

Sell toys online to get the most money

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Q: How do I find current value for my collection of Texaco coin banks, bought 1980s to 2000? - Gilbert, Tucson, Ariz.

A:

The writer adds that his banks are still in the box, never played with and "like the day I bought them."

Smart collectors know that in the collecting game, that condition is called MIB, meaning mint in box. That means that the toy and its original box are as they appeared off the production line. The box is unfaded with bright colors and crisp graphics, and there are no scuffs or bent corners, plus impeccable cellophane or wrap.

Sometimes, MIB can make the difference between sale and no sale. One very early Mickey Mouse "walker" figure brought top dollar because of bright graphics on the original box. The box was semi-beat up, but the color lithographs on it were vital.

In the case of these die cast vehicle and airplane replica coin banks made by Ertl for sale at Texaco stations, many were made, and many are still in circulation. And, given the smarting up of collectors, many remain MIB.

In the 1930s, say, a child received a toy for Christmas, ripped the box open to retrieve the toy, and it was then discarded with the wrapping paper. Fast forward to today: Less boxes for that toy equals greater rarity and more collector demand.

In 1945, Fred Ertl, Sr. of Dubuque, Iowa, made his first die cast replica. In short order, Ertl die cast vehicle replicas became a standard for American-made quality. Today, with Ertl in its 60th year, most are made in China, etc. Many of the differing series (about 10) of the Texaco coin banks were made overseas. Due to their commercial origins and relative newness, they're not in the pantheon of collectible toys.

Newer toys tend to sell online, certainly on eBay. We saw that a No. 1 in a series, a 1913 replica made in China in 1984, brought \$153, MIB. A grouping of later replicas sold at \$60 for nine. You figure the math.

If bought as an investment, the reader's MIB collection may have to sit for generations until it becomes seriously desirable. Nothing is guaranteed. To sell now, online is the way to go. Be sure to mention that the keys for each bank are intact. It matters.

Q: What is current price on our Napco ceramic angels? - Matthew, Union Grove, Wis.

A: Well, you've read the reply above. Your angels are in pretty much the same boat. Plus, the market in angel figurines just isn't where it was about a decade ago.

On the plus side, your small pair in perfect condition still has original labels. Online, Napco angels bring well under \$25; a September Angel recently sold at \$8.33. Given the public one reaches, online is the place to sell, unless a friend or local contact expresses interest.

Q: Going through my mother's things, I found a silver piece. I wonder if it is sterling, silver plate or what. How do I find out? - Charlene, cybercollector

A: The marks tell it all. 1881 Rogers means the piece was made by Rogers Bros. EPNS means electroplate on nickel silver; 1121 is the model number for the pattern. Rogers Bros. has a long history in American silver plate. 1881 Rogers was a line of flatware (table settings) and hollowware, such as your small bowl. Value depends on variables including condition and pattern.

FYI: "Encyclopedia of American Silver Manufacturers: 5th Ed." by Dorothy T. Rainwater & Martin and Colette Fuller, \$29.95 from Schiffer Publishing, is an outstanding guide to American makers and marks. It is not a pattern identification book.

Q: We have several letters written to a relative by famous people including two presidents and celebrities.

Some were written with ballpoint pen and are fading. How do we save them? - Lynne, Aurora, Colo.

A: Whatever you do, do not photocopy those letters! Light is the enemy of paper.

If you have verified that the signatures are authentic (celebrities had secretaries write for them; presidents used autopens), then conservation is worthwhile. Is there a paper conservation business in your area? If not, The Chicago Conservation Center, www.chicagoconservation.com, is an excellent resource. They were very busy with art and paper conservation after Katrina hit.

FYI: The Chicago Conservation Center is at 730 N. Franklin St. Suite 701, Chicago, IL 60610.

OOPS!

Thanks and profuse apologies to an alert Tucson reader who spotted my insertion of an "n" into Goldscheider, the venerable family of Vienna porcelain makers. Mea culpa.

Danielle Arnet welcomes questions from readers. She cannot respond to each one individually, but will answer those of general interest in her column. Send e-mail to smartcollector@comcast.net or write Danielle Arnet, c/o Tribune Media Services, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60611. Please include an address in your query. Photos cannot be returned. <f