

# Op Ed: No Hate In Our States Means Rejecting Putin's Outrageous "Denazification" Propaganda



BY MYRA CLARK-SIEGEL, DIRECTOR, AJC WESTCHESTER/FAIRFIELD

As I write this, no one can predict the outcome of Russia's unprovoked, illegal invasion of Ukraine. Over one million Ukrainian refugees have fled to other countries seeking safe haven from Vladimir Putin's unwarranted onslaught against Ukraine, with numbers expected to rise dramatically.

We must be clear: Putin's ludicrous excuse of "denazification" was seemingly borrowed from the pages of Nazi propaganda of "the Big Lie" itself and must be resoundingly denounced.

And while Putin has been roundly excoriated, it is incumbent upon us all to clearly reject his words and actions. We must counter the lies by Putin and Russia's social media bots spreading misinformation about the basis for the invasion and false use of Holocaust terminology.

It is not Ukraine, led by a democratically

elected Jewish president that needs to be "de-nazified", it's Russia, and its tyrannical leader who is using the Nazi playbook for war. Putin's attack at Babyn Yar, where Nazi Germans mass-murdered more than 100,000 people, primarily Jews, is the site where for decades the Soviets refused to erect a proper memorial to honor the victims. The attack is an affront to the victims' blessed memories and demonstrates Putin's disregard for the site's sanctity in stark relief.

Ukraine today is a different country than it once was, and its voters – overwhelmingly non-Jewish – freely and openly elected a Jewish president. If any "denazification" is necessary, it must begin in Moscow. Yes, from 1941-1945, the Russians were essential to the defeat of Nazi Germany. But Putin's actions are straight from Hitler's in 1938-39: fake history, distraction, and aggression.

Russia's war against Ukraine threatens global and regional political stability, with far-reaching implications. Left unchecked, Russia's belligerence paves the way for other bad actors such as North Korea, China, and Iran. To be sure, Iran's leaders are carefully monitoring global responses to Russia.

And while no one can comprehend the impact of so many refugees and the horrific loss of life and destruction, one YouTube video is seared in my mind's eye: a young Ukrainian rabbi in tears in his Odessa synagogue. He cries that the threat

is too great for the Jewish community to stay, fervently hoping for the day when the Jewish community will return to pray in peace.

We must do more than post Ukrainian flags on social media; we need meaningful action now. The U.S. Congress must lead our allies in a unified response to Putin and force him to stand down.

We pray for the well-being of Ukrainians seeking safety from harm's way and should be proud that Jewish and Israeli NGO's mobilized immediately to provide safe passage, medical care, and support for Ukrainian refugees of all backgrounds and religions. AJC (American Jewish Committee) launched an emergency support campaign, with 100% of donations directly going to help on the ground in Ukraine.

## Do It Yourself Wills, Not Such a Good Idea



BY BERNARD A. KROOKS, CERTIFIED ELDER LAW ATTORNEY

It has been reported that Abraham Lincoln once said, "If you are your own lawyer, you have a fool for a client." Yet, a lot of time has passed since Honest Abe spoke those profound words and in today's times it is not uncommon for someone to try to prepare their own estate planning documents without the help of an estate planning lawyer. After all, it's pretty easy to find some forms on the internet, fill them out and perhaps save a few bucks by not working with an estate planning lawyer, right? Be careful. There is a lot more to estate planning than filling out some forms and it is fairly easy to make mistakes. While lawyers also make mistakes, of course, they are trained and paid to anticipate most of the kinds of issues that might arise. Untrained individuals may not have the skill or luck to foresee problems.

Consider Judy, who decided to write her own will. She went on the internet and printed out an online form for a will. In the middle of the form was a big open space with the language:

"I direct that after payment of all my just debts, my property be bequeathed in the manner following:"

Below that awkward introductory sentence, on the lines in the form, Judy wrote in:

"To my sister Sarah, my Bank Checking and Savings Account, my house at 246 Broad Street and its contents, my 2018 Ford Truck and my Friendly Investments IRA. If Sarah dies before me, I leave all listed to my brother Mark."

Judy completed the form, signed it, had it witnessed by two people and had the entire document notarized. She felt pleased that she had accomplished this task efficiently and inexpensively.

Do you already see what was wrong with Judy's will? If you are a lawyer, you probably do — but you might not if you are not a lawyer.

Three years later, Sarah died — before her

In 1991, AJC was the first Jewish organization to publicly support Ukraine's independence, the first to urge the U.S. Administration to recognize Ukraine's independence, and the only one to establish a temporary solidarity office in Kyiv during the Maidan Revolution. We are a proud partner of the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, working with Jewish communal leadership to support the community.

We proudly #StandWithUkraine, and together, must continue to declare zero tolerance for misappropriation of Holocaust terminology and imagery at every turn.

Myra Clark-Siegel is AJC Westchester/Fairfield regional director. To learn more: [westchester@ajc.org](mailto:westchester@ajc.org).

sister, and before Judy's will could leave anything to her. In fact, Sarah left her own home and bank account to Judy. Judy took the \$130,000 she inherited from her sister and opened a new brokerage account at Friendly Investments (the same brokerage firm where her IRA was located). Then, two years after Sarah's death, Judy died.

Judy's brother Mark did survive her. So did the two daughters of her other, deceased brother John. So, who inherits what?

The family could not agree, and the case went to court. The probate judge decided that Judy intended to leave everything to her brother Mark and ordered that her nieces would receive nothing. The nieces were upset and appealed to a higher court. The higher court ruled that Judy had died without a complete will, and that her nieces would receive a share of the undesignated part of her estate — the home and account she had inherited from her sister Sarah. Mark was not happy, so he appealed to the highest court in the state, which ultimately decided that the nieces were entitled to something. Her nieces received a share — a small share, to be sure — of her estate. Who knows if this is even what Judy would have wanted? Only Judy could have answered that question; unfortunately, she is dead.

Now you can easily see what was wrong with Judy's will. She did not include a "residuary clause" providing for assets not listed in her will. If she had added a few short words to the end of the dispositive language she could have provided for distribution of "all the remaining assets I might own" or something similar.

Even if you think your estate is small, and you want a "simple" will, you should see a lawyer. Ultimately, Judy's estate would have saved a lot of legal fees for the very modest cost of a lawyer at the outset — and what she wanted could actually have happened.

Bernard A. Krooks, Esq., is a founding partner of Littman Krooks LLP. He was named 2021 "Lawyer of the Year" by Best Lawyers in America® for excellence in Elder Law and has been honored as one of the "Best Lawyers" in America since 2008. He was elected to the Estate Planning Hall of Fame by the National Association of Estate Planners & Councils (NAEPC). Krooks is past Chair of the Elder Law Committee of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel (ACTEC). Mr. Krooks may be reached at (914-684-2100) or by visiting the firm's website at [www.elderlawnewyork.com](http://www.elderlawnewyork.com).

## Domestic Violence: Myths and Realities

According to the NY State Division of Criminal Justice Services, there were 1,724 domestic violence crimes reported in Westchester County in 2020. Each year, 3-4 million children and adolescents witness violence in their homes. Exposure to domestic violence affects children's emotional development, social functioning, ability to focus and learn in school, moral development, and ability to cultivate healthy relationships in adolescence and adulthood.

While most of us recognize how devastatingly dangerous domestic violence is, both physically and emotionally, few of us are as knowledgeable as we should be about this vitally important social problem. Here are some common misconceptions about domestic violence...and the reality:

1. **Myth:** Most people report instances of domestic violence to the police.

**Reality:** Half of abused women do not tell the police, according to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics.

2. **Myth:** Acts of domestic violence are generally physical or sexual.

**Reality:** Any pattern of coercive behavior—whether it's physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and or psychological abuse—exerted by one family member or intimate partner over another in an attempt to establish or maintain power and control constitutes domestic violence.

3. **Myth:** People who suffer from domestic violence recognize that they are being battered.

**Reality:** A victim of domestic abuse may not identify family violence (physical or emotional) as domestic violence. This is especially true if there is no physical injury.

4. **Myth:** All cases of domestic violence are

committed by men against women.

**Reality:** 83% of all domestic violence cases involve women being battered by men. 17% of domestic violence acts are committed by women. Domestic violence also happens in same sex couples and among teenagers.

5. **Myth:** People who suffer from domestic violence always want to leave the person committing the violence.

**Reality:** People who are victims of domestic violence are often protective of the abuser, blame themselves for "relationship problems," and minimize and rationalize the abusive behavior.

If you or someone you know in Westchester is a victim of domestic violence, please contact the WJCS Trager Lemp Center for Treating Trauma & Promoting Resilience. To learn about our programs and services, go to: <https://www.wjcs.com/services/mental-health/trager-lemp-center/>

WJCS' Margaret's Place program, offered in partnership with the Joe Torre Safe At Home Foundation, provides middle and high school students a safe room at school where they can talk to each other and to a professional social worker trained in domestic violence intervention and prevention. Core components of the program include individual and group counseling, prevention curriculum in classrooms, peer leadership groups and staff, parent and community workshops. The non-threatening environment has proven to be an effective setting in which to promote discussion of issues surrounding violence, while also offering peer support and education. Margaret's Place is available at White Plains HS, Peekskill MS, and Cross Hill Academy (Yonkers).

To learn more about WJCS programs and services, go to <https://wjcs.com>.