

LIFE, DEATH & MONEY: LEONA HELMSLEY
BUCK PRODUCTIONS/BOKEH COLLECTIVE FOR REELZ CHANNEL
TRANSCRIPT UPDATE – Dec 4, 2020

VIDEO	AUDIO
COLD OPEN	
	<p>MICHAEL PAGNOTTA: [10:00:03:05] [00:00:00] Leona Helmsley was called the “Queen of Mean”.</p> <p>KIYRA LYNN: Leona Helmsley was the biggest B-I-T-C-H.</p> <p>ELLIS HENICAN: A reputation for not being a very nice lady and she made it to the top of the real estate world in New York in the 80s.</p> <p>JILL STANLEY: Leona Helmsley was all about control and she did this even from the grave.</p> <p>DANIELLE MAYORAS: Leona Helmsley passes away and now the whole family wonders, who’s going to get her billions?</p> <p>MICHAEL PAGNOTTA: Except as far as Leona was concerned it wasn’t going to go to her grandchildren. She disinherited both of them in her will.</p> <p>JILL STANLEY: She writes in her will, “you two get nothing and you know why”.</p> <p>ELLIS HENICAN: It was cruel and it was crazy. There was one stroke of generosity in Leona’s will... \$12 million for Trouble.</p> <p>KIYRA LYNN: This woman is a piece of work.</p> <p>DANIELLE MAYORAS: I mean she gave</p>

	<p>\$12 million to her dog but disinherited two of her grandchildren. And there were many lawsuits after that.</p> <p>KIYRA LYNN: That is how she earned her title of being the “Queen of Mean”.</p>
ACT ONE	
	<p>VO: [10:01:24:00] [01:32] When a celebrity checks out, there’s no shortage of people ready to cash in. There’s a ton of money to be made on the backs of dead celebrities...and with millions of dollars at stake, the battles over the estates of the rich and famous can lead to some serious drama.</p> <p>[01:50] This is the story of how the notorious Queen of Mean, Leona Helmsley, created an enormous real estate empire worth billions of dollars...and the scandals and battles over her money that would continue long after her death.</p>

VO: When Leona Helmsley passes away in 2007, her net worth is estimated to be over the unbelievable sum of \$4.8 billion.

MICHAEL PAGNOTTA:

[10:02:10:01] [02:20]

[00:52:38 > A004_C003_08078I_001 -

12:56:19:11] By the time of Leona Helmsley's death in 2007, she was largely forgotten as a public figure, but she still retains her enormous wealth.

[00:52:51][13.0]

VO: [2:30] Leona's estate is comprised of a sprawling 28-room mansion in Greenwich, Connecticut valued at 65 million in 2014, a nine-room penthouse with a swimming pool and a private hair salon overlooking Central Park atop her hotel, the Park Lane; a condo in Palm Beach, Florida; a mountaintop hideaway near Phoenix, Arizona; and a 100-seat jet with a bedroom suite.

Her closets were stuffed with hundreds of evening gowns and an extensive shoe collection, including 200 identical pairs of Italian designer flats that cost more than \$200 a pair or \$40,000 for entire the collection.

	<p>KIYRA LYNN: [10:02:59] [3:09] [00:10:51 > A001_C003_08219I_001 Looking fabulous was her number one priority. [00:11:05][13.6]</p> <p>VO: [10:03:05:00] [3:14] As for her business holdings – at one time, the Helmsley corporation boasted as many as 125 properties in New York and around the US, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 27 hotels bearing the Helmsley name• Manhattan skyscrapers, warehouses, residential lofts and landmark Manhattan buildings the Graybar Building, the Flatiron Building and the iconic Empire State Building.
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VIZ: newspaper headlines

VO: With such a huge fortune on the line, the media is eager with speculation of who will get what. When Leona's final will goes public, it causes a massive uproar.

JILL STANLEY: [3:51] [15:17:49 > A003_C001_0818OQ_001 - 15:17:47:12]
There is no end to how mean, how nasty, how controlling and how clear Leona would be about her power.
[15:18:00][10.4]

JILL STANLEY: [10:03:50:10] [4:00]
[15:51:18 > A003_C003_0818XC_001 - 15:51:17:01] When you look at the will and the terms of this will is we see the Queen of Mean exercising her control and her need for power from the grave.
[15:51:28][9.8]

VO: Leona leaves her chauffeur \$100,000.00 and bequeaths her brother Alvin Rosenthal and two grandsons, Walter and David Panzirer, millions. She has also assigned them as executors of her charitable trust which will constitute a bulk of her massive fortune...A trust whose mission statement indicates it's for "provision of care for dogs".

But tongues really start wagging when it's revealed who is the biggest beneficiary. Her 7-year-old pet dog, Trouble.

MARK ROESLER: [10:04:33:15] [04:42]
[17:45:57 > A004_C001_0818ZQ_001 - 17:45:55:22] She wanted to make sure her dog, Trouble, had everything it needed during the rest of the, her dog's lifetime. So that's why she left the \$12 million.
[17:46:04][7.5]

KIYRA LYNN: [01:03:41 >

[A001_C003_08219I_001 - 12:38:52:22](#) It is a lot of money to be leaving to a dog. But if you think about it. Trouble never talked back and Trouble never had an opinion.
[01:03:48][6.9]

VO: The news that Trouble has become the richest dog in the world has the media in a tizzy. But even more jaw-dropping is who Leona Helmsley specifically leaves out of her will. Her two grandchildren.

ELLIS HENICAN: - [A001_C003_0806Y4 - 10:45:50:10](#)] Craig and Megan got nothing.

MICHAEL PAGNOTTA: [00:55:35 > [A004_C004_0807EW_001 - 13:00:59:07](#)] I mean, what could you have done that was so wrong that your grandmother would leave more money to her dog than to you?

ELLIS HENICAN: [00:41:23 > [A001_C003_0806Y4 - 10:45:50:10](#)] In the will she said, "they know why."
[00:41:27][4.3]

JILL STANLEY: [[10:05:16:12](#)] [05:25] [15:53:16 > [A003_C003_0818XC_001 - 15:53:15:23](#)] Actually didn't know why, contrary to what Leona thought.
[15:53:23][7.2]

JILL STANLEY: [15:52:59 > [A003_C003_0818XC_001 - 15:52:59:00](#)] Those two grandchildren would go on to question the fact that they were left with nothing and fight it in court.
[15:53:16][16.7]

VO: Helmsley's controversial final wishes will launch an epic dog fight between the executors, her grandchildren and three animal rights charities to get what they believe is rightfully theirs.

DANIELLE MAYORAS: [00:08:29 > A018_C001_081274_001 - 16:03:27:14] It's almost like reality's crazier than what you could create on TV. [00:08:34][5.2]

VO: But how exactly did the Queen of Mean earn her notorious title and accumulate her billions of wealth?

ELLIS HENICAN: [10:05:51:02] [06:00] [00:21:23 > A001_C003_0806Y4 - 10:04:30:20] In a way, Leona Helmsley lived a Cinderella story. [00:21:28][4.1]

ELLIS HENICAN: [00:21:55 > A001_C003_0806Y4 - 10:26:24:16] The problem is that Leona didn't bring any grace to the role. She was the bitchy Cinderella. [00:22:09][14.3]

VO: From an early age – Leona Helmsley was certain she was destined for greatness and was prepared to do

MARK ROESLER: [10:06:09:00] [06:18]
[17:30:14 > A004_C001_0818ZQ_001 - 17:30:12:20] She was a ruthless business person. [17:30:16][1.8]

MARK ROESLER: [10:06:19:13] [06:29]
[17:36:05 > A004_C001_0818ZQ_001 - 17:30:16:13] And when you're ruthless like that... [17:36:09][4.2]

MARK ROESLER: [17:30:19 > A004_C001_0818ZQ_001 - 17:45:55:22]
...sometimes people like that do make it to the top. [17:30:24][4.9]

VO: [10:06:19:13] [06:29] **Leona Mindy Rosenthal is born on July 4, 1920 outside New York City. Her father is a hatmaker and is struggling to support his family financially. As soon as she is old enough, Leona takes control of her destiny.**

ELLIS HENICAN: [10:06:36:01] [06:43]
[00:08:01 > A001_C002_0806DJ] -
[09:39:43:23] **And she had grown up in tough circumstances. She knew what it meant to struggle and she did not want that ever again in her life.**

VO: [10:06:43:18] [06:54]
Leona Rosenthal becomes Leona Roberts and gets married and divorced twice by the time she enters her 30s.

VO: **By 1968, Leona is a single mother to a son - she uses her well-endowed tenacity and street smarts to help make ends meet. But to turn her life around, Leona bravely decides to enter the notoriously tough, male-dominated world of New York City real estate.**

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	<p>DANIELLE MAYORAS: [10:07:13:08] [07:22] [00:09:14 > A018_C001_081274_001 - 16:04:12:10] Leona Helmsley was definitely good at getting what she wanted, even if she had a lie to do it. In order to get her first job in a real estate company as a secretary, she not only lied about her age, but she also presented a bogus resumé.</p> <p>VO: [10:07:27:12] [07:39] Leona moves up the ladder quickly going from secretary to real estate broker.</p> <p>ELLIS HENICAN: [00:09:43 > A001_C002_0806DJ - 09:41:20:21] The real estate industry, is a place that doesn't matter so much what your fancy degrees are, doesn't matter, uh what your background is, what matters is what you can sell. And boy, Leona could sell. [00:10:04][21.6]</p> <p>KIYRA LYNN: [10:07:48:02] [07:58] [00:07:08 > A001_C003_08219I_001 - 11:42:24:08] She ended up brokering the first sale of a New York condominium, which was almost unheard of at the time. [00:07:18][9.6]</p>
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VO: [10:07:57:45] [08:02] In 1968, Leona establishes her own real estate firm.

KIYRA LYNN: She was a trailblazer.

[00:08:14 > A001_C003_08219I_001 - 11:43:30:07]

Leona claims that she made \$688,500.00 in the first three months that she opened her real estate firm. That's unbelievable.

[00:08:27][12.8]

VO: But Leona isn't satisfied yet... She goes looking for her ticket to the major leagues of New York real estate power brokers. And in 1972, she finds him.

MICHAEL PAGNOTTA: [10:08:35:11]

[08:46] [00:08:33 A004_C002_0807JO_001 - 12:09:23:17]

There are several stories about how Harry and Leona met. To hear Leona tell it, he had heard of her reputation and he asked one of her associates to call her to get her on the phone to hire her away, to which her reply was, "you can't afford me". The real story, as far as most people are concerned, is that she turned up looking really good at a party that he had thrown. And she sashayed across the room, isolated him, and pretty much never left his side after that. [00:09:05][32.0]

ELLIS HENICAN: [10:09:02:01] [09:11]

[00:08:45 > A001_C002_0806DJ -

09:40:35:009] He was not the best-looking guy in the world. He was not the most glamorous guy in the world. But, boy, he knew how to make money. And Leona Helmsley understood that teaming up with Harry, they could do an awful lot together. [00:09:21][36.4]

VO: [10:09:25:03] [09:36] **Leona soon charms Harry into a major position within his company.**

MARK ROESLER [17:49:21 > A004_C001_0818ZQ_001 - 17:49:20:00]
Leona Helmsley was offered a job as vice president of one of Harry's real estate companies at a salary of over \$750,000.00. [17:49:29][8.5]

MARK ROESLER [17:49:36 > A004_C001_0818ZQ_001 - 17:49:34:04]
That's a very attractive salary during that time period. [17:49:41][5.6]

VO: [10:09:43:17] [09:54] **Despite Harry's personal situation his relationship with Leona goes quickly from business to pleasure.**

DANIELLE MAYORAS: [10:09:50:23] [9:59]
Harry was married when he met Leona Helmsley. But he was smitten with her.

VO: **By 1972, Leona gets rid of her competition when Harry files for divorce from his wife of 33 years.**

MICHAEL PAGNOTTA: [10:10:01:35] [10:13] [00:09:53 > A004_C002_0807JO_001 - 12:10:43:17] It cost Harry Helmsley \$7 million to get out of his first marriage.

	<p>VO: Leona and Harry soon get married in their brand-new million dollar penthouse suite atop Harry's recently acquired hotel, The Park Lane.</p> <p>ELLIS HENICAN: [10:10:16:40] [10:28] [00:25:46 > A001_C004_0806HC - 11:00:05:18] The Park Lane penthouse is on Central Park South and it goes back to 58th Street...</p> <p>ELLIS HENICAN: [00:15:59 > A001_C002_0806DJ - 09:47:34:07] And it was lavish, unspeakably lavish.</p> <p>ELLIS HENICAN: [00:15:44 > A001_C002_0806DJ - 09:47:21:22] Living room on two floors, an indoor a swimming pool, views in all directions up Central Park...beautiful.</p> <p>MICHAEL PAGNOTTA: [10:10:30:40] [10:41] [00:16:05][6.0] [00:11:28 > A004_C002_0807JO_001 - 12:12:40:06] And this was their, essentially their private home. [00:11:58][29.8]</p>
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	<p>VO: Despite his wealth, before he met Leona, Harry lived a fairly frugal life. But Leona soon changes all that. Leona renovates their penthouse and the Helmsleys start to live large.</p> <p>MICHAEL PAGNOTTA: [10:10:47:13] [10:58] [00:09:53 > A004_C002_0807JO_001 - 12:10:43:17] His lifestyle just took an enormous upward tick. [00:10:06][13.2]</p> <p>ELLIS HENICAN: [10:10:54:50] [11:03] [00:16:12 > A001_C002_0806DJ - 09:48:07:18] It wasn't enough to buy a \$4 million private jet. They had to gold plate the buckles on the seat belts, install beautiful wood paneling and turn that airplane really into a, to a flying palace. [00:17:07][55.9]</p>
	<p>VO: Leona and Harry Helmsley are seen as the Big Apple's new King and Queen.</p> <p>JILL STANLEY: [10:11:16:01] [11:26] [15:08:41 > A003_C001_0818OQ_001 - 15:08:40:17] Leona Helmsley and Harry Helmsley were in some ways the toast of New York City. Even though they weren't liked. Why were they revered? Because they were billionaires. [15:08:52][10.7]</p> <p>VO: Leona Helmsley has risen from poverty to achieve her dream of becoming rich and now famous - and she embraces it wholeheartedly.</p>

	<p>DANIELLE MAYORAS: [10:11:36:11] [11:46] [00:20:05 > A018_C001_081274_001 - 16:15:04:17] She was extremely vain. Every day, when Harry would go to the office, she would have her private hairdresser come, do her hair, do her nails.</p> <p>DANIELLE MAYORAS: [00:21:50 > A018_C001_081274_001 - 16:16:49:19] ... She would swim laps in the pool and when she went around, she would have a hotel employee waiting with a platter of shrimp so that she could reward herself and take one shrimp every time. [00:22:03] [12.3]</p> <p>VO: Leona is rich and powerful and she makes sure no one ever forgets it.</p> <p>DANIELLE MAYORAS: [10:11:59:20] [12:10] [00:12:12 > A001_C003_08219I_001 - 11:46:39:23] You didn't want to get on her bad side. The littlest things could set off Leona Helmsley.</p> <p>VO: It will be that very attitude that will ultimately be her undoing.</p>
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