

# Immigrant leaves most of estate to U.S.

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Maria Woods was stubborn and contrary to the end. She didn't want to move into an assisted living facility because she'd have to give up her oven. She insisted on taking the bus 15 miles to see her lawyer.

And the German immigrant did precisely the opposite of what nearly every self-respecting estate planner

and taxpayer in the United States would do.

She left nearly all her worldly goods—diminished though they were—to the U.S. government as a way of showing her gratitude to the country that embraced her.

"My job is to help my clients avoid giving anything to the government," said attorney Joseph Karp, who handles estate, trust and elder law. "She told me this country has given her everything she has and she wanted to give

some back."

When Woods died in September at age 80, she left 70 percent of her estate to the U.S. Treasury and 30 percent to the Arthritis Foundation to devote to curing her disabling ailment, minus some small bequests to friends.

"When she told me she was going to leave her money to the IRS, I thought, 'Oh, God,'" said longtime friend Pat Dooley, who lives in Pensacola. "She had no

idea she was giving the fox all the chickens and the chicken house."

A few years ago, Woods' estate amounted to \$500,000, but the costs of medical care and aging shrank it to about \$98,000. But it's the principle of the thing, not the principal.

Woods was born Maria Hoffman to a tavern owner in pre-World War II Germany. During the war, her family fled the advancing Russian army. Later, when the Poles took over the area, her family was deported to West Germany.

She found a job caring for two

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Woods

## Woman credited U.S. for success

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years for the young children of Gerald and Pat Dooley, a military family. Woods kept up a lifelong correspondence with Pat Dooley. The Dooleys sponsored her immigration to the United States in 1959, bringing her bicycle when they returned from overseas.

She cared for the children of wealthy families who sometimes visited Florida, where she vowed to live. She married a Chicago chauffeur named George Woods, who died in the 1970s.

Maria Woods became a U.S. citizen in 1970. She

wrote to Dooley in 1978, "I became a Citizen of this big strong beautiful country eight years ago. . . . The day I buy a Cadillac I will be a full-blood American. Are you a little proud of me?"

Suspicious of people individually, she was loving and trusting of her new country. "In one letter, she said she would never have been a success if we hadn't brought her to America," Dooley said.

"She was the stereotypical *hausfrau* until her husband died," Karp said. "Then she had to become in charge of her own affairs. She became a tough little cookie. She didn't like injustice."

Woods owned five apartments in West Palm Beach between Southern and Forest Hill boulevards and managed them herself. She repaired the plumbing, fixed the windows and put up shutters.

Woods first hired Karp to evict one of her tenants, then trusted him to handle her affairs. Stubbornly, she refused to buy health insurance or hire a handyman to do the tough jobs.

"She was a feisty, tough lady," Karp said. "She wasn't looking for recognition. She just wanted people to know that she appreciated the U.S."

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Courtesy photo

**SELF-RELIANT:** Maria Woods, shown in an undated photo, took care of apartments she owned.