

Your Digital Undertaker: Exploring death in the digital age in Canada

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THERE ARE LIFE events that inevitably change the way we understand things. Those precious and serendipitous ‘epiphany’ moments seem to come up unexpectedly and leave long-lasting impressions of clarity and peace of mind. They are also confirmatory: as if we knew it all along, but never quite had the courage to do anything about it. That is exactly how the reader will feel at the end of Sharon Hartung’s book.

This is not your ordinary legal bible on estate planning, but a project management manual on how to die ‘properly’ and prepare for that final moment. Although primarily aimed at the layperson, this book contains valuable advice for advisors – specifically executors, trustees and those acting in a power of attorney role.

Hartung says it best when she questions the inevitable in chapter three, entitled ‘Your Body Can’t Bury Itself’. There, she advises, ‘My take away is this: leaving your family to decide what happens to your body and organize your funeral/memorial is like asking someone to plan your wedding and reception but giving them no details, no budget, a very tight timeline, and then never really knowing if you would have liked it or not.’

The writing is honest and straightforward. The reader is immediately invited to take a proverbial seat in a 21st-century home-office chair and dive into highly personal, moving and genuine storytelling about the death of Hartung’s mother. The author explains how she was surprised by it, put into great discomfort and yet

came out of the experience with one clear goal: to help others to not ‘leave a huge mess behind’.

In a few words, she stewards the reader towards estate planning so they can die with dignity, leaving less complexity behind for their heirs to deal with or argue about. Wherever possible, she advocates not being afraid to seek the help of experts such as estate and tax planners, advisors, lawyers and accountants. What Hartung has produced is a reader-friendly, practical and humorous guide to making sense of what happens when one is ‘six feet under’ – and not only from a legal and accounting perspective.

From financial, real estate and intangible assets to the plethora of digital ‘bits and bytes’, Hartung describes and explains how to take ownership of one’s own digital footprint. Through definition, navigating the issues of valuation, cataloguing and inventory, the author reminds the reader to allow the proper access and transfer of all that is ‘digital’.

The book guides the reader through a constellation of practical modules, with diagrams, tables, iconic pictures. The chapter titles are cleverly forged, such as ‘Death Never Comes at a Good Time’, ‘Death With a Side of Digital’ and ‘Death and Taxes, They Get You Coming and Going’. This publication should be the preferred gift purchased by estate planners and trust officers for their clients, because it is never too early to open a dialogue about death and call on *Your Digital Undertaker* for help.



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