotional weight.

Because of that, how the home is handled matters. How people speak about it matters. How belongings are treated matters. How buyers respond to it matters. Even when the sale is necessary, families can be deeply affected when the home is treated carelessly or as though it were only a transaction.

When the emotional meaning of the home is recognized instead of dismissed, families are often able to handle the sale with more patience, compassion, and understanding.

Secret #4

The person responsible for the sale is often carrying far more burden, pressure, and responsibility than others may realize.

In many families, one person ends up carrying most of the responsibility for the sale.

That person may be the trustee, executor, administrator, adult child, surviving spouse, friend, or another family member trying to handle what needs to be done. They may also be carrying grief, family pressure, legal issues, financial decisions, paperwork, repairs, cleanup, scheduling, and the emotional weight of trying to do the right thing for everyone involved.

When others do not fully understand how much is falling on that one person, the burden often becomes even heavier. When it is

recognized, the family is more likely to bring patience, support, and realistic expectations to the process.

Secret #5

Selling a loved one's home often takes more out of you than you expect.

Even when a plan is in place, the process often takes a heavier emotional and personal toll than people expect.

The person responsible is not just making decisions about a property. They are often making decisions while grieving, sorting through belongings, carrying responsibility, managing pressure, and trying to hold themselves together at the same time.

This toll is often hidden. The person carrying it may look capable on the outside while quietly becoming more exhausted, discouraged, and emotionally worn down over time. When this is recognized early, they are more likely to get the support they need and pace the process more realistically.

Secret #6

When a family already has a history of conflict, selling the home often becomes the next battleground.

In some families, the sale of the home does not create the conflict. It reveals the conflict that was already there.

The arguments may appear to be about pricing, timing, repairs, belongings, authority, or who gets to decide what happens next. But often the deeper issue is much older. It may be about mistrust, resentment, blame, entitlement, jealousy, exclusion, or control.

When this pattern is recognized early, the sale begins to make more sense. The goal is not to heal the family's history. The goal is to understand it well enough to put the right structure, boundaries, and authority in place so the sale can still move ahead.

Secret #7

The right guide can steady the process, reduce the burden, and protect the outcome.

Selling a loved one's home often requires much more than putting a property on the market.

It may involve grief, family dynamics, timing, repairs, cleanup, legal questions, pricing decisions, financial concerns, and emotional overwhelm. That is why the right guide matters.

The right guide is not just someone who can list the home. The right guide understands how to help a burdened decision-maker through both the emotional and practical side of the sale. They know what questions to ask, what problems to anticipate, what decisions matter most, and how to help move the sale ahead with steadiness and care.

Why These Secrets Matter

The stories in this book will show you what these seven secrets look like in real life.

Some families were loving but overwhelmed. Others were cooperative but delayed. Some were burdened by legal complications, financial strain, or difficult property conditions. Others were pulled into conflict that had little to do with the house itself.

But in every case, the same deeper truths were shaping what happened.

Once you understand those truths, the sale begins to make much more sense.

And when the sale makes more sense, families are far better able to handle it with more steadiness and less chaos.

WHEN THE HOUSE BECOMES THE NEXT BATTLEGROUND FOR FAMILY CONFLICT

When Six Beneficiaries, Family Conflict, and a Court-Appointed Fiduciary All Collide

When a family already has a history of conflict, selling the family home often becomes the next battleground.

What looks like a disagreement about the home is often something much deeper. The arguments may appear to be about timing, repairs, pricing, authority, or who gets to decide what happens next. But underneath those surface disagreements, the real struggle is often much older. It may be about control, jealousy, blame, resentment, entitlement, old family roles, and wounds that were never resolved.

I saw that very clearly in the sale of a home in Carlsbad on the 17th hole of the Aviara golf course.

I was brought into the situation by a fiduciary attorney who asked if I would take over the sale. By the time I entered the story, the family situation had already turned into litigation. There were six siblings involved, and only one lived in San Diego. Several attorneys were already part of the case. The home was no longer just a family asset. It had become the center of a family power struggle.

The problem had started before I was involved.

Two of the brothers had decided on their own to hire a real estate agent and put the home on the market without telling the other four beneficiaries. One of the sisters found out, not from her family, but from a next-door neighbor who casually mentioned that the property was for sale. She was furious. That discovery triggered litigation, and the matter escalated to the point that the court removed the original agent and appointed a fiduciary to oversee the sale.

That detail revealed something important. It showed that this was not only a problem of authority, but a family pattern of secrecy, exclusion, mistrust, and conflict.

This is what happens in high-conflict families. This was not a family calmly trying to solve a problem together. This was a family already functioning through secrecy, exclusion, mistrust, and conflict. The house did not create that dynamic. The house simply became the next place for it to play out. That is exactly what makes some inherited-home sales far more difficult than they should be.

By the time I stepped in, the person in charge was no longer one of the siblings. It was the fiduciary. That legal structure changed

everything. The fiduciary had the responsibility to act in the best interest of the estate and move the sale forward in a way that was neutral and defensible. My job was not to repair the family history. My job was to work within that structure, protect the value of the property, and help get the house sold.

The house itself also needed work. It was in a desirable area, but it was not ready for the market in its current condition. It needed preparation, repairs, updating, and attention. The wallpaper needed to come down. Carpet needed to be addressed. Termite issues were present. The home needed work before it could be properly positioned for sale.

But the house was not the hardest part. The house needed work, but the harder challenge was the family.

There were six beneficiaries, and with six beneficiaries often came six different versions of reality. Some wanted the sale to move ahead. Some were suspicious. Some were angry. Some appeared cooperative until the process required a real signature or decision. The family dynamics were intense. Even something as simple as who might visit the home on the Fourth of July had become an argument among the siblings. That mattered because it showed the truth of the situation. This was not just a sale. This was a family continuing a long-standing pattern of conflict, and the house had become the next battleground.

At one point during an open house, I opened a bedroom door and discovered termites swarming through the room. I asked a neighbor if I could borrow a vacuum, and he brought over a brand-new one still in the box. I spent part of that afternoon vacuuming termites while continuing to show the home. That moment may sound almost humorous now, but it captures something important.

In these cases, the person handling the sale is often managing the visible problems and the invisible ones at the same time. The termites were easier than the family dynamics.

Eventually, the neighbor across the street wrote a cash offer of \$1,400,000. That should have brought relief. Instead, it triggered the next layer of difficulty. Because of the legal structure of the case, the buyer had already been approved by the fiduciary, but the sale still had to go through a court-ordered 35-day Notice of Proposed Action so the beneficiaries could approve or object. Four of them signed quickly. The two sisters waited until the 35th day to sign and mail their approval. The buyer had to wait through that entire period before escrow could continue.

If the siblings had truly wanted the home sold quickly, they all had the same opportunity to sign the Notice of Proposed Action immediately and keep the sale moving. Four did. Two deliberately waited.

That was one of the clearest signs that the conflict was not really about selling the house.

When a solution is sitting right in front of people, and they still delay, obstruct, or stir up more turmoil, the conflict itself has become the driving force. The home had become the battleground, but the real driver was not the sale. It was the conflict. This is what happens in high-conflict families. The focus shifts away from what needs to happen to get the home sold, as the conflict takes on a life of its own.

The buyer had agreed to wait through that 35-day period. During the wait, another buyer offered \$200,000 more. The fiduciary instructed me to consider that offer equally, even though the original buyer had already been approved by the fiduciary and we were already in the

waiting period for beneficiary approval. I provided the second buyer with the inspection reports. After reviewing the true condition of the property, including about \$20,000 in termite damage and other needed work, the second buyer rejected the deal and walked away.

The fiduciary had forced the original buyer from across the street to increase his price by \$200,000 to compete with the second buyer. Once the 35-day waiting period was over and the beneficiaries had finally approved the sale, the original buyer canceled the day before we were supposed to close escrow.

Now there was no buyer.

That meant we would have had to start all over, find another buyer, and go through another 35-day waiting period. It was exactly the kind of delay this family conflict fed on, because it created one more chance for the siblings to continue the same pattern they had likely been living in for years.

At that point, I went back to the fiduciary and, after a great deal of discussion, convinced him that the house was not in good enough condition to support the higher price. We needed to face the reality of the property and lower the price to attract the right buyer. He finally relented.

Once the price was adjusted, I went back to the original buyer, the neighbor across the street. He wanted the home, so he returned to escrow and completed the transaction. His inspections had already been completed. The only thing left was for him to wire in his funds, which he did. He completed the sale in one day at the new price.

This sequence revealed again that the sale was never just about the property. If it had been, the family would have acted quickly when they had the chance. Instead, the conflict kept driving the decisions.

The house became the next battleground, and the process became one more place for the family to fight, delay, and push against reality.

During that same 35-day waiting period, the local sister began making false claims about me to the fiduciary. On three separate occasions, she told him I had said or done things that were not true. At one point, she claimed I had told a neighbor the home was selling for \$1.4 million. I had not spoken to that neighbor. In fact, the only time I had spoken with the sister was when I met her at the house to get the keys.

Each time, the fiduciary would call me and ask whether what she was saying was true. Finally, I said to him, “Do you trust me? Do you believe I have integrity? Do you believe I have expertise in handling difficult real estate transactions? Do you believe I know how to get this sale closed?”

He said yes.

I told him, “Then the next time she calls you with a story about me, ask her for the source. Get the phone number and verify it yourself.”

It happened one more time. He asked her for the source. First, she said it was the neighbor, then she changed it to the neighbor's husband. When he asked for the phone number, she never gave it to him. After that, the accusations stopped.

He then came back to me and said, in essence, “You were right. This is about the conflict, not the sale.”

That moment revealed how conflict spreads in these situations. It does not stay neatly attached to one issue. It pulls in the fiduciary, the Realtor, the buyer, and anyone nearby. What looks like confusion or

miscommunication is often part of a much older pattern of conflict that has been playing out in the family for years.

In this case, the brothers secretly listed the home without the others knowing. The sister fed false stories to the fiduciary. Two sisters held back their signatures until the last possible moment. The higher offer stirred the pot and created even more distrust. The original buyer across the street lost confidence in the process and canceled. Yet when the terms finally became realistic, and the noise settled down, he came back and completed the sale immediately.

This is what makes these situations so painful and so revealing at the same time. The house may look like the issue from the outside, but it is often not the real problem at all. It is simply the next place where the family conflict shows up.

Even after the transaction closed, the conflict did not stop. The fiduciary later told me the siblings were still fighting about the pink furniture that had belonged to the mother and about whether they would be allowed to go to the house on the Fourth of July to watch the fireworks over the golf course.

The ironic part was that we closed in June.

By July, the house belonged to the buyer across the street.

That story has stayed with me because it revealed something much deeper than a dispute over authority or a disagreement about selling a home.

What I saw in that family was a pattern of conflict that had likely been there for years. The house did not create it. The sale did not create it. The house simply became the next place for that conflict to live.

In many families, conflict has been sitting quietly for a long time. It may lie dormant, but selling a loved one's home can trigger it again and turn the home into the next battleground.

That is what families often do not understand in situations like this. They think the fight is about the home. They think it is about the sale, the money, the paperwork, the timing, or the furniture. Usually, it is not.

It is about control. It is about exclusion. It is about old resentments. It is about blame. It is about mistrust. It is about who felt left out, who felt overlooked, and who no longer trusts whom.

The house simply becomes the new battleground where all of that gets acted out.

In this case, the secret listing, the delayed signatures, the false accusations, the fight over the extra \$200,000, the distrust that pushed the buyer away, and even the arguments that continued after closing all pointed to the same truth: this was not really about the house. It was about the family's way of relating through conflict.

That is one of the most important truths in these sales. When family conflict is driving the process, the real estate transaction becomes heavier, slower, and more painful than it should be. The house may be what everyone is arguing about, but the deeper problem is usually the conflict itself. That is why structure, boundaries, and neutral authority often become necessary. The goal is not to cure the family conflict. The goal is to understand it well enough to keep the sale from being destroyed by it.

Questions People Ask When the House Becomes the Next Battleground for Family Conflict

1. The Person in Charge:

What happens when a family cannot move forward without conflict?

In high-conflict families, the issue is often not authority at the beginning. The deeper issue is that the family cannot function together without conflict. Authority becomes necessary because the conflict makes cooperation impossible.

That is what happened in this story. The siblings were not functioning like a family trying to solve a problem together. They were functioning like a conflicted system. The secret listing, the litigation, the delayed signatures, and the false accusations all pointed to the same truth: the conflict was already there, and it made neutral authority necessary.

When a family cannot move forward without conflict, someone outside the conflict often has to step in to create enough structure for the sale to continue.

2. The People Involved:

How do family members turn the sale of a home into a battleground?

A home sale becomes a battleground when the people involved bring old resentment, mistrust, exclusion, jealousy, blame, entitlement, and power struggles into the process.

That is what happened here. Two brothers acted secretly. One sister found out from a neighbor. Others delayed. False accusations were

made. Signatures were withheld. Even after the house sold, the family kept fighting.

That is the deeper lesson. The sale of the home often does not create the conflict. It exposes the family's existing way of dealing with each other.

3. The Property:

Why can a beautiful or valuable home still become difficult to sell in a high-conflict family?

Because the problem is not always the house.

In this case, the home had strong value. It sat on the Aviara golf course and had beautiful views. At the same time, it needed updating, preparation, and repair work, including termite treatment.

But even with those issues, the house itself was not the real reason the sale became so difficult. The bigger problem was the conflict surrounding it. A valuable home can still become very hard to sell when the people involved are fighting, delaying, mistrusting each other, and destabilizing the process.

The property matters, but conflict can damage a sale far more than families realize.

4. The Process:

How does family conflict complicate the legal and real estate process?

Family conflict makes every step harder.

In this story, the sale had to move through litigation, fiduciary oversight, a 35-day Notice of Proposed Action, delayed signatures,

buyer distrust, price disruption, and the collapse of a nearly completed escrow.

That is what happens when conflict gets woven into the process. A sale that should move forward becomes fragile. Every decision becomes loaded. Every delay creates more tension. Every new development becomes one more opportunity for mistrust and disruption.

The process becomes complicated not only because of the legal structure, but also because the family conflict keeps interfering with it.

5. The Pressure Points:

What pressure points reveal that the real problem is family conflict, not the house itself?

The clearest sign is when the conflict continues, no matter what is happening with the property.

In this chapter, the siblings fought over who had authority, who had been excluded, when they would sign, what had been said, whether the buyer would stay, how much the house should bring, the mother's furniture, and even who would enjoy the property on the Fourth of July after it was already sold.

That is how you know the house is not the true issue.

When the conflict keeps shifting from one subject to another, but never really ends, the real issue is the family dynamic itself. The house simply becomes the latest place for that conflict to attach itself.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE HOME CANNOT BE PUT ON THE MARKET?

When Legal Delay, Family Conflict, and Unclear Claims Stall the Sale

Sometimes a family knows the home will need to be sold, but that does not mean the sale can move forward. Sometimes the conflict, the legal complications, and the family dynamics become so heavy that the home never even makes it to market.

That is one of the hardest realities for families to understand. Delay does not always look dramatic from the outside. It may look like waiting for the attorney, waiting for paperwork, waiting for the family to agree, waiting for someone to move, or waiting for the legal process to work itself out. But while everyone is waiting, the burden remains, the home remains, and the opportunity to move forward remains frozen.

I worked with Lily, a woman in her 70s.

Lily had lived in San Diego her entire life. She grew up in a small home on a very valuable piece of land in Solana Beach. Over time, the structure had been expanded as the family grew, but the property was essentially a teardown because the land could support several luxury homes or multiple condominium units.

After her father died, Lily cared for her mother until she died as well. Lily had already been named the trustee of her parents' trust, so she knew she would eventually be the one responsible for handling the sale of the home.

But when the time came, Lily was not ready to sell it.

Family members were still living in the house. Her granddaughter and great-grandchildren were there. The home held decades of memories, and letting go of it felt like losing her parents all over again.

At the same time, her sister, who had lived out of state for many years and had not been involved in their parents' care, wanted the home sold so she could receive her share of the inheritance.

That difference between the two sisters caused tension.

Lily had been the caregiver for her parents. She had carried the practical burden. She had lived close enough to see what was happening. Her sister had not carried that same burden, but she still wanted the financial result.

Lily's sister hired an attorney because she was tired of waiting for Lily to sell the home, and that forced Lily to hire an attorney as well.

We were preparing to put the property on the market so its true value could finally be established.

Then the situation became even more complicated. A niece, the daughter of Lily's brother who had died years earlier, hired her own attorney and tried to claim a share of the property, even though there were serious questions about whether she had any legal right to it at all.

The attorneys told us to wait before placing the home on the market.

That wait stretched into more than a year and a half.

During that time, the property sat off the market while attorneys argued over claims, interpretations, and imagined outcomes. The home was not being exposed to real buyers, so no one truly knew what the market would pay. The family was fighting over assumptions instead of allowing the market to determine the value a buyer would actually offer.

Meanwhile, legal fees were growing, emotional exhaustion was growing, and the inheritance itself was quietly shrinking while everyone waited.

One of the hardest parts of Lily's story is that she is the trustee, which means she is the person expected to move the process forward. Yet because of the legal conflict, the attorney changes, and the fact that the property is still tied up, she cannot actually do what she has been left in charge to do. That creates a painful kind of paralysis. She carries the responsibility, but she does not yet have the practical ability to bring the matter to resolution.

At the time of this writing, the property is still not on the market.

Lily's former attorney stepped away from the case and moved into a different area of law, which meant Lily had to start over and wait for a new attorney to step in. The attorney she was referred to has been

out of town, so at this moment Lily is still waiting for him to return so she can formally hire him and begin moving forward again.

That creates another layer of delay and another layer of burden. The new attorney has not lived through the arguments, the litigation, and the family conflict that have already happened. He will have to be brought up to speed from the beginning, which means additional attorney fees for Lily, and those fees eat into what the family may eventually receive.

Even the appraisal that was done a year and a half ago may no longer reflect today's value closely enough to rely on it with confidence.

In the middle of all of this, I received an offer through another real estate agent that, in my opinion, was about a million dollars too low. Unfortunately, I could not act on that offer in the way I normally would because the property was not on the market, and Lily did not currently have an attorney in place. In other words, the sale process was too tied up for the family to know whether that offer was fair, safe, or the best available option.

When a home is on the market, qualified buyers have the opportunity to see it, assess it, and compete for it. That is how the market reveals value. Buyers compete through price and terms, and that competition helps establish the true value a willing buyer is prepared to pay for the property, including its development potential.

My role as the real estate broker is to expose the home to the market so qualified buyers have a fair opportunity to see it, compete for it, and reveal what they are truly willing to pay. That is how value is established in the real world, especially when a property has unusual land or development potential.

And while the home sits off the market, legal fees continue, information becomes stale, opportunities are missed, and the person in charge is still left carrying a burden they cannot fully resolve.

This situation is difficult and creates even more pressure for Lily. I was hired to help sell the home, but neither Lily nor I can do our jobs because of the delays.

A legal delay does not just postpone a sale. It can freeze action, increase costs, and keep a family stuck while time keeps moving.

Not every chapter in a book like this ends with a clean sale and a ribbon tied around the story. Some stories are still unfolding. Some homes are still caught in the middle of grief, conflict, delay, and legal process. Lily's story is one of those.

And that is exactly why it belongs here.

It shows how a family can know the home will probably need to be sold and still be unable to move forward. It shows how the person who did the caregiving may also become the one burdened with the sale. It shows how legal conflict can stop a valuable property from ever reaching the open market. And it shows how dangerous it is when families begin fighting over what they imagine the property is worth instead of allowing the market to determine the value a buyer would actually offer.

That story has stayed with me because it reveals something very important: sometimes the biggest problem is not selling the home. Sometimes the biggest problem is not being able to get the home on the market at all. And while the home sits off the market, legal fees continue, information becomes stale, opportunities are missed, and the person in charge is left carrying a burden they cannot fully resolve.

This story shows that when the starting conditions are not in place, especially legal authority and the freedom to move the sale forward, even a valuable property can remain stuck for a very long time. It also shows how heavy the burden becomes for the person left in charge.

Questions People Ask When the Home Cannot Even Be Put on the Market

1. The Person in Charge:

What do I need to understand if I am the one left in charge, but I still cannot move the sale forward?

One of the hardest realities in a case like this is that the person in charge may still be unable to act.

People often assume that once someone is named trustee, executor, or decision-maker, the sale can move forward. But that is not always true.

Sometimes the person in charge has the responsibility without the practical ability to get the home sold.

That was true for Lily.

She was the trustee. She was the one expected to move the process forward. But because of legal conflict, attorney changes, competing claims, and delay, she could not actually do what she had been left in charge to do.

That kind of situation creates a painful form of paralysis.

The person in charge may feel responsible, pressured, blamed, emotionally exhausted, and stuck all at the same time.

If this is happening to you, it is important to understand that your role may be clear on paper, but the path forward may still be blocked in real life. That does not mean you are failing. It may simply mean the situation is tied up in complications that must be resolved before the home can move forward.

Being the person in charge can feel especially painful when you are also the person who carried the caregiving burden, the emotional burden, or the family burden before the sale was ever even part of the conversation.

2. The People Involved:

Who are the people involved, and how can their emotions, expectations, or legal actions block the sale?

The home may be the visible issue, but the people around it often determine whether the sale moves forward or stalls.

That includes siblings, other heirs, beneficiaries, nieces or nephews, attorneys, trustees, anyone making a claim, and anyone whose emotions, expectations, or legal actions affect the situation.

In Lily's case, the people were a major part of the blockage.

Lily had been the caregiver and had carried the burden of helping her parents. Her sister had not been involved in the same way but wanted the home sold so she could receive her share. Then a niece entered the picture and tried to claim a share of the property as well.

Now the sale involved far more than the home itself.

It had become about caregiving versus inheritance, fairness versus resentment, legal claims versus assumed rights, and old family differences suddenly showing up inside the estate.

That is something many people do not fully expect.

If you are left in charge, one of the first things to assess is not only the house, but the people. Who is involved? Who has legal standing? Who has emotional influence? Who is likely to create conflict? Who is waiting, pressuring, accusing, or assuming?

The people around the estate can either support the process or block it completely.

And when grief, greed, entitlement, old family wounds, or competing expectations get involved, the sale can stop before it ever begins.

3. The Property:

What do I need to understand about the property itself when it is tied up and cannot reach the market?

When a home cannot be put on the market, people often stop thinking clearly about the property itself.

But the property still matters.

In Lily's case, this was not an ordinary home. It sat on very valuable land in Solana Beach. The house itself was essentially a teardown, but the land had significant development potential. That made the delay even more serious because this was not a small asset.

When a property is blocked from reaching the market, several things happen.

The true market value remains unknown. Old appraisals may become stale. Private offers may be misleading. Opportunities may be missed. And the physical and financial burden continues while nothing is being resolved.

This is what made Lily's situation so frustrating.

The property itself may be valuable, but until it is exposed to the market properly, no one truly knows what a qualified buyer is willing to pay.

If you are left in charge of a property that cannot reach the market, you need to understand this: a valuable property and an accessible inheritance are not the same thing.

Until the path is clear enough to expose the home properly, the property may remain valuable on paper while still being unusable in practice.

So even in a blocked sale, the property still needs to be understood clearly: its condition, its market position, its strengths, the assumptions people are making about it, and what might change if it were actually exposed to real buyer competition.

4. The Process:

What parts of the process can delay things, increase costs, or keep the home from ever being put on the market?

This is where many people are caught off guard.

They assume the main decision is whether to sell.

But in a blocked sale, the process itself becomes the problem.

That process may include attorney involvement, competing legal claims, trustee questions, probate or trust issues, document review, stalled decision-making, new counsel stepping in, appraisals becoming outdated, and long periods of waiting while costs continue.

That was exactly the problem in Lily's case.

The attorneys told us to wait before placing the home on the market. That wait stretched into more than a year and a half. Then Lily's attorney stepped away. Then she had to wait for a new attorney to return and step in. And all the while, legal fees continued, and the property remained off the market.

That is the part many people do not anticipate.

Delay is not neutral.

Delay costs money. Delay increases fatigue. Delay makes information stale. Delay can shrink what the family eventually receives. Delay can keep the person in charge trapped in a burden they cannot complete.

If you are in this kind of situation, one of the most important things to understand is that legal or procedural delays do not just postpone the sale. They can change the value of the outcome.

That is why it is so important to have the right legal guidance for the legal process and the right real estate guidance for the sale process. They are connected, but they are not the same thing.

5. The Pressure Points:

What pressure points tend to heat things up in a blocked sale, and what kind of professional help keeps the situation grounded until the path clears?

Pressure points are the places where a blocked sale becomes emotionally or financially volatile.

In a case like Lily's, those pressure points included family conflict, legal bills, uncertainty about value, an outdated appraisal, a private low offer, emotional fatigue, and the ongoing burden of waiting.

One of the biggest pressure points in this chapter was imagined value.

The family had not allowed the market to determine what a buyer would actually pay, but they were still arguing over what they thought the property was worth.

Then a low offer came in through another real estate agent. In my opinion, it was about a million dollars too low. But because the property was not on the market and Lily did not currently have an attorney in place, the offer could not be handled, challenged by competing buyers, or fully evaluated the way it should be when a home is on the market.

This is exactly why these situations require more than someone who simply knows how to list a home. They require a real estate professional who understands both the emotional and practical sides of the sale, who can stay grounded in the middle of legal delay, and who knows how to help the person in charge stay steady until the path is clear enough to move forward.

That kind of professional helps the person in charge stay grounded, separate legal delay from personal failure, understand what the market can and cannot tell them yet, avoid reacting to assumptions, and be ready to move quickly once the legal blockage is removed.

That was what Lily needed.

The most important thing I could do was not force the sale before it was possible. It was to help her stay steady while the process remained blocked, so that when the path finally opened, she would be able to move forward with clarity.

Once the legal path clears and the home can finally be put on the market, another question often follows: What happens when the entire burden of handling the estate falls on one person?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARE LEFT IN CHARGE OF HANDLING THE ESTATE?

When Grief, Burden, and Responsibility All Fall on One Person

Sometimes the problem is not that the home cannot be put on the market. Sometimes the problem is that the person left in charge is grieving too deeply to let go.

I was referred by a friend at an estate planning organization to a man named Matt.

Matt and Kurt had been good friends for many years. Their friendship began when they worked together at the same company. Both of them repaired trucks that had been cited for being out of compliance on the highway. They did that work together for about

fifteen years. Over time, they built not only a working relationship but a deep friendship and loyalty to each other.

Later, after they retired, Kurt bought a school bus and fixed it up so they could continue doing mobile repair work.

At the same time, Kurt bought a large older house. Over the years, he and Matt worked on that house together as well. In many ways, it felt like Matt's home, too. He spent weekends there working on the house or on projects with Kurt.

The house itself was unusual. It was a large home with the kitchen upstairs and the bedrooms downstairs. The kitchen and living room had the view, so the balcony added to the entertainment and the view. It was built in a way that allowed a motorhome to be parked underneath it. They installed new air conditioning. They reworked the interior of the unit behind the garage, got it cleaned up, and turned it into a rentable ADU. There was a three-car garage, a lot of room in the driveway, and a great deal going on at that property.

By the time Kurt died, the property also included a number of complications Matt would have to deal with. Kurt's ex-wife, Penny, was living in the house. His stepdaughter was there. A tenant was living in the ADU. There was a bus on the property that Kurt used for business. There was a skip loader. There were multiple cars. There were motorcycles. There were tools and equipment. All of that would become Matt's responsibility.

About a week before Kurt died, he told Matt he had made him the trustee.

Matt did not want that role. He told him no.

Then Kurt died unexpectedly.

Matt was not just dealing with the sale of a home. He was dealing with the death of his best friend. And because he had worked beside Kurt for so many years, first in business and then on the property itself, the house held enormous emotional meaning for him. It was filled with shared effort, memories, loyalty, and connection. Letting go of the house did not feel like selling property. It felt like losing Kurt all over again. It felt like losing Kurt's memory forever.

The first time I met Matt, I said to him, "I am so sorry about the loss of your friend. I would not wish that on anyone."

He responded right away, "You're the right agent to help me."

That stayed with me because I could see from the beginning that this was not going to be a simple trust sale. This was going to be a sale shaped by grief, responsibility, resentment, delay, and a deep emotional attachment to the home.

Matt also had stress in his own life outside of the property. His father was aging quickly and becoming restless, and Matt had put cameras in his father's home so he could keep an eye on him. That concern stayed on Matt's mind too. It was one more piece of emotional strain he was carrying while trying to handle Kurt's estate.

About a week after Kurt died, his brother Kevin came in from out of state with a flatbed and took much of the valuable property from the home, including motorcycles, tools, equipment, and other items that should have remained in the trust until Matt, as trustee, could properly handle them.

That created tremendous resentment for Matt.

For years, Matt had been frustrated because Kurt was always helping Kevin financially, sending him money to get through the month, and

at times helping Kevin's daughter, Jenny, too. So the resentment did not begin after Kurt died. It was already there.

It was such an insult, and so painful for Matt, to have Kevin intrude on Kurt's home with his flatbed and take the valuable property that should have remained in the trust. It was greedy. It was a violation. And it further fueled Matt's anger toward Kevin and Kevin's daughter, Jenny.

As if that were not enough, there were also delays and complications with the estate that affected the house financially. It took six months for the IRS issue to be resolved so Matt could get access to the funds connected to the property. During that time, he was paying the mortgage, the water, and the utilities out of pocket. That delay added pressure, frustration, and one more reminder that the house still belonged to the life and death of his friend.

Matt kept working on the house because, in many ways, it helped him stay connected to Kurt. He had worked on it with Kurt for years, and after Kurt died, continuing to work on it became part of his grieving process.

He worked on that house for two years before we finally got it on the market.

After two years, legal counsel told him he had to get the home on the market.

That was a turning point.

Until then, the work had given him time to grieve. It gave him something to do with his hands while his heart caught up to the reality of Kurt's death. But now the pressure was changing. The

house was no longer just a place to work on and stay connected to Kurt. It was time to let go and put it on the market.

Around that time, Matt asked me to have my contractor paint the rooms in the house. The work was done, but then I got a call from the referral person at the estate planning organization while Matt was on the phone with her, upset about the paint job my contractor had done.

That was uncomfortable because I was being pulled into the problem without being there, and I could not tell what was really going on. She already knew Matt and had known him for years. She told me, "He's a good man." So I knew there was more to it than anger over a paint job, especially because my contractor's work is very good.

My contractor and I both drove up there to see what we needed to do to resolve the issue he was complaining about. At first, we thought he wanted all the closets repainted. I sent my contractor off to buy five gallons of paint.

While he was gone, I said to Matt, "It must be really hard to miss your friend."

That changed everything.

Matt admitted he would give anything to have Kurt back and to be the one living in the house. In other words, he did not want to sell it. Once he said that, he calmed down. The anger softened because the real emotion underneath it finally had words.

And in the end, he really only wanted the trim on one hallway closet repainted and a bedroom shelf painted.

That moment says a lot.

The problem was not really the paint.

It was the pressure of being told he had to get the home on the market.

It was the end of his grieving season.

It was the beginning of letting go.

Because the insurance agent had said the house could not be left vacant, Kurt's ex-wife, Penny, stayed on the property. She moved from the main house into the ADU, and Kurt's stepdaughter moved out and found another place to live. That was important because the stepdaughter had special needs, and getting her moved appropriately helped simplify the situation. Penny stayed throughout the transaction and moved out on the day the property closed, when the buyer moved in.

That arrangement helped protect the property and kept the insurance in place, but it also added one more layer of complexity.

Matt also had to sell the vehicles, the bus, the skip loader, tools, and other items that were of value. All of that was part of the responsibility Matt inherited when Kurt died.

Eventually, we did get the home on the market.

The day we put the home on the market, there was a water leak. Because the kitchen was upstairs and the bedrooms were downstairs, a kitchen faucet leak affected the ceiling below and made the carpet wet. The leak was repaired.

The buyer came through on the very day that leak was being repaired.

We negotiated an offer, opened escrow, and then the buyer's agent began insisting there was water damage and claiming there was mold.

We brought in our own restoration company to look for leaks and make recommendations. The contractor repaired the recommendations. We replaced the wallboard in the bedroom, repaired other affected areas, and the problem was resolved.

Then the buyer's agent insisted there was mold, so we brought in a mold inspector.

The result was clear. There was no mold.

The second report was almost laughable. It essentially recommended opening the windows and running fans. It was not a real mold issue.

Even so, during the request-for-repairs time frame in escrow, the buyer's agent began to demand more money for the supposed mold issue.

That greatly frustrated Matt.

At the same time, I learned Penny had actually given the buyer a key to the home. It was inappropriate for the buyer to be there without his agent, and it was a violation for him to have that kind of access during escrow. But it also told me something very important.

The buyer loved the house. That became important because a buyer's behavior often tells you how deeply they want the home. And when you know that, you know more clearly how to manage the negotiations. He had been there every day, misty-eyed over the home, measuring and planning. He was not going away just because we said no to a request for more money.

At one point, Matt asked me what to do about the extra money the buyer's agent was pushing for.

I told him no.

There was no mold. We had already offered the buyer a \$10,000 credit. It was a courtesy to offer that money. It was not required. In real estate, a seller credit is a courtesy, not an automatic entitlement.

So I told Matt, “No. Hold your ground. The buyer loves this house. He is not going to cancel over this. It is the buyer’s agent pushing his luck, not the buyer.”

So we held our ground.

There was another issue at the same time. Because this was a VA loan in California, the property needed a termite clearance. That meant the home had to go through the required termite process so the transaction could close. Either the buyer or the seller had to pay for it. If Matt refused, we could have delayed the transaction, complicated the loan, or even risked losing the buyer.

The cost was \$6,500.

Matt balked at first. He believed prior termite work had already been done. But according to the termite company, the prior inspection had been several years earlier, the house had not been fully tented, and the property needed more work in order to obtain clearance.

Matt did not want to spend the money.

I understood why. Kevin was still entitled to receive money from the estate, even after all the years Kurt had supported him and even after Kevin had come in and taken property he should not have taken.

So I explained it to Matt this way: if that \$6,500 was not spent on the termite clearance, then it would simply remain in the estate and eventually benefit Kevin. But if we used it to do what needed to be done to complete the sale properly, then it was being used for the

house, for the transaction, and for the responsibility Matt had been entrusted to carry.

The minute he realized that, he authorized the work.

We got the termite work done.

The story about Matt is an example of how being left in charge of handling an estate can become much bigger, heavier, and more complicated than a person ever expected.

It is not just about selling a home.

It is about carrying grief, responsibility, resentment, decisions, delays, money, and pressure all at the same time.

The home was not just something Matt needed to sell.

It was something he needed to say goodbye to.

Matt was carrying grief, financial burden, property responsibility, delay, pressure, and resentment all at once. That is what made the burden so heavy and the toll so personal.

Questions People Ask When They Are Left in Charge of Handling the Estate

1. The Person in Charge:

What do I need to understand about being the person left in charge?

The first thing to understand is that being left in charge means much more than signing papers or hiring a real estate agent.

It means someone has trusted you, or life has placed you, in the position of carrying the responsibility for what happens next.

That responsibility may include dealing with the house, protecting the property, sorting through belongings, managing repairs, paying bills, communicating with family members, working with legal professionals, making decisions under pressure, and eventually getting the home sold.

The emotional state of the person in charge matters too.

Some people are grieving deeply. Some are reluctant. Some are overwhelmed. Some are duty-bound and determined. Some are angry that they are the ones left holding it all.

Matt did not want the job. He said no when Kurt told him he had made him the trustee. But after Kurt died, Matt still stepped in and did what had to be done.

That is important.

The person left in charge is not always refusing to do the job. Sometimes they are hurting while trying to do it.

And that is a very different thing.

If you are the one left in charge, you need to understand that the job may touch every part of your life for a while. It may take more time, more emotional energy, and more decision-making than you expected. That does not mean you are failing. It means the role is real, and it is heavy.

2. The People Involved:

Who are the people involved, and how can they affect the sale?

The sale is never just about the house.

It is also about the people.

That includes the person in charge, the family members, the beneficiaries, the attorneys, the fiduciaries, the estate sale people, tenants, ex-spouses, buyers, buyers' agents, and anyone else whose behavior, decisions, or emotions can affect the process.

Sometimes, the people are cooperative.

Sometimes they are not.

Matt's situation included Kevin, who came in with a flatbed and took valuable property from the house. It included Kevin's daughter, Jenny, whom Matt already resented because Kurt had supported them financially for years. It included Penny, Kurt's ex-wife, who remained on the property to satisfy the insurance issue and help keep the house from being vacant. It included the legal professionals who were helping move things along. And it later included a buyer's agent who kept pushing for more money even though the facts did not support it.

All of those people affected the sale.

If you are left in charge, one of the first things to understand is this: the people around the estate can either help stabilize the situation or make it much harder.

That is why it is important to know who has authority, who has influence, who is cooperative, who is emotional, who may create conflict, and who needs to be managed carefully.

Many times, the difficulty in an estate sale is not only the house. It is the people attached to the house.

3. The Property:

What do I need to understand about the property itself before I make decisions?

The property matters.

Before you can make good decisions, you need to understand what kind of house you are dealing with, what condition it is in, who is living there, what is inside it, and what may need to happen before it can be put on the market.

Some properties are fairly straightforward.

Others are full of complications, including deferred maintenance, repairs, occupancy issues, clutter, valuable belongings, vehicles, tenant situations, insurance issues, unusual layout problems, and budget limitations.

Matt's property had many of those layers. It was a large older house with an ADU, multiple vehicles, a bus, a skip loader, tools, motorcycles, and people living on the property. It needed preparation. It needed decisions. It needed time. And it needed someone to keep moving it forward.

If you are the person in charge, you need to understand that the house itself may create a large part of the burden.

The condition of the house affects how much money may need to be spent, how fast it can go on the market, who can live there or stay there, how easy it is to insure, what buyers will expect, and how stressful the sale may become.

That is why one of the first practical steps is to get a realistic understanding of the property: what condition it is in, what needs

to be repaired, what can be sold as-is, what must be addressed, what is worth doing, and what is not worth doing.

These are not just construction questions. They are decision-making questions, budget questions, and emotional questions, too.

4. The Process:

What parts of the process can delay things, complicate things, or cost more than I expected?

This is where many people are caught off guard.

The process often takes longer and becomes more complicated than they imagined.

That can include trust or probate issues, delays in getting legal authority clarified, IRS problems, missing paperwork, insurance requirements, questions about who pays which bills, occupancy issues, repair decisions, loan requirements, and timing delays that stretch on for months.

Matt had an IRS delay that took six months to resolve. During that time, he was paying the mortgage, the water, and the utilities out of pocket. That alone was enough to create frustration and pressure.

Then there was the timing of getting the house ready. Matt worked on the house for two years before it finally went on the market. That time gave him room to grieve, but it also stretched the process far longer than many people would expect.

Then there were the transaction complications: the water leak, the restoration work, the mold claim that turned out not to be real, the buyer's agent pushing for more credits, and the VA termite clearance that had to be completed so the deal could close.

If you are left in charge, you should expect that there may be delays, detours, and expenses you did not foresee.

That does not always mean something is going wrong in a catastrophic way.

It often means you are in the middle of a real estate transaction shaped by death, legal responsibilities, property issues, and human behavior.

It is also why the legal side and the real estate side need to be understood separately. Legal professionals help you understand the rules, authority, and formal process. A skilled real estate professional helps you move the house through the practical obstacles that arise on the way to closing.

5. The Pressure Points:

What pressure points tend to heat things up, and what kind of professional helps keep it all moving?

Pressure points are the places where emotions, conflict, and decisions start to heat up.

They can include grief, resentment, deadlines, buyer demands, repair requests, pricing disagreements, belongings, decision fatigue, arguments over money, or small issues that suddenly feel huge.

In Matt's story, the paint was a pressure point.

It looked like a paint problem, but it was not really about the paint. It was about the pressure of finally having to get the home on the market. It was about the end of his grieving season. It was about the beginning of letting go.

The termite clearance became another pressure point.

On the surface, it looked like a fight over \$6,500. Underneath it was resentment, grief, and the reality that Kevin was still going to receive money from the estate.

The buyer's agent pushing for more money became another pressure point.

On the surface, it looked like a negotiation issue. Underneath it was a test of whether Matt had the support and clarity to hold his ground.

That is why these situations require more than someone who simply knows how to list a home. They require a real estate professional who understands both the emotional and practical sides of the sale and who knows how to move the home through obstacles on the seller's side and the buyer's side until it closes.

A professional like that understands how grief affects decisions, how family dynamics spill into the sale, how to evaluate when a buyer is truly committed, when a credit is a courtesy, and when it should be refused, how to read pressure without being controlled by it, and how to steady the person in charge when things start to feel too hot.

That is what made the difference for Matt.

He did not just need someone to list the home.

He needed someone who could help him carry the burden, sort through the complications, keep the transaction from being pushed around, and get it closed with clarity and strength.

That is what the right guide does.

They do not remove the grief.

They do not erase the complications.

But they help the person in charge move through the mess with steadiness, protection, and enough wisdom to get to the other side.

WHEN THE HOUSE NO LONGER FITS THE LIFE AHEAD

What Should I Do With The House After My Spouse Dies?

When a spouse dies, one of the hardest questions a surviving husband or wife may face is this:

What should I do with the house now?

That question sounds simple, but it is not simple at all.

The house is not just a piece of property. It may be the place where you built a marriage, raised children, cared for your spouse through illness, celebrated holidays, welcomed friends, and tried to hold life together. It may also be the place where the bills now feel heavier, the rooms feel emptier, and every decision feels too big.

That is why this is such an important discussion.

A surviving spouse is often not making one decision. They are making a series of decisions while grieving, tired, scared, maybe dealing with physical issues of their own, and not always knowing

what the financial future will look like. Sometimes the spouse who died handled the bills, the finances, the repairs, or the planning, and now the surviving spouse is left trying to figure out what is even true.

I worked with Liz, a friend of mine, who became a widow after her husband died. He had been sick for several years, and by the time he passed, she was already worn down physically and emotionally. She also had her own health issues. She was in pain. She was grieving the loss of the man she had loved for thirty years, and she was facing a future that looked nothing like the life they had built together.

Liz knew early that without her husband's income, she would probably have to make housing and financial changes. But knowing that in your mind is not the same as being emotionally ready to act on it.

Liz loved that house. It was not a luxury house, but it was a sweet home full of light and comfort. It had worked well for them. They were happy there. So even though she probably knew she could not stay forever, she still had to work through the emotional, financial, and physical realities, along with all the other decisions that come with making a move.

She had to ask herself hard questions.

Could she afford to stay in the home without his income? Did she even want to stay in the home if it meant carrying that burden alone? Was the house still the right fit for her physically? Should she stay in San Diego County or move somewhere more affordable? If she moved, where would she go? What would she take with her? What kind of life could she actually live next?

Liz went through all of those questions over time.

She looked at whether she could stay in San Diego County. We talked about different possibilities. At one point, I even took her to look at a less expensive rental, but it was not a good fit for her. It may have been cheaper, but it did not feel like a place where she could settle into her next chapter with peace.

She also had to think about her own health, her safety, her isolation, and her future support. The home itself was one story and relatively easy to get in and out of, which was a plus. But that was only part of the picture. The larger question was whether that home still fit her life now that she was alone, grieving, in pain, and without her husband's income.

There was also the issue of isolation.

Where she lived with her husband had made sense for the two of them. But once she was alone, some of those same things became harder. She still had to drive the same distance for groceries and other daily needs, but now she had to do it alone. She did not have easy built-in social contact. Health matters. Safety matters. Support matters. Isolation matters. Distance to groceries, doctors, church, activities, and daily life matters too. Everything has to be looked at if it is going to affect whether the person should stay or sell and move.

This is one reason it can take so long for a widow or widower to decide what to do. It is not one decision, but a chain of decisions, almost like a long row of dominoes. One decision leads to the next, and the next, and the next. Can I afford to stay? If I stay, how do I make it work? If I cannot stay, where would I go? If I move, do I stay local or go closer to family? If I leave the area, what is affordable there now? If I move, what do I take with me? What do I do with the furniture, the belongings, and the things that matter emotionally but may not fit practically?

Liz went through this exact process. She took time. She thought through one possibility, then another. She asked questions, talked with people she trusted, and slowly worked her way toward clarity. When she had worked through enough of those decisions, she was finally ready to sell the home.

When Liz was finally ready, the sale itself became part of the support. The buyers offered flexibility. They bought some of the furniture. They gave her time after closing. The move became less frightening and more manageable. And she was able to begin the next chapter of her life with more peace than she would have had if she had been rushed or left alone in confusion. Later, when she moved into a senior community, she came alive again. She had activities, meals with other people, structure, and new friendships. That told me the move was right for her, not only financially, but emotionally, physically, and socially as well.

Many of my clients do not just sell a home after a spouse dies. They move into a completely new life. They have to create new routines, new support systems, new patterns, and new ways of living. The journey is not only about getting the house sold. It is about helping them make one good decision at a time until they are no longer stuck in fear and sadness, but are able to step into a life they can actually live.

That is what I want for people. I want to help them not only get the home sold, but also make wise, loving, practical decisions when life has changed, grief is heavy, and the future feels uncertain.

This story shows how deeply a home can hold love, marriage, memory, and transition, and how heavy the toll can be on the surviving spouse who must decide what comes next.

Questions People Often Ask After a Spouse Dies

1. The Person in Charge:

What is the surviving spouse really carrying when they have to decide whether to stay or sell after a death?

A surviving spouse is usually carrying much more than a real estate decision.

They are carrying grief, exhaustion, uncertainty, fear, and often the loss of the person who handled part of life with them. Sometimes the spouse who died handled the bills, the repairs, the planning, or the finances. Sometimes the surviving spouse has already been worn down by caregiving before the death even happens. By the time they are finally facing the question of what to do with the house, they may already be physically tired, emotionally drained, and unsure what the future can realistically look like.

That was true for Liz. She had loved her husband for thirty years. He had been sick for several years, and by the time he died, she was already worn down physically and emotionally. She had her own health issues. She was grieving and in pain. She loved her house, but she also knew life had changed. The real burden was not just deciding what to do with the property. The real burden was figuring out what kind of life she could now afford, manage, and live on her own.

That is why I never look at this as a simple housing decision. The surviving spouse is often carrying an entire life transition while they are still in grief.

2. The People Involved:

Who helps and who should be part of the decision when a grieving spouse is trying to figure out what comes next?

Not every important chapter in this book is driven by conflict. Sometimes the people involved are not the problem. Sometimes they are part of the support.

In Liz's case, she had caring people around her. She talked things through with me. She had friends and family who cared about her. Later, the buyers and the buyer's agent became part of the support because they responded to her practical needs with flexibility and kindness. The buyers purchased some furniture and gave her time after closing, which made the transition much gentler.

When someone is grieving, it helps to have both loving support and steady guidance. Friends and family may care deeply, but they do not always know how to walk someone through a chain of financial, housing, and life-transition decisions. That is where a calm, experienced guide can make such a difference.

The right people around the surviving spouse can help reduce confusion, reduce fear, and make it easier to think clearly. The wrong people create pressure. The right people create steadiness.

3. The Property:

How do the home itself, the monthly costs, and the physical fit of the property affect whether staying still makes sense?

The property matters, but not just in terms of price.

The real question is whether the home still fits the person's life now. A house may be sweet, familiar, and full of memories, and still no longer be the right fit for the next chapter. That was part of Liz's story. She loved the house. It had been a happy home. It was one story, relatively easy to get in and out of, and not a bad fit physically.

But affordability, isolation, daily living, and long-term support also mattered.

When a spouse dies, I encourage people to look honestly at the house itself and ask practical questions. Can I afford to stay here comfortably? Does this home still fit my physical needs? Is it easy for me to live here alone? Is it close enough to groceries, doctors, church, friends, or daily support? Will this house still serve me well if my health changes? These are all real property questions, even though they are also deeply personal.

A home can still be full of love and memories, and still no longer be the right fit. That was part of Liz's decision. It was not only about loving the home. It was about whether the home still fit the life she could realistically live.

4. The Process:

Why does deciding whether to stay or sell take so long, and what decisions usually have to be worked through first?

Because this is not one decision. It is a series of decisions that have to be worked through over time.

A grieving spouse may think they are trying to answer one question, but in reality, they are trying to answer many questions in a row. Can I afford to stay? If not, where would I go? Do I stay nearby or move out of state? What is affordable there now? What do I take with me? What do I leave behind? How fast do I need to act? How much time do I need before I am emotionally ready?

Liz went through that same process over time. She considered staying in San Diego County. She looked at a less expensive rental. She thought about different housing possibilities. She had to work

through those decisions one by one before she was ready to list the home.

This is why I do not rush people. I help them work through the process in order. One decision opens the door to the next one. When enough of those dominoes fall into place, clarity begins to come.

5. The Pressure Points:

What makes this decision so emotionally overwhelming, and how do you help someone move forward without pressure or panic?

The pressure points are often layered on top of grief.

There may be sadness, fear, pain, financial uncertainty, isolation, emotional attachment to the house, decision fatigue, and the pressure of knowing that life has changed but not yet knowing what comes next. A grieving spouse may feel that every decision is too big. Even simple choices can feel heavy when they are tied to loss. Liz's story shows that clearly.

My role is not to pressure someone into selling or leave them stuck in confusion. My role is to help them move one step at a time. I ask questions that help them identify what matters most, what they are afraid of, and what feels like the next manageable step. Then I help them work from there. That is how I help people who are grieving and overwhelmed, one step at a time.

That is what happened with Liz. Once she was ready, the sale itself became part of the support. The buyers offered flexibility. They bought some of the furniture. They gave her time to stay in the home after closing while she prepared for the move. That reduced the heat. It gave her breathing room. It made the transition gentler.

In the end, this was not just about selling a house. It was about helping a widow make wise, loving, practical decisions when life had changed, grief was heavy, and the future felt uncertain. That is what I want for people. Not just a closed sale, but a gentler path into the next chapter.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE AN INHERITED HOME IS SOLD?

When the Home Is Not Ready, and Neither Is the Family

Families are often surprised to learn that deciding to sell and being ready to sell are not the same thing.

Before an inherited home is truly ready for market, several things usually need to be clarified. The family needs to know who has the authority to act. The condition of the home needs to be evaluated. The people involved need to understand what is happening. The seller and the agent need a strategy for whether the home will be sold as-is, cleaned out, repaired, or prepared in a limited way first.

I never rush families to put a home on the market before those decisions are discussed. In my experience, selling a home after a death goes much more smoothly when the family understands the sequence and moves one step at a time.

I worked with Claudia, who had been told for years that one day she would be the one to sell the family home. She was the youngest of five girls. Her father had died years earlier. Her mother had recently died, and now the estate needed to be resolved. She had reached out to an estate planning attorney, who referred her to me.

From the beginning, Claudia told me she felt burdened by the responsibility of selling the home. She was not happy about being the decision-maker. She felt the full weight of it. She told me that two of her sisters were still living in the house, along with some of the grandchildren. She also told me the home needed a great deal of work.

This was not a situation where the family was trying to decide whether to keep the home. In Claudia's mind, she already knew it would need to be sold. The real problem was that the home was not ready, the people were not ready, and the process was far more complicated than "Let's just put it on the market."

The house itself had potential. It sat on a large lot in an area where a buyer might eventually tear it down and build something more valuable. It even had a partial view that could have become much more impressive if the property had been redeveloped. But the house had also been altered over time, maintained in a rough, do-it-yourself manner, and neglected for years.

Things had been added without really being finished well. Parts of the structure were sloping. The front and back yards had been neglected. Old cars had been sitting in front for years. The house was full of furniture. Twenty-five large plastic storage containers lined two walls of the primary bedroom waiting for a new location, while other belongings were stuffed in drawers, thrown onto chairs, and packed into overstuffed closets. No one had prepared for a move

when I first saw the home. The kitchen was old, outdated, and no longer functioning well. The sink was leaking, and only two of the four burners on the stove worked.

After I met the sisters and saw the condition of the home, I brought in my contractor to inspect the property and make recommendations for repairs and improvements that might bring in more money from the sale. Unfortunately, the recommendations were extensive, and the budget was limited.

When the contractor climbed under the home to inspect the plumbing, he discovered black mold under the hallway bathroom. Claudia confirmed there had been a leak in the tub several years earlier, and one of the brothers-in-law had handled the repair. Unfortunately, no plumber had checked the work, and the leak had continued long enough for black mold to spread.

The bathtub needed to be replaced. Three of the walls behind the wallboard were wet and moldy. The sink, tub, toilet, plumbing, and floor also had to be replaced.

It was a major blow. Claudia was shocked by the extent of the damage because nothing in the bathroom had made the problem obvious. There was no strong smell. It had not shown up from above. It was only revealed once someone looked underneath the home.

Now she had another decision to make. Should she pay for the bathroom repair or sell the home without doing it? The cost was approximately \$3,500. It was a fair price for the work, but it was still \$3,500 coming out of a limited budget.

I watched Claudia agonize over what to do. She wanted to preserve as much money as possible for her sisters from the sale. At the same time, the deferred maintenance was so significant that she had to face

a painful question: Was this one repair worth doing, or was it smarter to stop putting money into a property with far bigger problems?

She approved the bathroom work. Then, just after the repair was completed, COVID hit.

That brought another layer of delay. One of the family members had COVID, which reduced access to the house. After that passed, the family was still working on getting everyone moved out and their belongings relocated. That took time, especially because the two sisters living there had been in the home for years. Long after both parents had died, they were still living there rent-free, and now they were being displaced from the only home they had known for a very long time.

Every time I went back to the property, there seemed to be something else broken, leaking, or in disrepair. I was eager to get the home on the market, but between COVID, moving delays, and ongoing costs, everything was taking much longer than expected.

Eventually, Claudia decided to sell the property as-is with no further repairs, and in my opinion, that was the right decision. The home had too many issues. Sometimes the answer is no, and spending more only increases the family's stress without improving the outcome enough.

The home had so many structural and condition problems that it was never going to compete as a polished retail sale. The front and back yards had been neglected. The old cars needed to be removed. The house did not show well, and buyers were turned off. This was the kind of property that was going to attract cash fixer buyers, developers, or investors who would calculate the cost of repair,

discount the offer heavily, and negotiate as if the home had little value.

That reality was painful for Claudia.

To the family, this was not just a rundown property. This was the family home. It held memories of childhood, holidays, gatherings, and history. It had been in the family for decades. So when buyers came in with low offers and treated it like a project or a piece of land, it felt insulting. Claudia took that personally.

What made it even harder was that she felt guilty from every direction. She felt guilty about moving her sisters out. She felt guilty about the delays. She felt guilty about not getting more money for the home. She felt guilty about having to be the one who pushed the process forward. She was trying to be fair, responsible, and compassionate all at the same time, but the house, the family, and the market were all working against her.

Then we got into escrow with a cash buyer, and even that did not go smoothly.

The buyer began stalling because his cash partner had not come through. He kept trying to buy time while looking for another source of money. At that point, we served a Notice to Perform, which is a formal notice requiring the other side to do what the contract says they are supposed to do within a specific deadline or risk cancellation. When he still did not close, we canceled the escrow.

We had to start over.

That is another hard truth: families do not always understand about selling a distressed home as-is. Cash buyers are often the right buyers for distressed homes, but they are also the buyers most likely to

negotiate aggressively. They are looking at repair costs, resale margin, risk, and profit. Families, on the other hand, are looking at memories, burden, fairness, and loss. Those two viewpoints often collide.

Although it looked like Claudia's dilemma was about whether or not to put more money into the house, the deeper truth was that no reasonable amount of money was going to turn this property into a top-dollar retail home. When a house has this many problems, sometimes the wisest decision is not to keep spending. Sometimes the best choice is to stop the bleeding, accept the limits of the property, and get the sale done.

That does not make it easy.

For Claudia, every delay felt like another arrow. Every setback hurt. She had grown up in that house. She remembered what it meant to the family. And now she was the one having to sell it out from under sisters who were not really in a position to support themselves independently. In the end, each of them rented a room from another family member so they could finally move out.

It was a very painful transaction for her, and I felt her pain. I understood why the low offers felt offensive. I understood why the delays felt personal. But I also knew that when a family does not have the budget to put \$100,000 or more into a severely distressed home, the only real choice may be to stop trying to create a perfect outcome and instead move toward the most realistic one.

Eventually, the home sold to another buyer for much less than what it might have brought under different circumstances.

That story has stayed with me because it shows something families often do not understand at first:

Before an inherited home can be sold, the person in charge, the people involved, the property, the process, and the pressure points all have to be more ready than most families realize.

This story shows how the condition of the home, the money available, the hidden damage, and the family's financial limits all help determine the right strategy for the sale.

Questions People Ask Before an Inherited Home Is Ready to Sell

1. The Person in Charge:

What do I need to understand about my role if I am the one left in charge?

Being “in charge” is not just a legal title. It is a responsibility that often comes with emotional weight.

You may be the one expected to make decisions no one else wants to make. You may feel pressure to be fair, to protect others, and to do the right thing, even when there are no easy answers.

In many cases, the person in charge did not ask for the role. It was assigned, assumed, or expected.

In Claudia's situation, she carried more than the responsibility of selling a house. She carried the burden of her family's expectations, her sisters' housing situation, and the emotional history of the home.

Understanding your role clearly helps you separate what you are responsible for and what you are not.

You are responsible for making decisions that move the process forward.

You are not responsible for making every outcome feel good to everyone involved.

2. The People Involved:

Who are the people involved, and how can their behavior affect the sale?

The people involved in the transaction can have as much impact as the condition of the property.

Family members may be grieving, resistant, dependent, cooperative, or conflicted. Some may want to move quickly. Others may not be ready. Some may still be living in the home. Others may have strong opinions without being directly involved.

In Claudia's case, her sisters were still living in the home and were not moving at the same pace as the sale required. That created delays, emotional tension, and additional pressure on the process.

Buyers and agents are also part of this group. Investors, in particular, may approach the transaction very differently than the family expects, focusing on numbers, repairs, and profit rather than emotional value.

Recognizing how people influence the process allows you to anticipate challenges instead of being surprised by them.

3. The Property:

What should I look at in the property before making decisions about repairs or preparing it for sale?

The condition of the home plays a major role in determining what decisions make sense.

Some homes are clean, updated, and ready for market. Others have deferred maintenance, hidden damage, or years of wear that significantly affect value and strategy.

In Claudia's case, the home had multiple issues, mold under the bathroom, structural concerns, clutter, and long-term neglect. Even after repairs, the home was never going to compete as a fully updated property.

One of the most important questions is whether putting money into the property will actually increase the value enough to justify the cost.

Sometimes the answer is yes.

Sometimes the answer is no.

Making that distinction early can prevent families from spending money in ways that do not improve the final outcome.

4. The Process:

What kinds of legal, financial, or timing issues can make the process more complicated than expected?

Selling an inherited home is rarely a straight, predictable process.

There may be delays in moving occupants out, unexpected repairs or discoveries, limited funds for improvements, escrow problems or buyer delays, and outside events that slow everything down.

In this situation, the process was affected by multiple factors. The discovery of mold created an unexpected repair decision. COVID

limited access to the home. Family members needed time to relocate. A buyer entered escrow and then stalled, forcing the sale to restart.

Each of these events added time, stress, and complexity.

Understanding that delays are part of the process, not a sign that something is going wrong, helps families stay grounded and make better decisions along the way.

5. The Pressure Points:

Why does everything start to feel overwhelming, and what actually helps get the home sold?

The feeling of overwhelm does not come from one problem. It comes from many pressures happening at the same time.

These pressure points may include grief, guilt, family conflict, financial limitations, buyer negotiations, repair decisions, and delays and uncertainty.

In Claudia's case, she felt responsible for everything. She felt guilty about moving her sisters out. She felt frustrated by delays. She felt hurt by low offers. She felt pressure to do the right thing with limited resources.

That combination is what makes these transactions feel so heavy.

What helps is not pushing harder or trying to solve everything at once.

What helps is having a steady, experienced guide who can separate emotional reactions from practical decisions, tell the truth about the property and the market, help create a realistic plan, take action when needed, and keep the process moving.

The goal is not to remove the difficulty.

The goal is to move through it with clarity, structure, and support so the home can be sold and the family can get through it, too.

WHEN SOMEONE IN THE HOME CONTROLS THE SALE

How One Family Member Delayed the Sale of a Home for Over Two Years

One of the hardest truths in selling a family home is this: sometimes the real problem is not the house at all.

Sometimes the house is fine, cared for, and in a good location with real value. It should sell without too much difficulty.

But if the person living there controls access, manipulates the process, and refuses to cooperate unless everything happens on their terms, the sale can become miserable for everyone involved.

I worked with a woman we will call Auntie Anna. She was in her eighties, bright, analytical, accomplished, and fully capable of handling her affairs. She was not weak, confused, or someone who needed rescuing. She had money, resources, and the ability to make sound decisions without financial desperation. That matters because this was not a transaction where the seller was rushing to sell out of

financial desperation. This was a situation where the process became painful because of the people involved, not because the owner lacked ability or stability.

Years earlier, Auntie Anna had bought a San Diego home for her sister. It was a generous act. After the sister died, the sister's granddaughter, whom we will call Nancy, continued living in the home. Nancy had grown up there. Her mother had also died years earlier. Auntie Anna had felt sorry for her and had allowed her to remain in the property for a very long time.

That long period of generosity seems to have created a dangerous expectation.

I cannot say exactly what Nancy believed in her own mind, but over time, it appeared that she had come to think the home might somehow become hers, or that if she stalled long enough, the outcome might bend in her favor. I was also given strong hints that Auntie Anna changed her estate planning because of how mean and difficult Nancy had become. I was not part of those legal decisions, so I would not present that as a formal fact inside the chapter, but it was clear that the relationship between them had deteriorated badly.

From the outside, it looked like a mix of entitlement, resentment, and possibly jealousy.

Nancy had benefited from living in the home for years. She had stability, shelter, and time that many people would never have been given. Yet instead of gratitude, the pattern that emerged was control, resistance, and delay.

By the time I became involved, Nancy was in her thirties, a single mother with a son, and deeply attached to the house. She was

eventually going to receive a share of the sale, but instead of helping move things forward, she made the process painfully difficult.

From the very beginning, she wanted control.

The first time I went to meet her at the property, I was delayed by heavy traffic caused by an accident. I texted her. I had driven about thirty-five minutes to get there. Even so, she refused to let me into the house. That was how it started.

That may sound like a small moment, but it was not small. It told me a great deal. This was someone who was going to make sure that nothing happened unless she wanted it to happen. If she felt in control, she could be polite. If she did not, she could be cold, nasty, or impossible.

That pattern continued for over two years.

The home itself was not the problem. Nancy kept it neat and cared for it. This was not a situation where the property was filthy, destroyed, or falling apart from neglect. Her own monthly burden for living there was very low. The only regular housing cost she appeared to be paying was the HOA, which was about \$168 a month, since she was not making the house payments.

Even so, Nancy behaved as though she carried unusual power in the neighborhood. In one communication, she referenced being close friends with an HOA board member across the street and threatened complaints and reports when she felt challenged.

Auntie Anna had legal authority over the property, but Nancy controlled day-to-day access.

That distinction matters more than families realize.

You can have legal authority on paper and still have a nightmare on your hands if the occupant is resistant, manipulative, and determined to stall. The person with the key, the person inside the house, the person who answers the door, the person who decides whether to act pleasantly or hostilely that day, that person can create enormous damage without ever openly saying, “I refuse to cooperate.”

This transaction had lawyers on both sides. I had been referred into the matter by Auntie Anna’s attorney, and the communications show that Nancy had her own lawyer as well. The emails also show that when timing or access was pushed, the legal tension was already right under the surface. Auntie Anna’s attorney was involved, Nancy’s attorney was involved, and ordinary business decisions began to feel loaded and adversarial.

Nancy did not always refuse directly, which in some ways made it worse.

She could sound polished, reasonable, and even cooperative in writing. In one April 2021 email, she said she was “ready to sell the house” and wanted it sold “as soon as possible,” but in the same message she laid out rigid conditions about scheduling, timing, and access, described herself as extremely busy, and framed the process around her own availability. She also complained about my arrival and treated a brief delay as grounds to cancel access altogether.

Auntie Anna’s response that same day captured the real issue. She wrote that Nancy reacted “with anger and threats when she feels she is not in control,” and said Nancy needed to understand that she could not “dictate all the terms” for the professionals needed to evaluate and prepare the property. Auntie Anna even raised the possibility that Nancy might need to move out in order for the house to be sold in a timely manner.

That was exactly the problem.

Nancy wanted influence without true cooperation.

She could be pleasant when she wanted something. She could sound reasonable when it benefited her. But when it came time to allow access, cooperate with scheduling, or support the sale in a meaningful way, everything became harder than it needed to be. She used her son as an excuse at times. Later, her boyfriend moved in during part of the two-year period. He was nice, but the overall household dynamic still remained one more layer in a transaction that already had too many complications.

The home went on the market. We had showings. We had a few open houses. At one point, we scheduled one showing after another on a Saturday to create flow and opportunity. But Nancy would remain there and talk to buyers in ways that undermined the sale. She denied doing anything wrong, but agents later told me she was poisoning the buyers and scaring them away with what she said.

That is one of the hardest problems to solve in an occupied sale.

A buyer may walk through a home and like what they see. Then the occupant starts talking. Suddenly, doubt enters the room. Suspicion enters the room. Discomfort enters the room. The buyer leaves with a bad feeling and moves on.

The seller often cannot prove exactly what happened, but the damage is real all the same.

There were also long stretches of delay. During COVID, Nancy said she had COVID, and because no one could prove otherwise, showings had to stop, and the property came off the market for a period of time. The deeper pattern was that she was often

not truthful. Her story kept changing, and every time she talked, something shifted. Whether this particular claim was true or not, the result was the same: more delay, more interruption, and more lost momentum.

Delay was power.

Nancy stalled long enough to get what she wanted. She wanted her son to get through junior high. She wanted to move during the summer. She wanted things done on her schedule, not the owner's schedule, not the market's schedule, and certainly not mine.

In the meantime, Auntie Anna was under constant stress.

That matters because Auntie Anna was not a weak or passive woman. She was highly intelligent, very analytical, and financially able to make decisions. But intelligence and strength do not erase emotional wear. In fact, sometimes highly capable people feel the burden even more because they understand exactly how unreasonable and draining the situation has become.

There were also court issues along the way, and those legal pressures added another layer of burden and cost. The court fees were eventually included in the payoff. Nancy was also entitled to a portion of the house. My understanding is that she originally stood to receive one-half, but later deductions and court-related adjustments changed that outcome. The exact legal math is less important than the larger truth: even after causing enormous delay and stress, she still benefited financially.

That is hard for people to accept, but it happens.

One of the mistakes in a transaction like this is believing that if the house is improved enough, the sale will become easier. Money was

spent updating the property. Looking back, I do not think the update is the central lesson of this chapter. The more important truth is that the update gave Nancy more time, and the real obstacle was never the condition of the home.

The real obstacle was Nancy.

One of the clearest lessons in a sale like this is simple: do not confuse a property problem with an occupant problem. If the person living in the home is slowing everything down, controlling access, and undermining the sale, money spent improving the property may not bring enough value to justify the delay, the cost, and the stress.

In August 2021, the emails also show another layer of the struggle. Nancy and her boyfriend wanted to buy the property themselves, but Auntie Anna did not want to take on more future stress from Nancy, even if Nancy sounded apologetic or claimed she had changed. Auntie Anna told her lawyer that Nancy's proposal was "not competitive," that she did not want more stress in her life, and that she really wanted out of the property. Later, when an outside offer of \$755,000 appeared, Auntie Anna expressed concern that Nancy might "drag her feet" even then.

That concern fit the pattern perfectly.

Even when real opportunities showed up, control and delay were never far away.

Finally, after all of that, a couple bought the home.

And when Nancy eventually left, she left without a trace.

That told its own story.

For all the delay, all the control, all the stress, and all the ways she made the process difficult, when it was finally over, she was simply gone. The house had been something she used until the timing worked for her.

That story has stayed with me because it teaches a truth families often do not see soon enough.

They think the issue is the price. They think the issue is the market. They think the issue is whether to update the home. They think the issue is paperwork.

But sometimes the issue is much simpler and much harder than all of that.

Sometimes the issue is the person living in the house.

And when that person uses access, attitude, delay, legal tension, and control as power, the sale can become far more painful than anyone expected.

The lesson is not that occupied homes cannot be sold. They can.

The lesson is that when the occupant is uncooperative, the seller needs to see the problem clearly and deal with it honestly. Otherwise, months turn into years, stress turns into exhaustion, and what should have been a manageable sale becomes a draining family battle.

This story shows that when a family already has a history of conflict, selling the home often becomes the next battleground. The problem is not always the house itself. Sometimes the real obstacle is the unresolved conflict, control, and resistance surrounding it.

Questions People Ask When an Occupant Delays the Sale

1. The Person in Charge:

What is hardest about being the person in charge when someone else is living in the home and resisting the sale?

One of the hardest parts is that the person in charge may have the legal authority, but not the practical control.

That creates enormous stress.

The decision-maker may be fully authorized to sell the property, but the occupant still controls daily access, the mood inside the home, the timing of showings, and the overall ease or difficulty of the process. That means the person in charge can feel responsible for results without being able to control what is happening day to day.

That was true in Auntie Anna's case. She was intelligent, capable, and financially stable. She was not confused about what needed to be done. But she was still deeply stressed because the person living in the home was making every step harder than it needed to be.

Being in charge does not always feel powerful. Sometimes it feels like carrying the burden while someone else creates the obstacles.

2. The People Involved:

How do the people involved make this kind of sale harder than it looks from the outside?

In many family sales, the tension is not just about the house. It is about the behavior, attitudes, and motives of the people involved.

In this story, Nancy was not the legal owner, but she had influence because she was living in the home. She could be polite when she wanted something and difficult when she wanted control. She used timing, access, her son, legal pressure, and even her presence during showings in ways that slowed the process down.

When that happens, the sale becomes emotionally exhausting. It turns into more than a real estate transaction. It becomes a relationship problem, a power struggle, and sometimes even a legal problem.

This is why families need to understand early that the people involved may be a bigger issue than the property itself.

3. The Property:

What do families need to understand about the property when the home itself is not the real problem?

Sometimes a home is not hard to sell because it is damaged, dirty, or distressed. Sometimes the home is perfectly presentable, but the conditions surrounding it make it difficult to market.

That was true here. The house was neat. It was being cared for. It was not a wreck. The problem was not that the property was unsellable. The problem was that the occupant's behavior made it difficult for buyers to experience the home in a normal, comfortable way.

This is a very important distinction.

Families often assume that if they improve the home, spend money on updates, or prepare it more carefully, the sale will become easier. But if the deeper problem is occupancy and control, those efforts may not solve what is really blocking the sale.

The property may look fine on paper and still be very hard to sell in real life.

4. The Process:

What process complications can happen when the home is occupied, and both sides have lawyers?

When an occupied home is already under strain, the process can become much heavier than families expect.

Scheduling can become difficult. Showings can be disrupted. Open houses may not go smoothly. The property may have to be taken off the market and relisted. Legal involvement can make even normal decisions feel tense and loaded. Court pressure, attorney communication, delays, and disputes over timing can all stretch the process out.

That is what happened in this transaction.

There were lawyers on both sides. There were court-related issues. There were starts and stops. There were interruptions during COVID. There were buyer problems. All of that made the transaction longer, more expensive, and more emotionally draining.

Families often think the process will be a straight line. In occupied family sales, it often is not.

5. The Pressure Points:

What causes a situation like this to heat up and become so painful for everyone involved?

The pressure points are what turn a difficult sale into an exhausting one.

In this chapter, the pressure points included entitlement, resistance, shifting behavior, legal tension, access problems, delay, buyer interference, and the emotional wear of dealing with someone who would cooperate only when it suited her.

Those pressure points kept building on each other.

Auntie Anna was trying to move the sale forward. Nancy was trying to hold onto control. The lawyers added tension. The delays added cost. The showings lost momentum. And over time, what should have been a manageable sale became a draining two-year struggle.

This is why it is so important to identify the real pressure points early.

When the seller sees clearly that the heat in the transaction is coming from the occupant, not just the market or the paperwork, better decisions can be made sooner.

WHEN LOVE, GRIEF, AND TRUST ALL MEET AT THE FRONT DOOR

What Happens When Selling A Loved One's Home Becomes Part Of the healing?

Helen was not just another homeowner to me.

She was my friend.

For years, we had worked together as part of a volunteer team in a networking group. She was steady, organized, and faithful. Helen was one of those women who quietly held things together. She showed up, did the work, and became part of the fabric of the group. She also had a signature style. For over twenty years, Helen wore a scarf to every meeting. Even now, every May, our group honors her by wearing scarves in remembrance of her. That is how loved she was. That is how deeply she is still remembered.

When Helen passed away, the loss was personal for me. It was not just a professional situation. It was the loss of a woman I had known, respected, and served beside for years.

Her daughter Diane was suddenly left carrying the weight of it all. Diane lived in Missouri, far from San Diego, far from the house, and far from the life her mother had built over decades. She was grieving, overwhelmed, and trying to make sense of what to do next. Her mother had lived in that Encinitas home for nearly fifty years. It was not just real estate. It was a lifetime of memories, belongings, family history, and emotion.

Helen had been widowed years earlier and then remarried later in life. After her death, Diane was left not only with the house and its contents but also with the practical realities surrounding her mother's husband, the family belongings stored there, and the painful question so many families face: What do we do with the house now?

When I went to the house, I was there to collect paperwork our networking group needed from Diane. I was not there looking for an opportunity to list the house.

In fact, I did not mention real estate at all.

I came because Helen had handled important paperwork for our group, and after her death, we needed access to those records. I went to the house because of that practical need, but also because I cared. I loved Helen, and I could see that Diane was carrying heartbreak, confusion, and responsibility all at once.

Some people enter these moments as salespeople. I entered as a friend, a board member, and someone who genuinely wanted to help.

Diane and I sat together in the middle of her grief and talked about the house, the belongings, and the decisions ahead. She was emotional, exhausted, and unsure. She had been very close to her mother. She was also carrying sadness over all that had happened leading up to her mother's death, along with the helplessness that comes from living far away and trying to handle everything from a distance.

The house itself came with its own set of challenges.

It had begun as a two-bedroom home, but over time, an attached apartment had been added. Helen and her husband had used the back living area, and the front portion of the house had gradually become full of stored family belongings. The property was cluttered, outdated, and filled with the accumulated weight of a lifetime. It needed work. There was deferred maintenance, old furniture, family storage, and all the emotional heaviness that comes when every object seems to hold a memory.

But it also had beauty.

The home sat on an ocean-view lot in Encinitas. It had tremendous potential. Part of what made it special was the large yard, which was more visible and more generous than many neighboring lots because years earlier, the road had originally curved behind the property before that portion was changed. That left the home with a sense of space that stood out over other lots in the neighborhood. Diane knew the property was valuable, but value does not make the decisions easier when the home belonged to someone you loved.

That is one of the hardest truths in these situations. A house can be worth a great deal of money and still feel emotionally impossible to let go of.

Over the course of about a month, Diane and I talked on and off about her choices. Should she keep the property? Rent it? Try to manage it from Missouri? Fix it? Sell it? She was doing her best to think clearly, but grief has a way of making every decision feel heavier.

Then one day, in the middle of one of our conversations, she mentioned a few real estate agents she thought she might interview. I told her I did not really know them. Then she looked at me and said something like, “Wait... aren’t you a real estate agent?”

I said yes.

She asked me why I had not said so earlier.

And I told her the truth. I had not come there to sell her house. I had come because I cared about her mother, because our group needed the records Helen had handled, and because Diane was grieving and needed support. I did not want my first presence in that home to feel like a pitch.

That was the truth then, and it still matters to me now.

A little later, after Diane had time to think through her choices, she decided that keeping the house was not realistic. The distance was too great. The home needed too much work. The practical burden was too heavy. Once she had made that decision for herself, I told her I would be honored to be considered if she decided to sell. Her response was simple and deeply touching: “I have already selected you.”

That moment has always stayed with me because it was built on trust, not persuasion.

And trust matters most in the hardest seasons of life.

As the process moved forward, Diane hired an estate sale professional to help with the contents of the house. Since she lived out of state, I did what I could to keep an eye on things and protect the property. During the estate sale, I walked through the home and took pictures of her mother's things for Diane so she could see them one more time. That mattered to her. It helped her feel connected to her mother and to the home, even from far away.

That was not a marketing task. That was part of the human side of this work.

I have learned that people do not just need information during a sale like this. They need steadiness. They need someone who understands that every box, every piece of furniture, every small decision can carry emotional weight. They need someone who sees that the process is not just a transaction. It is a transition.

When the house finally came on the market, the response was strong. Neighbors came through the open houses, many of them curious because they had known Helen for years or had never seen the inside of the home. The property received eleven offers, including seven cash offers. Even with its deferred maintenance and need for updating, buyers could see the value in the location, the lot, and the ocean view.

Diane ultimately chose a buyer whose vision touched her heart. He wanted to bring multiple generations of his family onto the property. He planned to create a place where his children and their families could live together. That mattered to Diane. She loved the idea that the home would continue to be a place where family gathered and lived together. Later, the buyers remodeled the property, added a second story, and fully took advantage of the ocean view. The house began a new chapter.

And in a different way, so did Diane.

The sale did more than close a transaction. It helped her move forward. It helped her build her home in Missouri. It helped her brother by providing enough for a paid-off truck. Something practical and good came out of something deeply painful. The grief did not disappear, but the burden shifted. The house that had held so much of her mother's life became part of the way the next chapter of the family's life was built.

That is one of the reasons this kind of work matters so much.

Sometimes people think selling a loved one's home is only about price, condition, negotiations, and closing. Of course, those things matter. But they are not the whole story.

The whole story includes love, trust, and the ache of letting go. It includes the quiet moments when someone needs a picture of their mother's belongings because they cannot bear to lose sight of them all at once. It includes the relationships that remain after escrow closes.

Diane and I are still friends, and we have had lunch together when she has come back to town. That means a great deal to me. It reminds me that in some of these stories, I was not only helping a family sell a house. I was helping someone I cared about move through one of the hardest losses of her life.

Because my work has never only been about homes.

It has been about people.

It has been about walking with families through difficult seasons, staying steady when they are overwhelmed, and helping them make sound decisions while honoring what they have lost.

Helen's house was an ocean-view property with a future. Diane's burden was heavy, but she did not carry it alone. The buyers gave the house a beautiful new life. Diane carried forward the love of her mother, built a new home in Missouri, and helped her brother. And every May, our group still wears scarves to remember Helen.

That is not just a closing.

That is a legacy.

And sometimes, when a home is sold with care, love is still visible long after the sign comes down.

Questions to Help You Recognize When the Sale of a Loved One's Home Becomes Part of the Healing

1. The Person in Charge:

What emotional and practical burdens fall on the person left responsible for a loved one's home?

In this story, Diane was not just inheriting a property. She was carrying grief, distance, regret, family responsibility, and major decisions all at the same time. The person in charge is often carrying much more than paperwork. They are carrying the emotional weight of the entire situation.

2. The People Involved:

Who else is involved, and how do their roles, needs, or behavior affect the process?

This story included a daughter living out of state, a surviving husband, a brother, neighbors, estate sale professionals, buyers, and me as both friend and Realtor. Every person added a layer to the

process. Some people bring help. Some bring pressure. Some simply bring more decisions. Understanding who is involved is essential.

3. The Property:

What about the house itself makes the situation easier or harder?

The property had great value because of its Encinitas location, ocean view, and large yard, but it also came with deferred maintenance, stored belongings, outdated spaces, and the practical burden of clearing out decades of life. A house can be both valuable and overwhelming at the same time.

4. The Process:

What legal, financial, timing, or logistical realities shaped the sale?

Diane had to make decisions from Missouri, organize the contents, manage an estate sale, prepare the home for market, review multiple offers, and choose the best path forward. The process was not only emotional. It required clear timing, coordination, and practical support every step of the way.

5. The Pressure Points:

What caused the most emotional heat, and what helped reduce it?

The pressure points were grief, distance, letting go of belongings, and the emotional weight of every decision. What reduced the pressure was trust, steady guidance, honest communication, and a process that allowed Diane to move through the sale one step at a time instead of carrying the entire burden alone.

WHEN A FAMILY WORKS TOGETHER, EVEN A DIFFICULT SALE CAN END WITH DIGNITY

How One Family Prepared a Large, Neglected Home with Care and Dignity

Not every difficult home sale is a conflict story.

Sometimes the challenge is not family fighting. Sometimes the challenge is the size of the property, the years of deferred maintenance, the hidden problems no one knew were there, the amount of work required, and the emotional reality that someone has to step in and let go of a home that once held a whole life.

That was the situation with one property I sold in La Mesa in San Diego County.

I worked with a Southern gentleman from Mississippi who was handling his sister's estate from out of state. I will call him Mr. Davis. He was responsible for communicating with the other family members and beneficiaries, which meant he was carrying a great deal of responsibility before I ever entered the picture.

By the time he hired me, the family had already done something important. They had worked together to bring the loan current. That told me a great deal right away. This was not a family using the house as a battleground. This was a family trying to do the right thing while facing a property that required far more work, coordination, patience, and money than most people expect when they first say, "We just need to sell the house."

The home sat high on a hill in La Mesa overlooking the homes below. It was a large house, around 3,500 square feet, and at one time it had clearly been a very special place. You could feel that when you walked through it. It had presence. It had scale. It had history. It was one of those homes that made you stop and imagine what it had once been like when it was full of people, movement, conversation, and life.

The husband had died about seventeen years before, and I suspect that somewhere after that loss, the house slowly began to close in on itself. Mr. Davis's sister had gone on living there alone in a large home that once held a fuller family life. Bedrooms that were no longer being used were still full of beds and dressers. Closets were full. Storage spaces were full. The garage was full. Furniture, rugs, household items, bedding, and years of accumulation remained.

The family had already taken what they wanted. What remained was everything else.

So the first stage was not selling. The first stage was clearing.

We brought in an estate sale company to begin reducing the contents of the home. There was beautiful furniture left, large rugs, and pieces that reflected the scale and quality of the property itself. Some of them were simply too large for the size of most modern homes, but they told the story of the house. This was not a small or ordinary property. It had large rooms, gathering spaces, and a feeling that at one time it was meant to hold people.

As more of the house opened up, especially in the garage and storage areas, I kept noticing a smell I had sensed from the beginning but had not yet been able to trace. It was damp, moldy, and wrong.

Then, once enough of the belongings had been moved, I found it.

There was a damaged wall hiding a much bigger problem. Behind it was an unfinished elevator shaft with stagnant water sitting inside.

That immediately became the number one issue.

In a house like that, you cannot pretend the hidden problems do not matter. They do matter. They affect safety, buyer confidence, disclosures, presentation, and value. So before we could even think about putting the property on the market, we had to stabilize what was really there.

From that point forward, my contractor and I used a simple framework: “what must be done,” “what should be done,” and “what could be done.”

That framework helped us make wise decisions without turning the project into a full renovation. This family did not need a luxury remodel. They needed a practical, respectful plan that would improve the property, address the most important issues, protect value, and allow the home to be presented with dignity.

My contractor was a very kind, gentle man. He approached the property with the same respect I did. He understood that someone had lived there, loved there, and built a life there. That matters. We were not just fixing things. We were helping a home leave one family with dignity so it could be ready for the next chapter.

Together, we worked through the house one issue at a time.

The elevator shaft and water problem had to be addressed first. After that, we moved through the property strategically. We repaired a leaking sink. We made temporary repairs to the balconies and properly disclosed them. We replaced rotten stairs. We redirected gutters away from the garage path and the elevator area. We repaired the backyard shed with new wood and paint. We painted the outside back wall near the kitchen to improve what had been an ugly visual distraction. We replaced dead roses. We removed a heavy green security door from the front entry that made the home feel more closed off than welcoming.

None of this was a full remodel.

The property still needed updating, and in the end, it was sold to a cash buyer who could see the upside and was prepared to renovate further. But that was never the point. The point was not to make the house perfect. The point was to make it far more saleable, far more presentable, and far more valuable than it would have been if it had simply been emptied and pushed onto the market as-is.

And it made a very big difference.

Had the family done nothing beyond clearing out the house, the property might have sold for around \$900,000. Instead, after the cleanup, the organized repairs, and the thoughtful preparation, it

sold for about \$1,300,000. That is not a small difference. That is a major financial outcome.

The work took time. It took about six months to get the house cleaned out, the repairs coordinated, and the property fully ready for sale. But this family understood something many families do not understand at first: thoughtful preparation can protect and increase what everyone receives in the end.

They were willing to wait. They were willing to fund the important work. They were willing to trust a plan.

That is one reason this story matters to me.

Another reason is more personal.

What stayed with me most was not just the size of the house or the amount of work it needed. It was the feeling that Mr. Davis loved his sister deeply and wanted the home to be handled with dignity.

This was not a family simply trying to clear out a property and collect a check. My sense was that he wanted the home cleaned up, repaired wisely, and presented in a way that honored her memory.

His sister had lived in a grand home that had once been full of life, family, visitors, gatherings, beauty, and possibility. Even though the house had aged, even though some of the maintenance had been deferred, and even though hidden problems had developed over time, it still deserved respect. It still carried the imprint of a real life lived there.

There was large furniture, beautiful rugs, and the remains of what had once been a very full home. Some of those pieces were too large for most modern houses, but they reflected the scale and spirit of the property itself. This was not a small, ordinary house. It was a

place with presence. It had large rooms, multiple gathering areas, and enormous potential. I could easily imagine it becoming a retreat property, a place where families gathered for a long weekend, or even a training or seminar home where people came together to learn, connect, and grow. The house had that kind of energy. It felt like a place meant to hold people.

That is why it was so important not to leave it in a diminished state.

Sometimes, preparing a home for sale is not just about value. It is about helping a family feel that their loved one, and the life they lived, were treated with care to the very end.

One moment especially stayed with me. A photograph of his sister was found behind a cabinet and returned to him. He was deeply touched. That moment opened the deeper meaning of the whole experience for me.

Another day, a tall man came to the house and asked if he could walk through it. He told me he had once lived there with his aunt. Of course, I let him in. He moved through the home as if he were saying goodbye, almost like he was taking in one last memory of a place that had once held part of his life.

Moments like that remind me that houses are not just structures. They hold the lives, memories, and meaning of the people who lived there.

This family was not problem-free. There were still costs to approve, decisions to make, and a great many moving parts. But they were not fighting each other. They were trying to solve a problem together. And because they were willing to work together, the house was given the chance to leave their family with dignity and begin again with someone new.

Not every difficult sale has to become a war.

Sometimes, with the right guidance, it becomes a success story.

What this story shows is that the condition of the home and the financial reality surrounding it often determine how the home should be prepared and sold. When a family is willing to work together, face the property honestly, and make wise decisions about what must be done, a difficult sale can still end with dignity and a far better outcome.

Questions to Help You Recognize When Families Work Together and the Sale Ends with Dignity

1. The Person in Charge:

How do you help a large family move through the sale of a loved one's home?

When a large family is involved, the sale is never just about paperwork. Every person brings a different relationship to the home, a different grief process, and a different idea about what should happen next. Some want things done quickly. Others need more time. Some are practical. Others are deeply emotional. Some are carrying the burden of decision-making for everyone else.

In this situation, Mr. Davis was the one carrying that responsibility. What I saw in him was not just a man trying to manage a transaction. I saw a brother who loved his sister and wanted her home handled with dignity. That matters. Families feel it when the person guiding the sale understands that this was someone's life, not just someone's house.

My role is to help families make clear decisions with respect, but also with less stress. I try to communicate in a way that lowers stress, gives

the decision-maker organized information, and helps everyone feel that the home and the person who lived there are being honored thoughtfully.

2. The People Involved:

Who helped make the right decisions about preparing the home for sale?

The people involved matter more than many families realize. In this story, Mr. Davis served as the family's point person and carried the responsibility of communicating with the other beneficiaries. My contractor also played an important role. He was a kind and gentle man who approached the property with the same respect I did. Together, we used a simple framework: what must be done, what should be done, and what could be done.

That helped the family avoid overwhelm and avoid spending money in the wrong places. It also helped everyone make practical decisions without losing sight of the fact that someone had lived there, loved there, and built a life there.

When the right people work together with calm judgment and respect, even a large and complicated sale becomes easier to manage.

3. The Property:

What do you do when the home is large, outdated, or hiding serious problems?

You start by seeing the house for what it truly is.

This home was large, older, and filled with years of deferred maintenance. But it was also much more than that. It had presence. It had dignity. It had once been full of life, family, visitors, gatherings,

beauty, and possibility. That matters because when you see only defects, you miss the story of the home. And when you miss the story, you can easily miss what the home truly needs in order to be prepared with care.

As we cleared the house, more of the truth began to appear. We found hidden problems, including stagnant water in an unfinished elevator shaft. That immediately became a major issue. But even then, the goal was not to tear everything apart or over-improve the property. The goal was to respect the home, solve the most important problems, and bring it back to life in a way that made sense.

A house like this deserves thoughtful preparation. It deserves someone who can see both its condition and its potential.

4. The Process:

What process helped the family prepare the home wisely without overspending?

The process was not about doing everything. It was about doing the right things, for the right reasons, in the right order.

My contractor and I worked with a simple framework: what must be done, what should be done, and what could be done. That gave the family a practical way to make decisions without turning the property into a full remodel. It helped them focus on safety, presentation, disclosure, and value without losing sight of the larger goal.

The family also understood that thoughtful preparation would take time. They were willing to clean out the home properly, approve the important work, and wait for the house to be truly ready for market.

That process helped protect the value of the sale and led to a much better outcome in the end.

5. The Pressure Points:

What is the deeper lesson in a sale like this?

The deeper lesson is that this work is about people, not just property.

Yes, the house needed repairs. Yes, there were decisions to make. Yes, there was a financial benefit to preparing it properly. But underneath all of that was something more important. This family was trying to let go of a home that had held a real life. Mr. Davis was trying to do right by his sister. The family was trying to bring closure, not just complete a transaction.

I felt that in the house itself. I felt it when the photograph of his sister was found and returned. I felt it when a man who had once lived there came back to walk through it one last time. Moments like that remind me that houses are not just structures. They hold the lives, memories, and meaning of the people who lived there.

When I help prepare and sell a home like this, I am not just trying to get it sold. I am trying to help a family honor a life, close a chapter with care, and make room for someone new to begin again.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED TO LOOK FOR IN EVERY SALE

The Person, the People, the Property, the Process, and the Pressure Points

By the time a family reaches the point of selling a loved one's home, they are rarely dealing with just a house.

They are dealing with grief, responsibility, timing, pressure, money, belongings, family relationships, and a long list of decisions they never wanted to make. What may look from the outside like a simple real estate transaction is often something very different once you are living inside it.

The stories in this book have shown that clearly.

They have included conflict, delay, legal complications, hidden damage, grief, guilt, family pressure, difficult occupants, and decisions that felt almost impossible to make. Some families worked together. Some could not. Some homes needed thoughtful

preparation. Others needed to be sold in their present condition because the burden had already become too great.

The details were different, but the patterns were not.

Over time, I began to see that no matter how different the families, properties, or circumstances looked on the surface, the same five areas kept shaping the sale again and again. These five areas helped me understand where the pressure was, where delays were most likely to come from, what needed to be addressed first, and what kind of guidance the family would need most.

That is why I came to rely on what I think of as the Five Ps:

The Person in Charge

The People Involved

The Property

The Process

The Pressure Points

When I understand those five areas clearly, I can usually understand the true shape of the sale much faster. More importantly, I can help the family understand what they are really facing.

These five areas do not make every sale easy. But they do make the situation easier to understand.

1. The Person in Charge:

In almost every story in this book, one person ended up carrying more than everyone else.

Sometimes it was a daughter. Sometimes it was a surviving spouse. Sometimes it was a trustee, a brother, or another family member left responsible for handling what came next. That person was often

grieving while also trying to make legal, financial, emotional, and practical decisions under pressure.

This matters more than people realize.

The person in charge is often expected to stay calm, be fair, make good decisions, explain things to others, deal with professionals, sort through belongings, pay attention to money, and keep the process going, all while carrying the emotional weight of the loss. Other people may see only the title of trustee, executor, or decision-maker. They may not see the exhaustion, confusion, pressure, or loneliness that often comes with that role.

One of the biggest mistakes families make is underestimating how much burden falls on that one person.

When I work with a family, I want to understand not only who is legally in charge, but how that person is doing emotionally, practically, and mentally. Are they overwhelmed? Are they capable but overloaded? Are they being pressured by others? Are they clear-headed, or are they exhausted and trying to do too much alone?

The sale almost always goes better when the person in charge is well supported, not just handed responsibility.

2. The People Involved:

A home sale after a death is never just about the house.

It is also about the people attached to it.

That includes family members, beneficiaries, occupants, trustees, siblings, attorneys, fiduciaries, estate sale professionals, tenants, buyers, and sometimes neighbors or others who carry influence. Every one of those people can affect the direction of the sale.

Some bring help. Some bring stability. Some bring love and cooperation.

Others bring grief, entitlement, resentment, fear, conflict, control, or old wounds that never really healed.

This is one reason some sales become much harder than expected. Families often assume the main issue will be price, repairs, or timing. But sometimes the real issue is the people. Sometimes the person living in the home controls access and undermines the process. Sometimes, a sibling who has not been involved suddenly wants money and power. Sometimes old family pain rises to the surface, and the house becomes the next place where that pain plays out.

When I look at a sale, I want to know who is involved, what role each person plays, who has real authority, who has emotional influence, and where the most likely tension will come from.

Because once you understand the people, you understand much more about the sale.

3. The Property:

The property itself still matters deeply.

That may sound obvious, but families do not always see it clearly at first, especially when they are overwhelmed by grief or conflict. A loved one's home may hold memory and meaning, but it is still a property with real-world conditions that affect value, timing, buyer interest, and sale strategy.

Some homes are clean, updated, and market-ready. Others are outdated, overfilled, occupied, partially repaired, or burdened by years of deferred maintenance. Some have hidden problems. Some have redevelopment potential. Some need thoughtful preparation.

Some should be sold in their present condition because doing more no longer makes financial sense.

The house does not stop mattering because the emotions are heavy.

One of the most important things a family can do is look honestly at the property and ask: What kind of house is this really? What condition is it in? What does it need? What is worth doing? What is not worth doing? Who is the most likely buyer? What will this property support financially and practically?

Families often feel pressure to either do everything or do nothing. In reality, the right answer is usually much more strategic than that.

My job is to help families see the home clearly enough to make practical decisions based on the property that is actually there, not the one they wish were there, remember from years ago, or hope a buyer will ignore.

4. The Process:

Many people assume that once the family decides to sell, the hard part is over.

Often, that is when a different kind of difficulty begins.

The process itself may involve legal authority, probate or trust issues, attorney involvement, document delays, signatures, cleanout, repair decisions, occupancy problems, lender communication, insurance issues, deadlines, escrow complications, buyer concerns, and countless smaller decisions that affect whether the sale keeps progressing or stalls.

In some stories, the process was blocked before the home could even reach the market. In others, the home reached the market, but the

sale was still threatened by instability, delay, or uncertainty. In still others, the process became harder because no one understood what needed to happen first.

This is why clarity matters so much.

A family may be emotionally ready to sell and still not be legally ready. They may be financially ready and still not be logistically ready. They may have authority on paper and still not have control in practice. They may believe the sale should be simple, while the actual process is layered and fragile.

When I help families, I am always paying attention to what stage they are truly in, what must happen first, what can wait, and what part of the process is most likely to create risk or delay.

The process is not just paperwork.

It is the path the family must walk from burden to resolution.

5. The Pressure Points:

Every sale has pressure points.

These are the places where things heat up, fall apart, get delayed, become emotional, or suddenly turn unstable.

Pressure points may include grief, money, family conflict, legal claims, occupancy, hidden damage, buyer fear, guilt, timing, competing opinions, exhausted decision-makers, or financial strain. Sometimes the pressure point is obvious. Sometimes it hides quietly until the wrong moment, then suddenly controls everything.

Pressure points matter because they tell you where the sale is most vulnerable.

If a family has deep conflict, that is a pressure point. If the home is occupied by someone difficult, that is a pressure point. If there is mold under the bathroom, an unfinished elevator shaft full of stagnant water, a reverse mortgage, an underfunded repair budget, or an out-of-state daughter trying to do everything from far away, those are pressure points too.

Pressure points are not always avoidable. But when they are recognized early, they are easier to prepare for, manage, and keep from taking over the whole sale.

This is one of the reasons experience matters.

A good guide does not just react to problems after they explode. A good guide tries to see where the pressure is already building and helps the family prepare for it before it derails the sale.

Why These Five Things Matter

What I have learned is this:

When you understand the Person in Charge, the People Involved, the Property, the Process, and the Pressure Points, the sale begins to make more sense.

You begin to understand why one family is stuck, why another family is fighting, why one house should be repaired and another should not, why one person is overwhelmed, why a buyer is getting nervous, why delays are growing, and why the burden feels heavier than expected.

These five areas help you stop treating the sale like a mystery and start seeing it more clearly.

That clarity matters.

Because families often blame themselves for what they do not yet understand.

They think they should be moving faster, that the decisions should be easier, that they should be able to make everyone happy, and that they should somehow know exactly what to do.

But many of the struggles they are facing are not personal failures. They are built into the situation itself.

Once you understand the true shape of the sale, you can respond more wisely.

What I Hope You Take With You

If there is one thing I hope this book has shown you, it is this:

Selling a loved one's home is not just about getting the property sold.

It is about understanding what kind of sale you are really in, recognizing the burden on the person carrying it, seeing the family dynamics honestly, understanding the property clearly, respecting the process, identifying the pressure points before they take control, and realizing that the right guidance can change the entire experience.

Not because it removes grief, makes every family cooperative, or erases delay, conflict, or financial limits.

But because it brings clarity where there is confusion, steadiness where there is pressure, and practical wisdom where people often feel lost.

That is why this work matters.

I have seen homes sold after years of delay. I have seen families find relief after months of confusion. I have seen people let go of homes they loved deeply. I have seen buyers step into properties and give them a new life. I have seen burdened daughters, widows, brothers, and trustees finally breathe again as the burden began to ease.

A loved one's home is never just a structure. It holds life, memory, history, pain, meaning, and love. When it must be sold, the sale should be handled with as much wisdom, steadiness, and dignity as possible.

If you are the person carrying that responsibility now, I want to leave you with this:

You do not have to do this perfectly.

You do not have to know everything at the beginning.

You do not have to solve every part of it today.

And you do not have to figure it all out by yourself. The right people can guide you, help you understand what matters most, and walk you through the parts you were never meant to figure out alone.

But you do need to understand what kind of situation you are in, what matters most, and where the real burden is falling.

That is how good decisions begin.

That is how unnecessary chaos is reduced.

And that is how a difficult sale can be handled with more clarity, more dignity, and less pain than families often think possible.

That is what I have learned to look for every time.

REAL ESTATE AND ESTATE TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK

Administrator

If there is no valid will or no executor available to serve, the court may appoint an administrator to handle the estate. That person may be responsible for managing the property, paying bills or debts, and helping oversee the sale of the home.

As-Is Sale

An as-is sale means the home is being sold in its present condition, without the seller agreeing in advance to make repairs or improvements. Buyers may still ask for repairs, credits, or concessions during the transaction, but the seller can decide how to respond.

Beneficiary

A beneficiary is a person who is legally entitled to receive money, property, or other assets from a trust, will, or estate.

Cash Offer

A cash offer means the buyer is offering to purchase the property without getting a new mortgage loan. Cash offers can sometimes make a sale simpler or faster, but the strongest offer is not always just about price. Terms, timing, and reliability matter too.

Cross-Qualifying

Cross-qualifying means having a buyer speak with a trusted lender to help confirm that the buyer is financially strong enough to complete the purchase. This can help the seller feel more confident that the offer is solid.

Disclosure

A disclosure is information that the seller provides about the condition of the property or other facts that could affect the buyer's decision. In a sale like this, disclosures are especially important because the person selling the home may not have lived there or may not know every detail about its history.

Escrow

Escrow is the period of time after a home goes under contract and before the sale officially closes. During escrow, inspections, paperwork, deposits, title work, and final details are handled so the property can legally and financially transfer to the buyer.

Estate Sale

An estate sale is the sale of personal belongings inside the home, such as furniture, dishes, artwork, clothing, tools, or household items. It is different from the sale of the house itself.

Executor

An executor is the person named in a will to carry out the deceased person's instructions and help manage the estate. This may include handling the sale of the home if the property is part of the estate.

Executrix

An executrix is the traditional word used for a woman named in a will to carry out the deceased person's instructions and help manage the estate. Today, many people use the word executor for both men and women, but you may still see executrix in older documents or conversations.

Fiduciary

A fiduciary is a person who has a legal duty to act in the best interest of another person or estate. In a situation like this, a fiduciary may be responsible for helping manage decisions, protect the estate, or move the sale forward fairly.

35-Day Notice of Proposed Action

A 35-Day Notice of Proposed Action is a formal notice sometimes used in trust administration to tell beneficiaries about an action that is being proposed, such as the sale of a home. It gives them a period of time to object before the action moves forward.

Heir

An heir is a person who may have a legal right to inherit property or assets after someone dies. This usually applies when there is no will, or when state law determines who receives the estate.

HOA (Homeowners Association)

An HOA is an organization that manages a neighborhood, condo complex, or planned community. HOA dues, rules, unpaid balances, or property violations can affect the sale of a home.

Inherited Home

An inherited home is a property that passes to a surviving family member, heir, or beneficiary after the owner dies. Selling an inherited home often involves more emotion, more decisions, and more legal or financial questions than a traditional home sale.

Lien

A lien is a legal claim against the property for money that is owed. Liens may need to be paid or resolved before the home can be sold.

Notice to Perform

A Notice to Perform is a formal notice given during a real estate transaction when one side is not doing what the contract requires. It gives that person or party a deadline to act before the other side has the right to cancel.

Preliminary Title Report

A preliminary title report is an early report that shows who owns the property and what recorded issues may affect the sale, such as liens, unpaid taxes, easements, or other legal matters tied to the title.

Probate

Probate is the legal court process used to settle a deceased person's estate, pay debts, and transfer assets to the proper heirs or

beneficiaries. If the home is part of the estate, probate may affect when and how it can be sold.

Probate Sale

A probate sale is the sale of a home that is part of an estate going through probate. These sales can involve additional rules, court oversight, and timing issues that do not exist in a standard home sale.

Reverse Mortgage

A reverse mortgage is a loan taken against the equity in a home, usually by an older homeowner. After the owner dies or permanently leaves the home, the loan generally must be paid off, refinanced, or satisfied through the sale of the property.

Successor Trustee

A successor trustee is the person named to take over management of a trust after the original trustee dies, resigns, or can no longer serve. If the home is held in a trust, the successor trustee may be the person responsible for handling the sale.

Title Report

A title report is a document that shows the legal ownership of the property and identifies recorded matters that may affect the sale, such as liens, unpaid taxes, easements, or other title issues.

Trust

A trust is a legal arrangement in which one person holds and manages property for the benefit of another person or group of people. When a home is held in a trust, the sale may be handled differently from a probate sale.

Trust Sale

A trust sale is the sale of a home that is owned by a trust. The person handling the sale is usually the trustee or successor trustee, and the process may be simpler than probate if the trust and authority are already clear.

Trustee

A trustee is the person responsible for managing the assets in a trust according to the trust document. If the home is owned by a trust, the trustee may be the person authorized to sell it.

Will

A will is a legal document that states who should receive a person's property after death and who should be in charge of carrying out those instructions. A will may name an executor to manage the estate.

NEED MORE HELP?

If you are responsible for selling a loved one's home and feel overwhelmed by the decisions, the family dynamics, or the process itself, you do not have to figure it out alone.

I help individuals and families in San Diego County and surrounding areas move through these situations with steady guidance, practical support, and real estate experience grounded in the realities of difficult transitions.

If you are in San Diego County or nearby, I may be able to help you directly.

If you are outside this area, I can often help you find a trusted real estate professional in your community who can guide you through the sale with care, experience, and professionalism.

Whether you are a trustee, executor, administrator, surviving spouse, adult child, fiduciary, or the one carrying the responsibility, this process can feel heavy. The right guidance can make it easier to understand what needs to happen next and how to move forward with less stress and more confidence.

Call or text: 858-229-8072

Email: Doc@DeenaStacer.com

You do not have to carry this alone.

YOUR NEXT STEP

If you are responsible for selling a loved one's home, you do not have to figure this out alone.

These resources will help you understand what you are facing, what make control or disrupt the sale, and how to move through the sale with more confidence..

Scan to access:

The 5 Conditions Checklist,
The 7 Secrets,
Real Stories from the book,
Free book resources and next steps.



ABOUT DR. DEENA

Dr. Deena Stacer is a real estate broker who specializes in helping families navigate the sale of a loved one's home. She works with the person carrying the responsibility for the sale, whether a trustee, executor, surviving spouse, adult child, fiduciary, or trusted friend, offering steady guidance and real estate expertise through both the practical steps and the emotional weight of the process.

What makes her work different is not just her knowledge of real estate. It is her understanding of the emotional weight that so often comes with the sale. She knows that selling a loved one's home is rarely just about the property. It is about memories, responsibility, family history, difficult decisions, and the burden carried by the person trying to hold everything together.

With a PhD in conflict resolution and a background in family systems, human behavior, and leadership, Dr. Deena helps clients understand what to expect, prepare for what often happens, and move through the process with less stress and more confidence. Her approach focuses on helping people make better decisions based on the true condition of the home, the family dynamics, and the realities of the sale so they are not caught off guard along the way.

Much of her work is helping people understand what is likely to happen before it happens. By setting realistic expectations, identifying potential challenges early, and guiding each step of the

process, she helps clients feel more prepared, less overwhelmed, and better able to move forward even when the situation is complex.

Throughout her career, Dr. Deena has helped clients navigate challenging situations involving death, deferred maintenance, legal delays, family disagreement, occupant problems, and the many unexpected issues that can complicate a sale. She brings both practical guidance and a steady presence to the process, helping people feel supported while they make hard decisions and move forward.

She serves clients in San Diego County and surrounding areas and can often help connect people outside the area with trusted real estate professionals who can provide reliable help and care.

Dr. Deena is the author of *Selling A Loved One's Home* and other real estate books written to help buyers and sellers make wise decisions, avoid costly mistakes, and move through important transitions with greater confidence.

If you are the one responsible for selling a loved one's home, this book was written for you. Selling a loved one's home is not the same as a traditional home sale. In a typical sale, the owners understand the home, control the decisions, and move forward on their own terms.

Selling a loved one's home is very different. You may be dealing with grief, unexpected responsibility, a home that needs work, unclear legal authority, financial pressure, and family members who do not agree. Decisions are often delayed, and the process becomes far more complicated than you ever expected. With decades of real estate experience, including helping families through these exact situations, Dr. Deena Stacer understands what this process is really like for the person left in charge.

In this book, Dr. Deena Stacer shares real stories of homes sold under difficult circumstances, showing what actually happens, why delays occur, and how these sales eventually move forward.

You will learn the Five Conditions that shape every sale and the Seven Secrets that help you better understand what you are facing. If you see yourself in these pages, you will begin to realize that what you are experiencing is not unusual. And that matters. Because when you understand what is happening, you can make better decisions, stay focused, and move through the process with more confidence until the home is sold.



The Real Estate Doctor
This Doctor Makes House Calls

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