

HEIRS' PROPERTY

FIRST MEETING OF THE FAMILY SKIT: POPPA'S LAND

May 2025

Setting

A modest home where a family gathering is taking place. The intent is for attendees to share a meal while discussing some pressing family business; inherited land.

Skit

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

(Taps glass with fork to grab everyone's attention)

Hey family! I want to thank everyone for being here today; I know we all have busy schedules. It's great to see the family together around the table again.

I know we're here to enjoy a meal, but there's also something important we need to talk about: our family's property.

From what we understand, laws about inherited land have changed, and we need to understand our rights so we can protect what belongs to all of us.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

I knew there had to be more to this meal!

What exactly is there to talk about? We've already inherited the land, and we have our rights. Sounds like you're trying to make things more complicated than they need to be.

Family Lawyer [Amari]

Let me help clarify what Taylor is saying. As a lawyer, I think I can make it simple enough for all of us to understand.

When we talk about inherited land, we're talking about heirs' property.

This is property that belonged to someone in the family who has passed away, like our great-grandfather Poppa Bill.

When he passed a few years ago, the rights of his property passed from him to all of us here today.

However, Poppa Bill's property was never legally passed on through a will or estate planning. The state government calls this intestate succession, but some people call it heirs' property, "Cloudy Title," or "Family Land"

There are new laws, like the Uniform Partition Act, which was created to protect families like ours from losing the inherited land unfairly or it being stolen from us.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

I don't see the problem. Poppa Bill wanted us to use this land; that's why he left it to the entire family.

I don't think he would want us to change anything. He used to tell us to never let the government or outsiders get involved, they can't be trusted!

Remember, Mr. Brown from Jasper County? There is a huge residential development on his land.

A rich land developer used to come and sit on his porch all the time. Once he convinced Mr. Brown to sell his property, the developer promised him that he could stay in his house on the land. Mr. Brown died in a mobile home across the street from those 7 figure condos and never made any real money from that deal.

Are you trying to set us up for that to happen here, too? This seems like a scam.

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

That's ridiculous! Why are you being so dramatic?

(Conversation gets heated and a family elder interrupts and directs everyone who is talking business to go finish this conversation in the living room. All interested parties leave the kitchen area)

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

Listen Paris, I can relate to how you must feel, but there is no reason to get defensive.

All I'm saying is that a lot has changed since Poppa Bill was alive. We have to learn the law and work together as a family to keep what happened to Mr. Brown from happening to our family land.

Whether you are willing to accept it or not, doing nothing puts us at greater risk.

So many families have lost their property because outsiders came in and bought an interest in the land from one of the family members.

And then the same outsiders force a sale at the courthouse, resulting in the land being sold for pennies on the dollar!

These new protections can help prevent that, though nothing is ever completely foolproof.

Family Lawyer [Amari]

Exactly!

With the new laws, if anyone ever tries to force a sale, family members get a chance to buy out anyone who wants out, and the land would be professionally appraised.

This helps us keep things fair and transparent.

But yes, there's always a possibility of a sale, so we have to stay informed and proactive.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

See! There it is! I knew you were only concerned with money.

Mr. Brown's family said it was the lawyer they hired and the judge overseeing the case that ended up owning their land.

Amari, I think that you should stay out of this discussion. Lawyers cannot be trusted!

Family Conciliator [Quinn]

Wait a minute Paris, Amari loved Poppa Bill just like you did.

If I heard Taylor correctly, it sounds like things are different now when it comes to just letting the property sit there with no protection.

And, If I heard Amari right, those of us not wanting to sell could buy out the interests of those wanting to sell.

I think we need to hear each other out and determine the best way to protect our land together.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

This sounds like a problem waiting to happen. You two are trying to set us all up for failure and control everything.

I'm not having it! Nobody should be selling this land!

Who do you think is going to get John to move their firewood from the main road leading to Poppa Bill's house?

And are y'all talking about stopping Xavier from having their annual Turkey Shoot next to the pond?

Family and friends gather there on the land at least 3 times a week. That's what Poppa Bill would've wanted, why would we change any of that?

Amari and Taylor, the two of you never participate in family get togethers anyway, so why are you trying to call the shots?

Family Conciliator [Quinn]

You've got to calm down and stop taking things so personally. I think we all ought to just try to get along here and weigh all of our options. No one is saying that we have to stop people from using the land.

We are just trying to understand how to legally protect ourselves and the property.

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

Agreed.

Paris, I hear your concerns, and you're right to be cautious. But I am not your enemy. Amari is not your enemy.

We are simply trying to have an open and honest conversation, so that we can eventually find a solution that works for everyone.

The first thing we need to do is to determine all of Poppa Bill's legal heirs.

I am going to give someone from each family a form on how to prepare your part of the family tree.

I will put them together and send a copy to everyone.

Can we at least agree to work together on this project? (poses the question to the groups by raising a hand)

GROUP Answers in Unison: YES!

Family Naysayer [Paris]

I still say we don't need to change anything with this property. Our family has held this land for four generations, and we don't need to mess it up now.

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

I agree; we should not mess this up.

Poppa Bill knew his children and many of his grandchildren.

But let's be honest, some of us didn't know him and we don't all know each other very well.

We need to find the members of our family and then work to make sure we manage this inheritance correctly.

Paris, will you work with me to make sure that all decisions and actions taken are protective of the land?

Family Naysayer [Paris]

Doesn't speak but quietly nods their head while peering off into the distance. (Members of the family quietly smile and show physical signs of relief.)

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

And who do you think is trustworthy enough to handle money?

Because, eventually, we are going to need to establish a family bank account to pay for a lawyer, a surveyor, an engineer and possibly permit fees.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

I will see about helping.

I know Angela is an accountant. She is trusted and liked by people in the family and the community. I think she would be a good candidate to handle finances.

Family Conciliator [Quinn]

I am so glad we can work together. I think cooperating will help us use our property in ways that truly benefit everyone.

I actually know someone who helps families like ours resolve conflicts about inherited property. They helped Denise Potter's family significantly reduce their legal costs by resolving their differences and identifying all heirs before talking to a lawyer.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

I just think we have to be careful. Next thing you know, they'll be trying to give the adopted family members the same rights as those of us who are blood relatives of Poppa Bill.

Family Lawyer [Amari]

From my experience, I can tell you our state's intestate succession laws say that legally adopted children have the same rights as blood children.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

Here we go again. That doesn't seem right to me!

Blood is the strongest tie. I don't see how making a family tree helps solve our problem anyway.

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

This is just our starting point; it won't solve everything.

First, we'll identify all the family members involved and update the property title to reflect everyone's share.

As changes happen, we'll keep updating it together.

We might also consider options like creating a trust or a family-run LLC to better manage our land. Amari can help explain these options later.

Family Naysayer [Paris]

Why would we change the title?

I don't trust companies and I don't want anybody to try to steal my part of the family land.

Family Problem Solver [Taylor]

Paris, we hear you.

I am going to call you next week so we can lay out a plan to keep us on the straight and narrow.

Angela I will also be giving you a call, if that's OK?

Can we agree to have a meeting every first Tuesday of the month?

We can start with a facilitator as our first speaker to educate the family on inheritance property.

I will organize an online meeting and send everyone the details.

Family Conciliator [Quinn]

I think we can all agree that this will need to be an ongoing conversation, but I am so encouraged by the progress we've made here today!

We are family y'all, let's not forget that we love one another.

There is no doubt in my mind that we can work together to resolve any issues that we have, like those who came before us were able to do for generations.

I believe Poppa Bill would be proud.

Now, I don't know about the rest of you, but there is a second plate in the kitchen with my name on it!