

Inside

- 1 John's 3-Step Method for Avoiding Holiday Drama
- 2 Black Friday: COVID-19 Edition
The Wills That Saved Thanksgiving
- 3 Prop 19 and Property Tax Law Changes
- 4 Is 'Glamping' the Perfect Winter Getaway?

Is 'Glamping' the Perfect Winter Getaway?

Cabin Fever Has Never Been So Stylish

When COVID-19 struck the U.S., travel restrictions had people canceling their vacation plans left and right. This meant that many would-be vacationers had to find some getaways a little closer to home — namely, camping trips and their fancier cousin, glamping trips.

If you haven't heard of "glamping" before, it's essentially glamorous camping. You have access to the beautiful, rugged outdoors as well as all the comforts of home. While traditional winter camping certainly wouldn't be a relaxing getaway for most people, glamping during the winter months can give you access to the peace of the outdoors like you've never experienced before without so much as a shiver or snuffle.

If you've decided to make glamping your go-to method of escape from the cabin fever that

besets us all during the cold, dark winter days, you might be thinking: How can I make sure I have the best glamping experience possible? Luckily, there are a few tips and tricks you can apply to any glamping location to ensure that your time away from home is just as relaxing as that Caribbean cruise would have been.

Step 1: Decide which kind of lodging you want.

Glamping shelters come in all shapes and sizes depending on the level of comfort you desire on your trip. The most rugged glamping lodgings usually still include a wood-burning stove and a nice comfy bed, whether you opt for a log cabin or a specialized glamping tent (sometimes called a yurt). However, some of the more posh options include amenities like fresh linens, private bathrooms and showers, fully stocked kitchenettes, and even TVs.



Step 2: Decide how you want to spend your time.

Obviously, the point of glamping is to spend time in the great outdoors with winter activities, such as snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and other fun snow activities. However, glamping really shines during the frigid evenings. You can retreat indoors, throw some logs in the stove, prepare some hot cocoa or cider, and just watch the snowfall from your window. There's no right or wrong way to glamp. All that matters is spending time in the wilderness with all the comforts of home — all while feeling refreshed and at peace.



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Love, Hear, and Here

3 Steps to Avoiding Drama This Thanksgiving

In my experience, there are three things no holiday celebration is complete without: family, food, and drama. The latter truly does affect everyone. Even if you feel your family is well adjusted and almost always gets along, I'm sure that at some point you've mediated an argument over who makes the best casserole or had to console hurt feelings when so-and-so's child didn't want to sit at the kid's table. It's as much a tradition as football games and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

This year, with emotions running high due to all the issues with the COVID-19 pandemic and the presidential election, I think it's safe to say that there will be far more drama than usual on Thanksgiving. I can already hear the shouts of "You voted for who?!" ringing out over the roast turkey and pumpkin pie. Fortunately, for your consideration, I have a method that I try to remember when dealing with such drama without taking sides. It stems from years of being a father to five children and easing clients through the dispute-riddled process of estate planning. But I also have to credit something else: stuffing.

You see, when I was young, my father was in charge of stuffing the Thanksgiving and Christmas turkeys. I loved his stuffing. It was absolutely, unbelievably delicious, but I only got to eat it twice a year. This made it even more special, and I always looked forward to loading up my plate at the holidays.

Then, I got married, and I discovered that my wife didn't like my father's stuffing. I was

shocked! When I passed the stuffing to her, she said, "I don't care for any." It broke my heart! I felt like she was saying, "I don't love your family anymore, and I don't want to be a part of it!"

I know this seems like a lot of offense to take over stuffing. But I was young and naive, and admittedly, I was being dramatic about stuffing. I was doing it even though I knew that LuAnn is a picky eater. I realized that and I love her to pieces, but still, I felt hurt.

From that experience and my other encounters with drama, I have realized that there are usually **three things a person with hurt feelings wants to hear**. When a loved one, a friend, or even a total stranger approaches me with a disagreement to vent about, I try to offer those three things.

The first thing is an expression of **love**. I'll say, "I want you to know, first and foremost, that I love you. I'm sorry you're feeling bad, and I'm sorry [insert drama here] offended you." When I say this, I'm careful not to mention the person or people on the other side of the argument.

The second thing I offer is my ear. I'll say, "I **hear** what you're saying. I know that you want to verbalize what's going on and you need someone to listen. I am that person." When my wife turned down my father's stuffing, I desperately wanted someone to listen to me talk about how much the stuffing meant to me.

The third thing I offer is my **presence and support**. I'll say, "Anytime you want to tell me

about this horrible experience, I'm **here** for you. Next time you need to feel loved and heard, I'll be here then, too."

When I remember to follow these three simple steps, my experience has been that I'm often able to minimize the hurt feelings and avoid involving myself in the drama.

These days, my father's stuffing isn't an issue at Thanksgiving. Saint that she is, my wife not only eats the stuffing, but she also makes it, and our children love it as much as I do. (Well, not quite all of them — I'm over it.) But I still remember how much it would have meant if someone had said to me, many, many years ago, "I love you, I hear you, and I'm here for you." Those words would have made the stuffing issue ridiculous.

This Thanksgiving, I'm going to use my strategy to navigate the political and familial drama at the table. I hope that if you come face to face with a pointing finger or a crying sibling, you can do the same.

From my family to yours, happy Thanksgiving!

-John Preston

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Black Friday: COVID-19 Edition

How to Turn the Shopping Holiday Into a Stay-at-Home Family Event

A string of retail stores, including JCPenney, Bed Bath & Beyond, Walmart, Target, Kohl's, and Dick's Sporting Goods, have declared they won't be open for the traditional Thanksgiving and/or Black Friday shopping this year. But that doesn't mean the annual shopping holiday is canceled! If you're an avid Black Friday shopper, you can keep the tradition going and involve the whole family by using the day to shop online. Here are a few tips to get everyone involved in the fun and turn the holiday into an overnight party.



Divide and conquer.

Does your whole family love shopping? If they do, it's time to break out the laptops, cellphones, and tablets. Take the list of items you're hoping to snag and divide them up so that each person has things to browse for. Then choose a start time — midnight is always good — and let everyone loose to bargain hunt. While you're shopping, remember to use store apps, websites like RetailMeNot and Groupon, money-saving browser extensions like Honey, and price-comparison apps like Flipp to score the best deals.

Refuel with caffeine.

No all-night shopping spree is complete without a coffee run. To keep your family fueled, make sure to stock up on your favorite coffee in advance and set a time for a coffee break. It's not quite the same as taking a break at the mall's Starbucks, but it will help you

power through the night. For an extra bit of fun, you can even try to recreate your favorite Starbucks drinks at home. ChowHound.com is a great resource for DIY recipes and has hacks for the caramel frappuccino, pumpkin spice latte, and more.

Celebrate with a big breakfast.

When you've finally dropped the last item into your virtual cart, it's time to celebrate! Depending on how long your spree took, it might be 3 a.m., or you might be able to see the sunlight peeking through your blinds. Either way, you deserve to reward yourself with breakfast. Try cooking your favorite breakfast foods as a family or, if it's late enough, order home-delivered pancakes and hashbrowns from your favorite local restaurant. Once you're stuffed, you can crawl into bed knowing that you had a fantastic family night.

Property Tax, Capital Gains Tax, Gift Tax!

‘Oh My!’

Just when you thought it was safe to go into the forest of taxes, things just got scarier. In addition to a new president, it looks like California will have a new law that changes some of the rules regarding property taxes. I'm referring to Proposition 19, which is currently passing by a narrow margin. As we continue monitoring the status of Prop 19, we want to discuss why this proposition presents good news, bad news, new strategies to consider, and more questions.

Good News

If you are 55 or older and want to sell your personal residence and move to another home, you can retain your current Prop 13 taxable value. At first blush, this looks like the same law we had before. However, there are three main differences with the new law.

1. Under the old law, in order to retain the current taxable value of your property, the new residence had to be located in one of 11 specific counties. Now you can purchase the new residence anywhere in the state of California.
2. Under the old law, you were only allowed to transfer the current taxable value of your residence to a new residence one time. Now you can transfer it up to three times.
3. Under the old law, the value of the new residence had to be equal to or less than the value of the previous residence to transfer the taxable value. Now there is no restriction on the value of the new residence. However, there will be an adjustment in the property tax for the amount that exceeds the value of the previous residence.

Bad News

Under the old law, when children inherited their parents' personal residence (and other property, up to \$1 million in assessed value), they also inherited their parents' Prop 13 taxable value of the property with no reassessment. This was the case whether the children occupied the property or not. If Proposition 19 is approved by a majority when the vote count is completed, your children can only inherit the Prop 13 taxable value of your personal residence if the children intend to use the property as their personal residence within one year following your death. Property other than your personal residence will now be reassessed to its current market value following your death.

New Strategy

If passed, this law will not take effect until Feb. 16, 2021. Can you transfer your property before the new law takes effect and preserve the property tax for your property? Yes, but there are still limitations, such as the \$1 million limit for properties other than your residence, and other important factors to consider. It's also worth mentioning that the current federal estate tax exemption, the amount you are allowed to transfer to your heirs without an estate tax, is currently \$11.58 million. There are rumors, given the new presidency and the current federal debt, that this number will be significantly reduced. Remember, the easiest tax to collect is the one from people who have passed away (they won't vote you out of office).

CAUTION

There is one major drawback to consider: capital gains tax. When you pass away, your heirs receive a "stepped up basis" on any property you owned at death. This means that the heirs will not be responsible for any capital gains that would have been triggered as a result of appreciation that occurred during your lifetime. When you "gift" the asset to them while you are alive, they inherit your current cost basis and it is not "stepped up" when you die.

Analysis

If your children are more interested in inheriting your existing Prop 13 taxable value than avoiding the capital gains tax (because they don't plan on selling the property), you should consider gifting the property before Feb. 16, 2021, unless the property is your personal residence and your child intends to reside in that personal residence within one year of your death. If your children plan to sell the property, then gifting the property now for the purpose of preserving the property tax would not be appropriate. There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution to this question. Each situation is unique and there are other issues to take into consideration.

CALL

If you are considering making a gift of real property before the deadline, call our office and we can discuss the options you have. It will also be a major topic of our next webinar. Be sure to join us.

The Wills That Saved Thanksgiving

How a Preston Client Used Estate Planning to Bring His Family Together

Several years ago, John was working with a couple that was estranged from their children. They didn't mean to be — life had simply gotten in the way, time had passed, and it had been 20 or 30 years since they'd seen all of their kids and grandkids in one place.

This troubled the husband. Toward the end of his life, after we'd helped prepare an Estate Plan for the two of them, he told his wife, "I think it's important that we have one more family gathering. I'm going to do my best to get all of our children together on Thanksgiving."

Skeptical, his wife asked, "What do you have in mind?"

He said, "I don't know, I'll need to think about it."

He came up with a brilliant idea. He decided to send a letter to the whole family. It read: "Your mother and I will be reading our Wills at Thanksgiving dinner this year, and we'd love for you to join us if you can. We'll certainly understand if you can't make it."

As you might imagine, that Thanksgiving, the couple had a full house. Every one of their children and grandchildren showed up for the reading of the Wills. When it was time for dinner, they gathered around the table, holding their collective breath with excitement.

There were two envelopes, one in front of the mother and one in front of the father, each with a Will inside. Like the gentleman he was, the husband picked up his wife's envelope first, opened it with the stroke of a knife, and handed it back to her. Then, he opened his own envelope and unfolded his Will. Both of them began to read ... quietly to themselves.

The family waited. Still nothing. There was dead silence in the dining room. After a few minutes of reading quietly, the husband turned to his wife.

He asked, "Have you read your Will? Are you comfortable with its terms?" She said. "Yes."

"So have I," he said. Then, he slid the Wills back into their respective envelopes, sealed them with tape, and put them on the counter behind him. He turned back to his family and said, "I'm so glad you could join us for Thanksgiving and reading of the Wills," he said. "Now let's eat!"

The "reading of the Will" is traditionally a very sad and solemn occasion. However, in this case, it turned out to be a wonderful and happy reunion ... at least for our clients.