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| ESTATE OF           | § | IN PROBATE COURT     |
|                     | § |                      |
| NELVA E. BRUNSTING, | § | NUMBER FOUR (4) OF   |
|                     | § |                      |
| DECEASED            | § | HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS |

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| CARL HENRY BRUNSTING, et al | § |
|                             | § |
| v.                          | § |
|                             | § |
| ANITA KAY BRUNSTING, et al  | § |

**Anita & Amy Brunsting’s Joint  
No-Evidence Motion for Partial Summary Judgment**

Defendants, Anita Brunsting and Amy Brunsting (“Defendants”), file this joint no-evidence motion for partial summary judgment and would respectfully show the Court as follows:

**I. Summary of the Argument**

This litigation started more than thirty-eight (38) months ago. Plaintiffs had sufficient time for discovery in this suit and the three (3) other actions<sup>1</sup> related to the 8/25/10 QBD (defined below). Plaintiffs challenge the 8/25/10 QBD on the following grounds, for which there is no evidence:

1. Nelva’s signature on the 8/25/10 QBD was forged 
2. Nelva lacked capacity when she executed the 8/25/10 QBD 
3. Nelva was unduly influenced into executing the 8/25/10 QBD 
4. Nelva was fraudulently induced into executing the 8/25/10 QBD 
5. Nelva executed the 8/25/10 QBD under duress 

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<sup>1</sup> Those three other proceedings are: (1) No. 4:12-CV-00592; *Candace Louise Curtis v. Anita Kay Brunsting*; United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Houston Division; (2) CA No. 2012-14538; *In re Carl Brunsting* (202 Petition); 80<sup>TH</sup> Judicial District Court of Harris County, TX; and (3) CA No. 2013-05455; *Carl Henry Brunsting v. Candace Freed & Vacek & Freed*; 164<sup>TH</sup> Judicial District Court of Harris County, TX.

## II. Background

 This is a family dispute among five (5) siblings of the Brunsting family: Carl, Candace, Carol, Anita, and Amy. The dispute involves a trust created by their parents: Elmer Brunsting (“Elmer”) and Nelva Brunsting (“Nelva”).

Elmer and Nelva created the Brunsting Family Living Trust on or about October 10, 1996. The trust was restated on January 12, 2005 (the "Family Trust").  Elmer and Nelva served as trustees of the Family Trust until 2008, when Elmer lost the ability to handle his financial affairs and Nelva served as trustee alone. In 2008, Nelva appointed Carl and Anita to serve as successor co-trustees. 

Shortly after Elmer died in April 2009, in accordance with the Family Trust, successor trusts  resulted: the Elmer H. Brunsting Decedent's Trust ("Elmer's Decedent's Trust"); and the Nelva E. Brunsting Survivor's Trust ("Nelva's Survivor's Trust"). Nelva served as the trustee of both trusts, with Carl and Anita to serve as successor co-trustees.

 In May 2010, Candace wrote, “[Nelva] has saved my house for me a few years in a row now by giving me the money to pay the property taxes. This time I told her she should take it out of my inheritance (that's what Daddy always said). She said no, she could help me.” Candace then continued, “[Nelva] always wants to know what I spend all my money on. Why I have no savings. Why I didn't plan better. [Nelva] treats me like such a FAILURE.” Apparently, Nelva thought Candace was a spendthrift and not good at handling her own financial affairs. 

In or about July 2010, Carl was hospitalized for an extended period of time due to herpes encephalitis, an acute infection and inflammation of his brain. As a result, Carl’s mental capacity and cognitive abilities were severely compromised. Carl continues to suffer from residual symptoms, which is why his wife Drina was substituted into this case as his attorney-in-fact.

In accordance with the Family Trust, on August 25, 2010, Nelva executed a Qualified 

Beneficiary Designation and Exercise of Testamentary Powers of Appointment (the "8/25/10 QBD"). In short, the document is an exercise of Nelva's testamentary powers of appointment as contemplated by the Family Trust. The document was notarized by Nelva's attorney, Ms. Freed.<sup>2</sup> The chief change that prompted plaintiffs' challenge to the 8/25/10 QBD is that the co-trustees for Carl's and Candace's interest under the trust changed from: (1) Anita and Carl; to (2) Anita and Amy. Apparently, the change in co-trustees from Anita and Carl to Anita and Amy offends Carl and Candace.



Carl and Candace ("Plaintiffs") brought several proceedings alleging every conceivable means to challenge the 8/25/10 QBD. Candace filed a case in Federal Court in February 2012. Carl originally filed a Rule 202 Petition in March 2012. In January 2013, Carl filed a lawsuit against Nelva's attorneys that drafted the 8/25/10 QBD. Carl filed this litigation in this Court in April 2013. Thus, Carl and Candace have had more than thirty-eight (38) months in four (4) separate proceedings to gather evidence regarding the 8/25/10 QBD.



### **III. Argument & Authorities**

This motion relates solely to plaintiffs challenges to the 8/25/10 QBD. It is important to put matters into perspective on plaintiffs' claims related to the 8/25/10 QBD. Ordinarily the laundry list of challenges a contestant makes to an instrument is when there is a disproportionate change in the distribution of property. Here, the 8/25/10 QBD does not affect the percentage of assets each child will receive in trust nor the distributions standards. For plaintiffs, the sole impact is the change in co-trustees from: (1) Anita and Carl; to (2) Anita and Amy.



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<sup>2</sup> The attorneys' name is Candace Lynne Kunz Freed. Ms. Freed is used to prevent confusion between Nelva's attorney, Candace Freed, and Nelva's daughter, Candace Curtis, since they share the same first name.

Plaintiffs' challenges to the 8/25/10 QBD center on the contention that Nelva would never have appointed Amy to serve in Carl's place as a co-trustee. However, plaintiffs ignore the fact that Carl suffered from herpes encephalitis in July 2010, which caused Carl's substantially diminished physical and mental capacity.

**A. No Evidence Nelva's Signature on the 8/25/10 QBD was Forged.**

Plaintiffs allege the 8/25/10 QBD was forged.

A document is forged if a person signs the document so that it purports to be the act of another who did not authorize the act.<sup>3</sup> The burden of proof rest on those seeking to set aside the instrument to show forgery.<sup>4</sup>

There is no competent summary judgment evidence to support that someone other than Nelva executed the 8/25/10 QBD. Accordingly, this no-evidence motion for summary judgment must be granted.

**B. No Evidence Nelva Lacked Capacity When Executing 8/25/10 QBD.**

Plaintiffs allege Nelva lacked capacity when executing the 8/25/10 QBD.

The law presumes that a trustor has sufficient mental capacity at the time of execution to understand her legal rights.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the burden of proof rests on those seeking to set aside the instrument to show lack of mental capacity at the time of execution.<sup>6</sup>

Here, plaintiffs must provide competent summary judgment evidence Nelva lacked sufficient

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<sup>3</sup> TEXAS PATTERN JURY CHARGES: EXPRESS TRUSTS PJC 235.4 (2014); *See In re Estate of Flores*, 76 S.W.3d 624, 630 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 2002, no pet.).

<sup>4</sup> *In re Estate of Flores*, 76 S.W.3d 624, 630 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 2002, no pet.)

<sup>5</sup> *Walker v. Eason*, 643 S.W.2d 390, 391 (Tex. 1982); *Bradshaw v. Naumann*, 528 S.W.2d 869, 873 (Tex. Civ. App.—Austin 1975, writ dism'd); and TEX. PROP. CODE § 112.007.

<sup>6</sup> *Walker v. Eason*, 643 S.W.2d 390, 391 (Tex. 1982).

mind and memory to understand the nature and consequences of her acts and the business she was transacting when she executed the 8/25/10 QBD.<sup>7</sup> Plaintiffs can provide no such evidence. Accordingly, this no-evidence motion for summary judgment must be granted.

**C. No Evidence Nelva was Unduly Influenced to Sign the 8/25/10 QBD.**

Plaintiffs alleged Nelva's execution of the 8/25/10 QBD was procured by undue influence.

"Undue influence" means that—

1. an influence existed and was exerted, and
2. the influence undermined or overpowered the mind of the person executing the document at the time of its execution, and
3. the person would not have executed the document but for such influence.<sup>8</sup>

The burden of proving undue influence is upon the party contesting its execution.<sup>9</sup>

Here, there is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy exerted any influence, much less undue influence, to make themselves trustees of Carl's and Candance's share of the trust after Nelva's death.

There is no evidence that, prior to its execution, Nelva had discussions with Anita and/or Amy regarding the terms of the 8/25/10 QBD.

There is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy contacted Nelva's attorney, Ms. Freed, and prescribed the terms or even discussed the terms of the 8/25/10 QBD.

There is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy participated in the drafting of the 8/25/10 QBD.

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<sup>7</sup> See *Mandell & Wright v. Thomas*, 441 S.W.2d 841, 845 (Tex. 1969).

<sup>8</sup> TEXAS PATTERN JURY CHARGES: EXPRESS TRUSTS PJC 235.3 (2014); *Rothermel v. Duncan*, 369 S.W.2d 917, 922 (Tex. 1963).

<sup>9</sup> *Rothermel v. Duncan*, 369 S.W.2d 917, 922 (citing *Scott v. Townsend*, 166 S.W. 1138 (Tex. 1914)).

There is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy were present when Nelva executed the 8/25/10

QBD.

Assuming, without admitting, there was an influence, there is no evidence that Nelva was mentally or physically compromised in August 2010, such that her free will was susceptible to being overcome.

Accordingly, this no-evidence motion for summary judgment must be granted 

**D. No Evidence Nelva Executed the 8/25/10 QBD as a Result of Fraud.**

Plaintiffs allege that Nelva executed the 8/25/10 QBD as a result of fraud. This type of allegation is a species of undue influence.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, in an abundance of caution and in the interest of judicial economy, Anita and Amy will specifically address plaintiffs' fraud claims as a separate allegation.

Fraud occurred if—

1. a person made a material misrepresentation, and
2. the misrepresentation was made with knowledge of its falsity or made recklessly without any knowledge of the truth and as a positive assertion, and
3. the misrepresentation was made with the intention of inducing the trustor to sign the document, and
4. Trustor relied on the misrepresentation in signing the document.

“Misrepresentation” means:

A false statement of fact [or]

A promise of future performance made with an intent, at the time the promise was made, not to perform as promised [or]

A statement of opinion based on a false statement of fact [or]

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<sup>10</sup> TEXAS PATTERN JURY CHARGES: WILL CONTESTS PJC 230.6; *Curry v. Curry*, 270 S.W.2d 208 (Tex. 1954).

A statement of opinion that the maker knows to be false [or]

An expression of opinion that is false, made by one claiming or implying to have special knowledge of the subject matter of the opinion.

“Special knowledge” means knowledge or information superior to that possessed by Trustor and to which Trustor did not have equal access.<sup>11</sup>

The contestant claiming fraud has the burden of proof.<sup>12</sup>

There is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy made any representation to Nelva with the intention of inducing Nelva to sign the 8/25/10 QBD.

Assuming, without admitting, that Anita and/or Amy made a representation to Nelva with the intention of inducing Nelva to sign the 8/25/10 QBD, there is no evidence such representation was false.

Assuming, without admitting, that Anita and/or Amy made a false representation, there is no evidence Nelva relied on the misrepresentation in executing the 8/25/10 QBD.

Accordingly, this no-evidence motion for summary judgment must be granted.

#### **E. No Evidence Nelva Signed 8/25/10 QBD Under Duress.**

Plaintiffs alleged the 8/25/10 QBD is invalid because Nelva executed it under duress.

Duress is the mental, physical, or economic coercion of another, causing that party to act contrary to his free will and interest.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> TEXAS PATTERN JURY CHARGES: WILL CONTESTS PJC 230.6.

<sup>12</sup> TEXAS PATTERN JURY CHARGES: WILL CONTESTS PJC 230.6; *In re Estate of Graham*, 69 S.W.3d 598, 612 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 2001, no pet.).

<sup>13</sup> TEXAS PATTERN JURY CHARGES: CONTRACTS PJC 101.26; *Black Law Pipe Line Co. v. Union Construction Co.*, 538 S.W.2d 85 n.2 (Tex. 1976); *Brooks v. Taylor* 359 S.W.2d 539, 542 (Tex. Civ. App.—Amarillo 1962, writ ref’d n.r.e.); and *Housing Authority of City of Dallas v. Hubbell*, 325 S.W.2d 880, 905 (Tex. Civ. App. – Dallas 1959, writ ref’d n.r.e.).

The contestant claiming duress bears the burden of proof.<sup>14</sup>

As the Texas Pattern Jury Charge warns, duress is only reached if the alleged coercion can legally constitute duress.<sup>15</sup> “It is never duress to threaten to do that which a party has a legal right to do.”<sup>16</sup>

There is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy used mental coercion to cause Nelva to act contrary to her own free will and interest in executing the 8/25/10 QBD.

There is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy used physical coercion to cause Nelva to act contrary to her own free will and interest in executing the 8/25/10 QBD.

There is no evidence that Anita and/or Amy used economic coercion to cause Nelva to act contrary to her own free will and interest in executing the 8/25/10 QBD.

Accordingly, this no-evidence motion for summary judgment must be granted.

#### **IV. Prayer**

For these reasons, Defendants pray that their no-evidence motion for partial summary judgment be granted and that Defendants receive all other relief, general and special, legal and equitable, to which they or the trusts may be entitled.

[SIGNATURES ON FOLLOWING PAGE]

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<sup>14</sup> *Sudan v. Sudan*, 199 S.W.3d 291, 292 (Tex. 2006).

<sup>15</sup> TEXAS PATTERN JURY CHARGES: CONTRACTS PJC 101.26.

<sup>16</sup> *Ulmer v. Ulmer*, 162 S.W.2d 944, 947 (Tex. 1942).

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Brad Featherston

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/s/ Neal Spielman (w/permission /s/ BEF)

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### **Certificate of Service**

I certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing instrument was served on the following:

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via e-service or email on June 26, 2015.

/s/ Brad Featherston

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Bradley E. Featherston