

A house packed with treasures and how a grieving widow and children are waging WAR over Robin Williams's will

By [Tom Leonard In New York](#)

Source: Daily Mail

Whether he was playing a radio DJ in Good Morning Vietnam or an impassioned English teacher in Dead Poets Society, Robin Williams brought an exuberant energy to all his roles.

Off stage, we now know, there was a darkness in his life as he battled alcoholism, depression and finally Parkinson's disease — a struggle that led to his suicide last August.

But, for all his problems, the Hollywood star was devoted to his wife and children. And he was determined that they would be provided for after he was gone.

One can only imagine what his feelings would have been had he witnessed events in a San Francisco probate court a few days ago when lawyers for his third wife squared off against representatives of his three children from previous relationships in an acrimonious dispute over his possessions.

The rift has apparently exposed yet another secret about the much-missed and deeply private actor and comic — that, for all the jolly pictures of him in public with his glamorous spouse on one arm and one of his three grown-up offspring on the other, it may have been only Williams's grinning presence that was holding them all together.

Now that he is gone, a vicious battle between his children and their stepmother has begun. Both his widow and his children claim they are the true guardians of Williams's final wishes in a dispute that has descended to bickering over the precise meaning of the words in his will.

Susan Schneider Williams, who became his third wife in 2011, has clashed with 31-year-old Zachary, Zelda, 25, and Cody, 23, over who is entitled to the star's cherished personal possessions — his collections of fossils, action figures and watches, his bikes, toys, games, trinkets and other memorabilia from a long career — that were left behind in the couple's £4.7 million home.

It was in the same house in Tiburon, a town outside San Francisco, that the 63-year-old star of films such as Mrs Doubtfire hanged himself. His widow said he had been in the

early stages of Parkinson's disease, while a coroner's report said he had been suffering 'a recent increase in paranoia'.



Tarnished legacy: Williams with his third wife Susan Schneider, (left) who is now in dispute with his three children, including daughter Zelda (right)

In an effort to limit the damage from a dispute that is already casting a shadow over the comic genius's legacy, a judge has given the two sides eight weeks to resolve their differences out of court.

If Mrs Schneider Williams's lawyer Jim Wagstaffe was to be believed, that will be simple. 'We're amicable and no one is raising their voices,' he assured the judge.

Referring to items the trustees of the Williams estate say should be passed to the children, he said: 'There are 1,200 items. Robin Williams didn't mean for the house to be gutted, furniture removed and art taken off the wall. This is a normal process. If the estate is a lake, what Susan is seeking is a bucket.'

That throwaway remark is the sort that has deeply offended the children. They regard their father's prized collections as anything but trivial and say they were a crucial part of his life — a life of which his widow was only belatedly a part.

And representatives of the Williams estate trustees and his children, its main beneficiaries, hardly share Wagstaffe's confidence that this can be settled so amicably. For them, Mrs Schneider Williams's petition is based on greed and her refusal to accept he intended his most personal possessions to go to his children.

'Robin made it very clear what he wanted his kids and Susan to get,' a friend of the children told me. 'She was very well taken care of, but for whatever reasons she wants more than he was prepared to give.'

Williams left her their Tiburon home, an allowance to maintain it, and all the contents that weren't his 'memorabilia' or jewellery he had acquired before their marriage. These were to go, along with everything else — including a second home in California's Napa Valley, his clothing and awards — to the children.

But in December, his widow filed an aggressive legal action claiming the contents of the home she shared with Williams should be excluded from the things the actor left his children. She also claimed some of her husband's personal items were taken from her home without her permission.

The trustees were blindsided, saying she had gone to court without mentioning her concerns to them. As well as demanding that 'memorabilia' be limited to what was connected to his entertainment career (for example, she cited the rainbow braces he wore on Eighties comedy series *Mork & Mindy*), she insisted 'jewellery' didn't include his impressive collection of watches.

Most woundingly to the children, she claimed unspecified people had the keys to the house and started taking things away just days after Williams's death.

Although she didn't directly accuse the children, a friend of theirs said it was 'despicable' that her lawyers did nothing to quash widespread speculation that they had been responsible for the alleged looting.

In fact — as his daughter Zelda insists, she and her brothers hadn't even been into the house since their father's death. (A friend said Mrs Schneider Williams actually barred the three from coming into the house the moment their father died). In public, the children have stayed out of the legal row but Zelda's remarks spoke volumes for their deep upset over her behaviour.

For her part, Susan's court submission portrays a helpless widow who had lost 'her husband through a shocking and emotionally charged event' and was 'not given time to grieve her loss free from the frenetic efforts to interfere with her domestic tranquillity'.

If the court didn't intervene, she said, her home would be 'stripped' while she still lives there — even of mementos of their marriage such as a ring Williams gave her, and the dinner jacket he wore at their wedding.

The children refuted this, saying her demands for extra to pay for any costs connected to her home reflected 'the greed that appears to be driving' her. They said they were 'heartbroken' by her actions and that in challenging their father's careful plans, she 'adds insult to terrible injury'.

As a family friend told me: 'It's hard enough losing their father in this way without her questioning his intentions.'

Her lawyer hit back at any accusation of greed, insisting she was 'not somebody who has sticky fingers'. But while Susan said she had not allowed the trustees' valuers into the house to appraise the contents — claiming it was too soon after her husband's death — the children's lawyers insist she was simultaneously getting her own valuation done.

And the trustees insist they have the right to decide who gets the 975 items on the inventory of the actor's possessions in the house.

The children have certainly inherited more collectively — the 640-acre Napa Valley ranch alone is valued at £20 million. But even their representatives concede the battle isn't really about money — most of the disputed items are inexpensive — but about Williams's legacy and who came where in his affections.

So does the legal wrangling reflect an animosity that was already present in the Williams family?

The children were never particularly close to their stepmother but they don't believe there was a huge rift. 'The children are grown up, so when she came into their life it wasn't like she was the evil stepmother,' said a family friend.

Williams often boasted about his closeness to his children, gushing that they 'give me a great sense of wonder, just to see them develop into these extraordinary beings'.

Certainly, he proved a better father than a husband. His first marriage to dancer Valerie Velardi produced his eldest son, Zachary, but they divorced after ten years when Williams had an affair with a cocktail waitress, who later accused him of giving her herpes.

The following year, he married his child's nanny, Marsha Garces, who was pregnant with Zelda. They then had Cody two years later in 1991.

Marsha sought a divorce in 2008, citing irreconcilable differences. It's not clear whether those included Susan Schneider, a graphic designer, 13 years younger than him and with two young sons, whom he met outside an Apple store.

He started seeing her romantically shortly before he had surgery in 2009 for a faulty heart valve and she nursed him, he said.

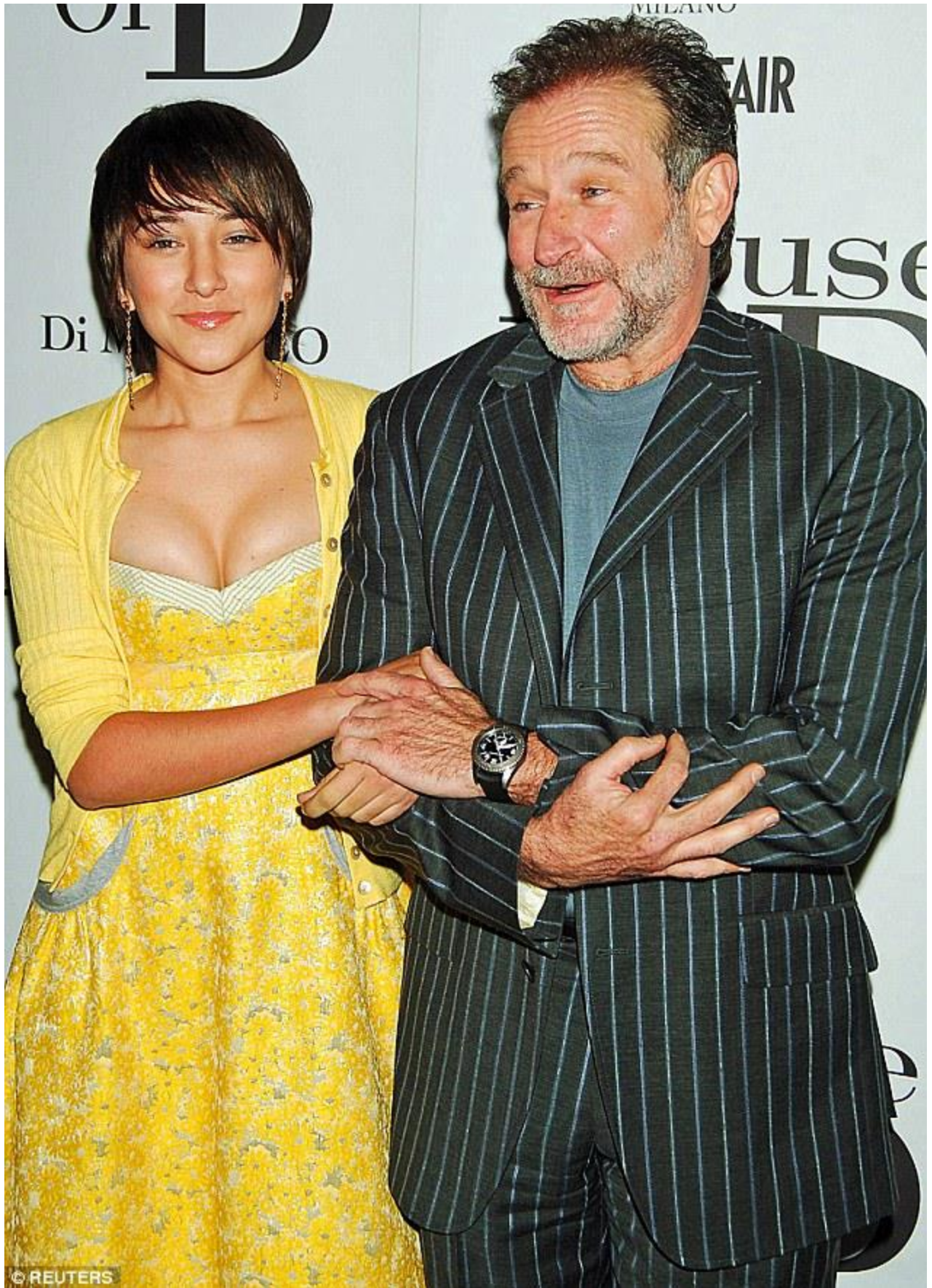
After his second divorce was finalised in 2010, Williams remarried the following year, and his children all attended the festivities.

'Let the wedding madness begin!' Zelda tweeted on the day,. The next day she seemed more reflective, writing: 'I'm really happy for my father, and wish him all the best.'

Things looked 'positive' on the rare occasions the couple appeared in public with any of his children. Williams joked about getting married a third time, quoting a fellow comic who said it was 'like bringing a burn victim to a fireworks show'.

He also insisted he got on 'fabulously' with his ex-wives but complained about the £20 million he had paid in settlements. 'Ah yes, divorce, from the Latin word meaning to rip out a man's genitals through his wallet,' he would quip.

Perhaps strenuous efforts to make an unambiguous will suggest that Robin Williams may have predicted problems ahead. If that is so, he has been proved very much right.



Revelation: The rift has apparently exposed yet another secret about the much-missed and deeply private actor and comic



Now that Williams is gone, a vicious battle between his children and their stepmother has begun. The actor is pictured above starring in Good Morning Vietnam



Williams, picture above in Mrs Doubtfire, hung himself in his house in Tiburon, a town outside San Francisco



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Mrs Schneider Williams demanded that 'memorabilia' due to go to his children be limited to what was connected to his entertainment career (for example, she cited the rainbow braces he wore on Eighties comedy series Mork & Mindy, left)