

August 18, 2008

RUSTLE THROUGH YOUR DRAWERS FOR 'WHAT HAVE I GOT DAY'

A leading Willwriting organisation is urging everyone to rustle through their drawers, look in the loft and search behind the sofa this coming August Bank Holiday, as it launches its What Have I Got Day 2008, on Monday, August 25.

The Institute of Professional Willwriters (IPW) believes Brits typically put themselves down and under-value their possessions, personal items and property. In a world where money is king, we often disregard items that have sentimental value, feeling that nobody but ourselves would find any use for them.

Believing that we have nothing to leave to anyone is one of the top three reasons for not writing a Will, being also linked to the top reason of apathy and that of perceived cost.

But, the IPW says that, if we took out a paper and pad and devoted ten minutes to listing items that we own, which someone would like as a keep-sake when we pass away, we would be surprised at what springs to light.

This was certainly true when some of the world's most famous people took time out to devote time to this matter. Diana Princess of Wales ensured her property and assets would be held in Trust for Princes William and Harry, until they reached the age of 25.

Marilyn Monroe left all her personal effects and clothing to Lee Strasberg to distribute among "my friends, colleagues and those to whom I am devoted". Whether the famous white dress worn in 'The Seven Year Itch' was amongst this collection is not known.

Napoleon really gave this matter some thought. Sabres, daggers, pistols, saddles, watches, a field telescope and all sorts of other items were specifically listed in his Will. A gold dressing-case was bequeathed to his son because: "It is my wish that it may be precious in the eyes of my son."

Going one step further, he had bracelets made from his hair, to send to the Empress Maria Louisa, his mother, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, the Cardinal and his son.

Most of us have possessions relating to someone or something we have cherished. These might not be valuable at auction, but are often items that bestow happy memories on those we know and love.

Popular items in this category are rings and pieces of jewellery, watches, photographs, tools, medals or awards, ornaments or paintings, particular pieces of clothing, memorabilia, football shirts and letters.

Chairman of the IPW, Paul Sharpe, says: "Many of us feel items will naturally gravitate to those whom we would most like to have them, but this is rarely the case. If a valid Will is not drawn up, the law will decide which family members should receive the estate and that includes personal items. The only way to ensure you put an item in a particular individual's hands, when you have passed away, is to leave a Will specifying who should receive what.

“We believe most people will be very surprised what springs to mind if they carry out the simple ten minute pen and paper exercise we have set for them on What Have I Got Day. Whilst doing this, they should also remember to include any money that will be paid out on life insurance policies, on their death, as this also needs to be bequeathed.

"If, having done this, they then want to draw up a Will, they can typically save money by using an IPW member. Our members often charge far less than solicitors, despite having to abide by stringent entry and membership criteria of the IPW and having a level of Willwriting expertise way above that of the average solicitor.

“What they should not do is head down the DIY Will route, where getting the wording right for items of sentimental value is a course of action full of hidden mines that can explode once the Will is read.”

What Have I Got Day is August 25, but devoting a small amount of time to this subject can be done at any time and the sooner the better, if you wish your loved ones to have fond memories attached to the items you leave behind.

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Notes to Editors

1. Local IPW members may be available for interview, subject to their diaries. Please contact Catapult PR to arrange.
2. As a bit of fun, the IPW has drawn up a list of items that famous people might leave in their Will, because they are intrinsically linked with their personality. Here are a dozen suggestions – we hope your readers/listeners can come up with gems of their own.

Pop star Cheryl Cole – cowboy hat.

Victoria Beckham – stiletto heels collection.

Alan Titchmarsh – favourite garden spade.

Elizabeth Hurley – the infamous safety-pin dress.

Rosemary Connolly – Green Goddess leotard.

Nigel Kennedy – collection of Aston Villa scarves.

Johnny Fingers (ex Boomtown Rats piano player) – his pyjamas.

Johnny Depp – Jack Sparrow’s hat.

Dame Kelly Holmes – running shoes.

Marco Pierre-White – bandanas collection.

Keith Harris – Orville.

Gordon Ramsay – swear box!