



## ELDER LAW AND ESTATE PLANNING

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# Adult stepchild wonders if stepmother left her an inheritance

**Question:** My father was married to my stepmother for 10 years. He predeceased her. She has now died, too. I was never close with her and since his death, rarely spoke to her. I know he left her some of his assets, so I'm thinking that some of the assets she left behind may be rightfully mine. Would I be entitled to anything from her estate?

**Answer:** There is too little information here to answer your question, so let's just cover some of the likely scenarios.

As a stepchild, you are not considered her heir. If she died intestate, under Florida law you are no more entitled to a piece of her estate than a stranger would be, unless she or your dad made plans to include you in some fashion.

On the other hand, you may have been mentioned as a beneficiary in her will. Do you know if she had one? You can find out if one has been deposited with the court by checking with the probate court in the county in which she resided. If one has been filed, you can see if you are listed as a beneficiary. Another possibility is that you were left something in a trust. If so, the successor trustee should be getting in touch with you.

Another possible scenario: You might have been named as a death beneficiary on a bank or

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brokerage account. But it may be very difficult to find that out unless you know of and go to the institutions where she had her bank accounts and brokerage accounts.

Given that your relationship with your stepmother was not close, it's unlikely she left you anything. But you never know. You could hire a probate attorney to look into the matter, but exercise caution: there may not be sufficient monies involved to justify the legal fees you would have to pay to get an answer.

*Joseph Karp and Jonathan Karp are Florida Elder Law and Estate Planning Attorneys. The Karp Law Firm is located in Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties. It assists clients with wills, trusts, Medicaid and VA benefits planning, special needs planning, asset preservation, probate/trust administration, estate litigation, and probate and elder law mediation.*