

Wills & Estates
Winter Term 2026

Lecture Notes – No. 12

XIV. GIFTS

Two related concepts are important: abatement and ademption.

'Abatement'

Abatement refers to the process by which the assets of a solvent Estate are used to pay debts, liabilities, and expenses which arise on the testator's death which may reduce some gifts as a result.

If there are insufficient assets to pay creditors, then the Estate is *insolvent* and no gifts can be satisfied.

Where the Estate is solvent but there is insufficient property to satisfy all gifts, then some gifts will *abate* – that is, the assets that would otherwise be used to make the gifts will be used to pay the deceased's debts instead.

If the Will doesn't provide specific terms on the point, then the residue and then general legacies and then specific legacies abate in order (and pro rata). In other words, specific gifts take priority over general gifts which in turn takes priority over residuary gifts.

Estates Administration Act, s.5

Subject to section 32 of the Succession Law Reform Act, the real and personal property of a deceased person comprised in a residuary devise or bequest, except so far as a contrary intention appears from the person's will or any codicil thereto, is applicable rateably, according to their respective values, to the payment of his or her debts, funeral and testamentary expenses and the cost and expenses of administration.

The 'contrary intention' to prefer one set of legatees over another in respect of abatement as set out in the Will must be clear on the face of the document.

**Lindsay v Waldbrook
(1897), 24 OAR 604 (C.A.)**

Here five legacies were set out in the Will in relation to a fund of money arising from the sale of real property. There wasn't enough money in the fund to satisfy all the gifts. Should all of the gifts in question abate or should some be preferred?

The question here was whether the words setting up the clause set out a 'contrary intention' to treat the legatees differently. The argument made by one legatee was that his share was to be set aside and invested and used for his education and maintenance. On appeal, it was held that the testator did not display an intention in the Will to treat this

gift differently than others within the same class. Thus, **only clear language to effect the testator's intention to give one general legatee priority over another will allow for avoidance of the pro rata approach to abatement.**

'Ademption'

Ademption occurs where the property subject of the legacy no longer exists as part of the testator's estate and as a result the gift is void.

Thus, where a house is destroyed by fire (in which the testatrix perishes), the insurance money falls into the residue of the estate as a gift of the house under the will adeems; **Re Hunter (1975), 8 O.R. (2d) 399 (H.C.J.); cb, p.585.**

[Please note the Succession Law Reform Act, s.20(2)(b) would now operate to allow the legatee to receive the insurance proceeds.]

McDougald Estate v. Gooderham (2005), 17 E.T.R. (3d) 36 (Ont. C.A.)

In this case, a woman was incapable and her Attorneys under a Power of Attorney for Property sold some Florida property to pay for her care. The property was subject of a disposition in her Will. The Court of Appeal examined the section of the *Substitute Decisions Act* dealing with ademption; s.36(1).

35.1

(1) A guardian of property shall not dispose of property that the guardian knows is subject to a specific testamentary gift in the incapable person's will.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in respect of a specific testamentary gift of money.

(3) **Despite subsection (1),**

(a) the guardian may dispose of the property if the disposition of that property is necessary to comply with the guardian's duties; or

(b) the guardian may make a gift of the property to the person who would be entitled to it under the will, if the gift is authorized by section 37.

...

36.(1) The doctrine of ademption does not apply to property that a guardian of property disposes of under this Act, and anyone who would have acquired an interest in the property acquires a corresponding interest in the proceeds.

...

37.(1) A guardian of property shall make the following expenditures from the incapable person's property:

1. The expenditures that are reasonably necessary for the person's support, education and care.

2. The expenditures that are reasonably necessary for the support, education and care of the person's dependants.

3. The expenditures that are necessary to satisfy the person's other legal obligations.

Gillese JA held:

29 At the time that the attorneys considered selling the Palm Beach property, they faced two apparently conflicting obligations. The first was their obligation to ensure that Ms. McDougald's assets were managed prudently. They had to manage Ms. McDougald's property so as to provide her with adequate care while ensuring that her assets were preserved. Both at common law and by virtue of s. 32(1) of the Act, as discussed below, the attorneys were required to act diligently, with honesty and integrity and in good faith, for Ms. McDougald's benefit.

30 The attorneys' second obligation was to ensure that Ms. McDougald's testamentary intentions were fulfilled. Under the terms of Ms. McDougald's will, her sister, Cecil Hedstrom, was to receive the Palm Beach property. The fact that a corporation owned the property was not a problem because paragraph 4 of the will directed her trustees to do whatever was necessary to transfer property held by the corporation to the beneficiary.

31 Absent the anti-ademption provision, the trustees could not have fulfilled both obligations. If they sold the property in order to prudently manage Ms. McDougald's assets, they would upset Ms. McDougald's desire to give the property to her sister. If they retained the property and transferred it to Ms. Hedstrom on Ms. McDougald's death, they would have permitted Ms. McDougald's assets to be depleted.

32 Section 36(1), as interpreted above, enabled the trustees to meet both obligations. They were able to manage Ms. McDougald's property prudently. In this regard, it is worthy of note that the application judge found that the attorneys' decision to sell the property was prudent. And, the attorneys were able to respect Ms. McDougald's clear wish that her sister receive the property, by giving her the proceeds of sale of the property.

33 As the application judge noted, the Act is to be given a large and liberal interpretation so as to best ensure the attainment of its objects. The intent of the Act is to provide a structure to protect individuals who are incapable of managing their financial affairs. It provides methods by which the property of persons whose capacity is diminished may be managed by others, including by means of a continuing power of attorney. Unlike a capacitated testator, Ms. McDougald did not have the ability to revise her will when it became apparent that the property should be sold. On the interpretation of s. 36(1) of the Act given above, the attorneys were able to take the steps required to manage Ms. McDougald's property in a way that respected her needs and her wishes at a time when she was incapable of managing her affairs on her own.

[*McDougald Estate v Gooderham* is also important in estate litigation generally and stands for the proposition that the normal costs rules apply in most cases; see *Sawdon Estate v. Sawdon*, 2014 ONCA 101 (Ont. C.A.); *Salter v. Salter Estate* (2009), 50 E.T.R. (3d) 227 (Ont. S.C.J.)]

Abatement and Ademption

<p>Specific legacy</p> <p>(i.e. a gift of a specific property)</p>	<p>A specific legacy which adeems fails.</p> <p>A specific legacy carries all income, profit and accretions on it.</p> <p>General legacies abate before specific legacies.</p> <p>Expenses in respect of preservation of the subject-matter can be charged against the legacy.</p>
<p>General legacy</p> <p>(i.e. a gift of specified property from the general assets of the estate; e.g. a gift of shares, which the estate may have to purchase)</p>	<p>General legacies abate before specific legacies.</p> <p>General legacies don't adeem.</p>
<p>Demonstrative legacy</p> <p>(i.e. a general gift but primarily from a specific fund held by the estate, e.g. from an investment certificate)</p>	<p>A demonstrative legacy may adeem but only in respect of that fund upon which it is to be drawn.</p> <p>A demonstrative legacy is treated as a specific legacy and will abate after general legacies.</p>
<p>Residuary legacy</p> <p>(i.e. a gift of the residue of the testator's general personal assets after other bequests are satisfied).</p>	<p>A residuary legacy carries all income, profit and accretions on general legacies.</p>

Property abates as follows:

1. Residuary personalty;
2. Residuary real property;
3. General legacies (including pecuniary bequests from the residue);
4. Demonstrative legacies (i.e bequests from the proceeds of a specific asset or fund, such as a bank account, which does not form part of the residue);
5. Specific bequests of personalty; and
6. Specific devises of real property.

Illustrative Cases:

**Re Millar
(1927), 60 OLR 434 (S.C.); cb, p. 561**

Here there was a general legacy which was impossible to fulfil. The preamble to the Will read:

This will is necessarily uncommon and capricious because I have no dependents or near relatives and no duty rests upon me to leave any property at my death and what I do leave is proof of my folly in gathering and retaining more than I require in my lifetime.

The clause in question read:

To each Protestant Minister exercising his clerical functions at an annual salary and resident in Toronto at the time of my death and to each Orange Lodge in Toronto I give one share of the O'Keefe Brewery Company of Toronto Limited.

Not only had O'Keefe Brewery Company been reorganized by the time of the testator's death, but the successor firm was privately held and so shares could not be purchased.

It was held that the gift created a general legacy which could be satisfied by the value of the shares in question if they could be purchased.

Middleton JA approved of the dicta in *Re Gray* (1887), 36 Ch.D. 205, 211, '**a general legacy of this kind amounts in effect to a direction to the testator's executors to buy the shares or other property designated ... if the legatee had a choice in the matter and said that he would rather not have shares, he would then take the amount of money which would have had to be expended in buying them.**'

[nb: in essence then this was a gift of money, valued notionally as against the shares. As the property was not actually owned by the testator at any time, the gift did not adeem.]

**Culbertson v Culberston
(1967), 60 WWR 187 (Sask CA); cb., p.568**

The will gave 'the following amounts to the following persons' and named 31 people. It then provided:

I direct that each of the above legacies shall be paid out of the money realized from the sale of my farm lands, and if the amount... should not be sufficient to cover the full amount of the said legacies, then each person shall take a proportionate share.

The sale of the lands during the testator's lifetime resulted in a fund well in excess of the legacies but, on his death, the executor received only a much smaller amount as what remained owing. Previous payments had been put in a general bank account and their identity lost.

At first instance it was held that the legacies were demonstrative and should be paid in full, using the balance of the purchase price first, then the general estate.

On appeal, it was held that the legacies were specific and payable only out of the balance of the purchase price. Thus, the legacies adeemed equally ('*pari passu*'). The testator's language, given its natural and ordinary meaning, limited payment to this particular fund.

Per Maguire J.A.:

2 The late Moses Culbertson died on June 30, 1965. By his last will and testament bearing date June 30, 1960, the testator bequeathed 31 legacies of varying amounts, totalling \$24,750, to certain charitable institutions and named persons. In respect to these legacies the will read:

I give devise and bequeath the following amounts to the following persons and organizations.

3 Then followed the names of the persons and organizations together with the amount given to each.

4 This provision in the will is immediately followed by the following paragraph:

I direct that each of the above legacies shall be paid out of the money realized from the sale of my farm lands and if the amount recovered from the sale of my farm lands should not be sufficient to cover the full amount of the said legacies, then each person shall take a proportionate share in accordance with the amount he would have received if the full amount of the legacies had been realized.

5 The residue of the estate, remaining after certain other bequests or provisions not of importance in our present consideration, was devised and bequeathed to his brother, William, and William's wife, in equal shares.

6 At the date of the will, the testator owned 850 acres of farm lands. These lands were sold by him on July 4, 1963, under an agreement of sale for a total sale price of \$30,000. At the date of death the sum of \$9,288.75 remained payable under this agreement.

...

15 **With every deference to the learned chambers judge, I am of the opinion that the language used by the testator, given its natural and ordinary meaning, limits the payment of the legacies to the fund to be realized from the sale of his farm lands. To place upon the words of the testator an interpretation that he intended the legacies to take effect out of some other of his property if the fund proves inadequate would, in my opinion, defeat entirely his direct and specific instructions that the legacies abate if the fund should be deficient. In my view, by reading the two paragraphs together and giving to the language there its natural and ordinary meaning, the legacies constitute a bequest of the specific fund to be realized from the sale of the testator's farm lands to the amount of the bequests: If the fund should be deficient, the legacies would abate; if the fund exceeds the amount of the legacies, the excess would fall into residue.** While the courts do not favour construing a bequest or devise in a will, as being specific when there is doubt, recourse cannot be taken to this rule of construction when, from the language of the will, the intention of the testator can be determined.

16 Payment of these legacies may, therefore, be made only from the fund designated by the testator. The portion of the sale proceeds received by the testator in his lifetime, having lost identity as such proceeds and thus as part of the designated fund, there remains only the balance of the sale price of the lands remaining payable at the testator's death, namely, \$9,288.75, which may constitute the fund.

DATE FROM WHICH WILL SPEAKS

The *Succession Law Reform Act* provides:

22. Except when a contrary intention appears by the will, a will speaks and takes effect as if it had been made immediately before the death of the testator with respect to,

- (a) the property of the testator; and
- (b) the right, chose in action, equitable estate or interest, right to insurance proceeds or compensation, or mortgage, charge or other security interest of the testator under subsection 20 (2).

This section is based on the 1837 English Wills Act and establishes the ambulatory nature of Wills; that is, the Will can be created in respect of assets which comprise part of the testator's estate. Sometimes the question arises as to whether property acquired after the execution of the Will was intended to be excluded from the operation of a particular

clause (i.e. a gift of the house in which T owned at the execution of the Will, or, the specific house which was owned at execution and which may have later been sold); alternatively, one might approach the question as one of interpretation of the term rather than operation of the Will.

**Re Rutherford
(1918), 42 OLR 405 (HCJ); cb, p.589**

Per Middleton JA:

The section [the predecessor of the present s.22, SLRA] in effect provides that, **unless from the will itself you can see that the testator did not intend after-acquired property to pass, it must be read as though he had executed it immediately before his death.** In many cases this must result in imputing to the testator an intention which in fact he never had; but, on the other hand, the opposite rule would even more frequently result in defeating his intention, This is at once apprehended where the expression used is general, e.g., where there is a gift of "my house" or "my horse," and the testator had sold his house or his horse and had bought another. The wife to whom he had given his house or the son to whom he had given his horse would riot easily understand why nothing was given because of the sale of the property owned at the will's date. So this statute establishes the rule, as put by one Judge, that **the testator must be assumed to have read his will or carried it in his mind till shortly before his death, and to have refrained from any change because it expressed his intention at that time.**

Now two things have been frequently found in wills which the Courts have taken as an indication of a contrary intention. When a testator speaks of that which he gives as that which he owns at the date of the will, clearly that and that alone is given, for the provision is not that the will must in all respects be regarded as made immediately before the death.

Then, when the will speaks of a specific thing, and is not general in its provisions, the thing given must be determined by the language used by the testator. Nothing else passes, for nothing else is given. In this way Judges, always slow to recognise by decision the desirability of reform, cut down the full meaning and effect of the statute. But it has always been held that when the thing given remains, and has, been added to between the date of the will and the date of, death, the whole property answering the description at the latter date will pass.

**Re Bird
[1942] OR 415 (CA); cb, p.592**

Here the testatrix bought a vacant lot in 1891 described as 'Lot 57, Plan 184' with a municipal address (set after she built a house on the property) of 14 Mitchell Avenue. She made a will devising it to her son, but later was required to tear it down and thereafter rebuilt is as two houses, 14 and 16 Mitchell Avenue. No change was made in the Will

notwithstanding this development of the lot. There was a signed memorandum in which the testatrix set out her intention to give both houses to the son. While the dissenting judge would apply the statute strictly and only allow 14 Mitchell Ave to pass to the son, the majority held that there was a contrary intention.

Per Fisher JA:

It is clear to my mind, the testatrix having by her will specifically described and identified the property she devised to her son, that notwithstanding the fact that the description at the date of death applied to part only of the property, the devise covered and included not only the land itself, but all the buildings thereon at the date of death, and further that even if there was a changed condition of the property subsequent to the making of the will, that changed condition satisfied the description of the property devised under the will...

... Lindley L.J. in *In re Portal and Lamb* (1885), 30 Ch. D. 50, [said] at p. 55: "It [meaning section 24 of The English Wills Act] does not say that we are to construe whatever a man says in his will as if it were made on the day of his death." Hawkins on Wills, 3rd ed., at p. 27, on the authority of *In re Evans*, says: "A specific devise is not cut down by an alteration in the property made after the date of the will..."

The Court, in construing a will such as this, is entitled to take into consideration the condition of things in reference to which it was made, and, where there exists a specific description, to consider all the circumstances relating to the property and material to identify the thing described...

I am of opinion that a contrary intention within the meaning of s. 26(1) of The Wills Act, appears here from the fact that the testatrix has used the description, "14 Mitchell Avenue" to refer to the whole Lot 57. The description "14 Mitchell Avenue" meant the same to her as the description "Lot 57", and therefore the will must be read as if she had said "Lot 57".

DISCLAIMER

A gift must be accepted; if disclaimed, it reverts to the Estate for distribution as part of the residue (unless it was a gift of the residue in which case there is an intestacy in respect of the residue). See **Montreal Trust Co. v. Matthews (1979), 99 D.L.R. (3d) 65; cb, p.630** It is not uncommon for a person interested in a gift to disclaim in favour of a residuary beneficiary for tax reasons.

XV. FAILED GIFTS: 'LAPSE'

Assume that the testatrix has provided properly in her Will for a gift to a named legatee; that is, the provision is valid on all points of certainty and formality. Suppose that the legatee has pre-deceased the testatrix. What happens?

The common law rule is that a gift to a person who predeceases the testatrix 'lapses' and is void, with the result that the gift falls into the residue of the estate (unless it was a gift of part of the residue, in which cases it is distributed as an intestacy). In Ontario, *the Succession Law Reform Act* provides as follows:

23. Except when a contrary intention appears by the will, property or an interest therein that is comprised or intended to be comprised in a devise or bequest that fails or becomes void by reason of,

(a) the death of the devisee or donee in the lifetime of the testator; or

(b) the devise or bequest being disclaimed or being contrary to law or otherwise incapable of taking effect,

is included in the residuary devise or bequest, if any, contained in the will.

Re Stuart

(1964), 47 W.W.R. 500 (BCSC)

The testator made his own Will which contained a number of specific gifts of money. Following the provision of various gifts, the Will went on to provide as follows in Clause 36:

I wish to express and make it clear to the Executors of my will that any balance left over after the amounts hereto before noted are all paid in full, **this balance of my estate is then to be equally divided among the following persons named herein** as listed below...

One specific gift was to a niece who predeceased the testator; she was also one of the names listed as taking the residue of the estate pursuant to cl.36. The issue then became whether the niece's share of the residue fell to the other persons within the residuary clause, or, would be distributed as an intestacy.

It was held that if the collection of persons set out in the residuary clause was of a definable 'class' then the niece's share would be reapportioned amongst the remaining members of that class; if not, the share would be distributed according to the intestacy rules. In this case, there was no discernable class on the facts.

Per Nemetz J:

It appears clear that a lapsed specific devise or bequest falls or is included in the residuary clause, if any, of a will. However, counsel before me have been unable to cite any case where a court has judicially considered the effect of sec. 22 of our *Wills Act* (or its counterpart in any other jurisdiction) in respect of lapsed residuary devises or bequests. Accordingly, I must now

determine whether or not sec. 22 applies equally to lapsed devises and bequests in both *specific* and *residuary* bequests and devises.

Romer, J. in *Re Whitrod; Burrows v. Base*, [1926] Ch. 118, 95 LJ Ch 205, restates the general principle of law relating to lapsed gifts vis-à-vis the residual provisions of a will at p. 121:

In *Vaughan Hawkins on Wills*, 3rd ed., p. 52, that learned author, after referring to the general rule that a general residuary bequest carries lapsed and void legacies, continues: 'The comprehensive import of the word residue does not extend to a gift of the residue of that residue. Thus, if the testator gives £10,000 out of the residue of his personal estate to A., and the residue to B., and the bequest to A. fails, the gift to B. will not, it appears, in general carry the £10,000 bequeathed to A., which will therefore be undisposed of.'

It was urged upon me by Mr. Jonsson, counsel for some of the residuary beneficiaries, that, since sec. 22 makes no distinction between specific and residuary devises or bequests, Annabelle Palmer's portion of the residue should be distributed among the surviving residuary beneficiaries. However, it appears to me that in order to give effect to this argument, the legislature would have used words in sec. 22 similar to those appearing in sec. 30, e.g., "and in the case of a lapsed residuary devise or bequest, is divisible among the remaining residuary devisees and legatees."

Since the will does not dispose of Annabelle Palmer's lapsed share and since sec. 22 does not, in my view, provide for the disposition of lapsed residuary devises or bequests, her interest passes as on an intestacy.

ANTI-LAPSE LEGISLATION: THE PREFERRED CLASS

The development of the lapse rule brought early statutory revision in English law in respect of lapsed gifts to close relatives. Thus the Wills Act 1837 (UK) provided the predecessor legislation to the contemporary provisions of our provincial statute that deemed a gift to the spouse or issue of the deceased legatee rather than have the gift to the predeceasing close relative falling into the residue of the estate. Why? Both lapse and anti-lapse are rationalized in common expectations – we presume that testator would rather the gift go to the spouse or issue of a predeceasing child (that is, stay within the family) and that a gift to a predeceasing friend (that is, stay within the friend's family). Given that these rules can be ousted by the testator in his will, we presume further that the testator knows the rule and provides in his will accordingly.

The anti-lapse rule is relatively simple:

except where a contrary intention appears in the Will, the doctrine of lapse does not apply where a legacy or devise is made to the child, grandchild, or sibling of the testator or testatrix who predeceases him / her where that person leaves a spouse or issue. In such cases, the gift is treated as being made directly to the

persons who would have taken from the donee's estate if he or she had died intestate immediately after the testator or testatrix.

Thus, the SLRA provides:

31. Except when a contrary intention appears by the will, where a devise or bequest is made to a child, grandchild, brother or sister of the testator who dies before the testator, either before or after the testator makes his or her will, and leaves a spouse or issue surviving the testator, the devise or bequest does not lapse but takes effect as if it had been made directly to the persons among whom and in the shares in which the estate of that person would have been divisible,
- (a) if that person had died immediately after the death of the testator;
 - (b) if that person had died intestate;
 - (c) if that person had died without debts; and (d) if section 45 had not been passed.

**Re Wolson
[1939] Ch 780**

Here the testator left a Will with a residuary clause that his widow would take a life interest and that after she died, the remainder would go, in a $\frac{1}{4}$ part, to certain people who attained 25 years of age. One of those people was his daughter. Thus, her share of the residue was conditional.

The daughter survived the testator, but died at age 24. It was held that the statute did not operate to save her share; that is, it did not operate to consider her as still alive when the testator died (in which case she would have been 25 years of age). If she had predeceased him having attained age 25, her share would not have lapsed according to the statute. The anti-lapse rule did not relieve against a condition of the gift to her given that she survived the testator.

**Re Wudel Estate; Moore v. Moore
(1982), 13 ETR 25 (Alta QB)**

The testatrix's Will provided for a disposition of the residue:

divide the residue (including but not limiting the generality of the foregoing of cash, stocks, bonds and real property) of my estate as follows:

1. 8% **to be divided equally among my grandchildren** at the time of my death;
2. 28% of my estate is to be divided equally among my sons;
3. 64% is to be divided equally among my daughters.

If any of my sons and daughters should die after the date of this my last Will and Testament but before my death, then I direct that the portion that that child was entitled to should be divided equally among his or her children. Should any of my children die as aforesaid leaving no children then the portion that that child was entitled to shall be divided between my children alive at the time of my death.

One of the daughters died *before* the Will was drawn; the issue was whether the anti-lapse provisions of the statute governed the disposition of the deceased daughter's share of the residue. The effect would be that the child of the deceased daughter would take her mother's share and still receive a portion of the residue equally with the other grandchildren of the testatrix.

Cawsey J held that general form of the estate plan expressed in the Will indicated that the anti-lapse provisions were excluded:

Although a will speaks from the date of the death of the testatrix the court must go back to the date of execution of the will to ascertain the intentions of the testatrix. The only evidence before the court is the will itself and the court must determine the meaning of the words used by the testatrix. Many Canadian courts have stated that the question is simply one of determining the meaning of the words used by the testatrix in the objective sense but more recent cases indicate that a court of construction should attempt to determine the subjective intent of the testatrix to determine the disposition of the property.

The whole will must be considered and not just isolated parts. When the will was drawn it must be accepted that Maria Wudel knew that her daughter, Marion, had predeceased her. However, she did not know what would happen between the date of her will and the date of her death.

If one of Maria Wudel's other children had died between the execution of the will and the date of her death the distribution with respect to that child would not be the distribution contemplated by s. 35 of the Wills Act since no provision is made for the spouse of such deceased child. This appears to be a clear intention on the part of Maria Wudel to oust the provisions of s. 35 of the Wills Act.

Thus, the inclusion of terms to deal with the shares of children who pre-deceased the testatrix after the execution of the Will in favour of his or her children (but not a spouse) and if there are no such children then his or her surviving siblings was consistent with the statute being ousted in respect of the daughter who pre-deceased the testatrix before the execution of the Will.

[Again, a conventional approach to interpretation but one that allows the judge to find the statute was ousted by implication – but not on the face.]

EXCEPTIONS TO LAPSE

(a) Joint Tenancy

Generally one might say that a joint tenancy is by definition excluded from the rule, as gift of a share of a joint tenancy is not possible by law (unless all tenants agree and thus convert the holding to one in common). If the testator is the last surviving tenant and gives the property to someone in the Will who predeceases him, then lapse does operate (as there is no joint tenancy at that point; T has taken title wholly through the doctrine of survivorship).

**Re Coughlin
(1982), 36 O.R. (2d) 446 (H.C.J.)**

At issue was the construction and operation of the following clause of the will:

4. I GIVE, DEVISE AND BEQUEATH all my property, both real and personal, of every nature and kind whatsoever and wheresoever situate of which I am possessed or over which I may have a general power of appointment, to my sister, MONA COUGHLIN, my brother, ALONZO COUGHLIN and my nephew, GERARD GRADY, in equal shares, **share and share alike to be theirs absolutely.**

Only Gerard survived the testatrix; the other two each pre-deceased her leaving neither spouse nor children.

The issue was in respect of the phrase 'in equal shares, share and share alike to be theirs absolutely' – **did To intend to give property as a joint tenancy (but only Gerard was alive at T's death) or in common and per stirpes (i.e. individual shares which pass to the deceased donee's issue)?** The latter – the family circumstances were consistent with a stirpital gift and not a joint tenancy.

Per Rutherford J:

With these principles in mind then, what did the testatrix intend by para. 4 of this will? I must put myself "in her armchair", having regard following surrounding circumstances which are in evidence:

(a) From 1956, when he was one and one-half years of age, until the spring of 1978, Gerard Grady lived with the testatrix, her sisters Lillian and Mona Coughlin (his great-aunts) and her brother Alonzo Coughlin (his great-uncle) at 291 Euclid Street, Peterborough.

(b) During that time, Gerard Grady was raised and provided for to the by his great-aunts and his great-uncle.

(c) At the time of the making of her will, the testatrix was residing at 291 Euclid Street solely with Gerard Grady and the other named residual beneficiaries, Alonzo and Mona Coughlin (Lillian Coughlin having died).

(d) During the time Gerard Grady resided with the testatrix, the surviving next of kin, Donald Coughlin, visited them approximately twice yearly.

This case raises a conflict between two rules of construction of wills: the rule that the will should be construed on the presumption that the testator did not intend to die totally or partially intestate, and the tendency of the law to lean towards a tenancy in common as opposed to a joint tenancy. If I find that the testatrix intended to benefit only the survivor of the three named beneficiaries, I must find that she intended to convey a joint tenancy. If I find she intended a tenancy in common, the result is that two of the bequests lapse and there is a partial intestacy with respect to two-thirds of her estate. These rules, I reiterate, are to be used only if the intention of the testatrix is not manifest from the instrument in the light of surrounding circumstances.

In my view, I do not need to resort to these rules to interpret this will. My reading of para. 4 of the will convinces me that the testatrix intended that the residue of her estate pass to the survivor or survivors of the three named beneficiaries. The testatrix, with her brother, her sister and her great-nephew, formed a household which had existed at 291 Euclid Street, Peterborough, since 1956. To that household, Donald Coughlin was an outsider even though he was the nearest surviving blood relative, apart from her brother and sister, to the testatrix. I do not believe that the testatrix intended that Donald Coughlin, or any other person, should take the shares of her brother and sister, should they predecease her, leaving Gerard Grady as the sole survivor of the named beneficiaries.

This view is supported by the final words of the dispositive paragraph: "... to be theirs absolutely". These words denote an intention to dispose of the entire residue of the estate to the named beneficiaries and they imply a right of survivorship. As Ritchie J. said in *Re Harmer* (1964), 46 D.L.R. (2d) 521 (S.C.C.), at pp. 524-25:

The inclination of Courts to lean against a construction which will result in intestacy is far from being a rule of universal application and is not to be followed if the circumstances of the case and the language of the will are such as to clearly indicate the testator's intention to leave his property or some part of it undisposed of upon the happening of certain events.

It appears to me, however, that when an individual has purported to make final disposition of all his 'property both real and personal of every nature and kind and wheresoever situate', he is not to be taken to have intended to leave all that property undisposed of on the happening of certain events, unless there are some very exceptional and compelling reasons for so holding. As was said by Lord Shaw of Dunfermline, in *Lightfoot v. Maybery*, [1914] A.C. 782 at p. 802, a construction resulting in an intestacy 'is a dernier ressort in the construction of wills'.

(b) Gift Made in Fulfilment of a Moral Obligation

There is old authority that supports the proposition that a gift motivated by the testator's fulfilment of what he thought to be a 'moral obligation' upon him falls outside the lapse

rule; see, for example, *Stevens v King* [1904] 2 Ch 30. On the other hand, courts have held that the payment must relate to a legal duty else there may lapse.

**Re Mackie
(1986), 54 OR (2d) 784 (H.C.J.)**

Should a gift lapse where the testator and his deceased spouse were cared for by the deceased donee (the testator's sister-in-law) and the testator may have felt he was morally obliged to provide a gift for her in his Will? Per Ewaschuk J:

...there is a need to confine situations where the moral obligation exception applies lest the exception swallow up and consume the general doctrine of lapse. It seems to me that it is generally arguable in most wills cases that a testator confers a testamentary gift on a beneficiary for some moral consideration, e.g. for past friendship or kindness, or simply because of blood relationship.

Where a testator confers a testamentary gift on a beneficiary by reason of past friendship with, or kindness on the part of, the beneficiary, the testator is under no moral obligation to do so. The testator has a moral obligation to a beneficiary only when the beneficiary is owed a fixed debt by the testator or a relative of the testator. In the later [sic] situation, the testator intends that the debt must be discharged, whether to the beneficiary or to the beneficiary's estate, since it is only morally proper to do so.

In non-debt situations, it is difficult to accept the notion that the testator would wish to reward the beneficiary's estate, and those persons that take from the beneficiary's estate, since whatever notional obligation the testator owed to the predeceasing beneficiary was more personal in nature than the payment of a fixed debt transmissible to the beneficiary's estate. In other words, this form of obligation is owed, if at all, only to the beneficiary and not to his or her estate.

SUBSTITUTIONARY GIFTS

The testator may include provisions to allow for an alternate beneficiary to substitute for a preferred beneficiary and avoid the lapse rules. Lapse still applies in relation to the substitute.

To be effective in avoiding lapse, then, the disposition should make clear that the lapse doctrine is being avoided through a clear statement of who should take in the event of the primary legatee predeceasing the testator.

**Re Cousen's Will Trusts
[1937] Ch 381**

Here the testator made a Will leaving the residue of his estate to his wife for life with one half of the remainder to the children of his uncle and aunt (separately):

... who shall be living at my decease in equal shares and as to and concerning the other half thereof for all the children of my late aunt... who shall be living at my decease in equal shares Provided always and **I declare that if any child of my late uncle... or of my late aunt... shall have died in my lifetime whether before or after the date of this my will leaving issue living at my death the share in the residuary trust funds which such child would have taken if he or she had survived me shall be held in trust for his or her personal representatives as part of his or her personal estate.**

No child of either the uncle or the aunt was alive at the testator's death. One of the uncle's daughters (Catherine) left a daughter (Jane) who was alive at the testator's death. Catherine had died during the testator's lifetime. Her husband (William) also died in the testator's lifetime. William had left his estate to Jane, including anything that he might have obtained through Catherine's estate.

Thus: the child of the uncle (Catherine) was no longer alive and neither was her personal representative (William). The personal representative left his Estate to their daughter (Jane). Did the gift to Catherine under the fall into intestacy, or, did it pass to Jane through the personal representative's estate?

According to Farwell J the gift had lapsed and fell to be distributed as on an intestacy as the substitute (William) had died and the statute did not operate to relieve against lapse in that contingency:

The question here, in these circumstances, in my judgment, comes down really to a question of construction of this will. The testator has undoubtedly endeavoured, and has succeeded up to a point, in avoiding the rule of lapse, because he has made a provision for the person or persons who would take directly, in this case Mrs Alcock, predeceasing him, and has made another provision, a substitutionary provision, providing for the benefit to go to that person's legal personal representative as part of her personal estate. The question is, how are these last words to be read? **In my judgment, according to the authorities to which I have referred, the only way I am justified in reading them is in reading them as being a gift to Mrs Alcock, or, in the events which have happened, to the person who became entitled, on Mrs Alcock's death, to her estate. That, in this case, was her husband, William Alcock. William Alcock did not survive the testator, James Cousen. There is nothing in this will that I can see which provided against the lapse which must arise if, on the true construction of the will the person who is substituted for Mrs Alcock is her husband, William Alcock. If that is the true construction, then this part of the estate of James Cousen has not been disposed of.**

Re Grasett
[1973] 1 OR 361 (CA)

This is really more of a case about 'class gifts' than substitutionary gifts. T made the will in 1923, which read in part:

I Give, Devise and Bequeath the principal of the shares... **unto my brothers and sisters who shall be then living or in case of the decease of them or of any of them then to the child or children of each deceased brother or sister of mine in equal shares**, but so that the child or children of any deceased brother or sister if more than one shall taken only the share which the parent would have taken if living at the time of distribution.

The testator had three brothers and two sisters. **One sister died some four years before the Will was made, leaving issue.** Two of the brothers died, one many years before the will was made and the other shortly after T; neither left issue. The remaining brother died after T, leaving issue. One sister died after T leaving issue. On appeal it was held that T intended to include the children of the sister who predeceased him and thus the gift to them did not lapse.

Per McGillivray JA:

It is, of course, the use of the word "sisters" which gives rise to the present litigation. Had it been "sister" there would have been none. It is a situation, however, which has arisen more than once in the past and the results are of interest. In *Theobald on Wills*, 12th ed., para. 900, p. 901, the learned author states:

900. (vii) Children of parents dead at the date of the will. When there is a gift to the members of a class for their lives, with remainder to their children the death of a member of the class in the lifetime of the testator, after the date of the will, will not prevent his children from taking, but the children of members of the class dead at the date of the will will not take. On the other hand, if the gift is to the testator's brothers and sisters for their lives, with remainder to their children, and the testator has only one brother living at the date of the will children of deceased brothers and sisters will take.

...

Turning then to consideration of the terms of this will I find them more consistent with the interpretation sought by the appellants than I do that of the respondents. **In view of the fact that the testator is said to have been in full possession of his faculties when the will was made it is a reasonable presumption, he having had two sisters, that he was well aware that one was dead. In that event he used the term "sisters" advisedly. Of course he was aware that one at least would not be living at the time of distribution but perhaps the others would not be either; and in fact they were not. Then he provided "in the case of the decease of them or any of them" to the children. How, one may ask, could this refer to any but brothers and sisters without qualification? It could not refer to a sister or brothers alive at the time of distribution for if they**

were alive at that time there would be no share to descend. In any event I am satisfied that the term "sisters" associated as it was with "brothers" and followed by the "decease" clause was the testator's way of saying that he wanted the distribution to his nephews and nieces of parents who had not lived to inherit to be on the basis that all were included. I cannot bring myself to believe because he sought by the wording to benefit certain sisters and brothers if alive at time of distribution rather than their children that he intended (sisters having been mentioned) to restrict the balance of his gift to the children of some only of his deceased brothers and sisters. The testator was said to have been on excellent and friendly terms with the Kingstone children and no independent provision is made for them in the will. While one cannot speculate regarding that which might have been in the mind of the testator one cannot help but remark it would seem unlikely, in the absence of any apparent reason for so doing, that the testator would have deliberately followed the harsh course of excluding one whole group of his nephews and nieces.

SURVIVORSHIP

The Succession Law Reform Act provides:

55.(1) Where two or more persons die at the same time or in circumstances rendering it uncertain which of them survived the other or others, the property of each person, or any property of which he or she is competent to dispose, shall be disposed of as if he or she had survived the other or others.

Simultaneous death of joint tenants

(2) Unless a contrary intention appears, where two or more persons hold legal or equitable title to property as joint tenants, or with respect to a joint account, with each other, and all of them die at the same time or in circumstances rendering it uncertain which of them survived the other or others, each person shall be deemed, for the purposes of subsection (1), to have held as tenant in common with the other or with each of the others in that property.

The common law dealt with the question of multiple deaths arising from the same incident (e.g. husband and wife killed in a traffic accident) as a question of fact; i.e. determined on the evidence.

Various jurisdictions have revised that rule. Some use an approach based on the ages of the deceased and operate such that persons die according to age in 'seniority'. As set out in s.55, the Ontario position is different – **we assume, for the purposes of distribution of assets, that the wills of the various people who die at the same time will operate on the fiction that each survived the others (thus avoiding lapse).**