

## **THE BEST AUCTION I NEVER WANTED!**

The basement reeked of cat as my wife and I followed the owner back up the stairs. Going upstairs was no blessing because the aroma of cats was even stronger in the main living area. I remember tapping on Rebecca's shoulder to get her attention and shaking my head as I mouthed the word 'No' to her. I did not want this auction. Everything was dirty, had an odor, and I had not seen much of value that I could sell. Just a lot of hard work! Oh, the owner had mentioned he might have some musical instruments to sell, but I took little note of that. The furniture was dirty and worn and as I gazed around the living room, I saw nothing of any great interest. The old bachelor proved to be one of the nicest men I have ever met; however, it was evident he was not a good housekeeper and the house was a mess. I felt a little sorry for him as it was obvious he wanted me to do an auction and thus far, I had not seen an auction. He had rented an apartment and was planning on moving out of this two bedroom ranch with what used to be a finished basement. He had no idea what to do with everything that was to be left behind. I had a few ideas, none of which had anything to do with an auction!

As I was struggling to find the words to explain we just could not do an auction with what he had, the old man suddenly looked up at me and said; "Could you sell my pontoon boat?" My head jerked up and I said; "A boat? You have a pontoon boat?" "Yes," he replied. "It's down at the lake. It has a twenty foot deck." I swallowed the words that had been ready to come out of my mouth and we talked for a few minutes more when the old man looked at me again and said. "Why, I'll bet you could sell my motorcycle too!" As he continued making eye contact, he said; "How about my tractor? Do you suppose I should sell my Ford garden tractor at the auction?" I was hooked! He had thrown the bait and I had eagerly swallowed. Suddenly I wanted this auction and I had yet to see the boat, the motorcycle or the garden tractor! I quietly handed Rebecca a tablet and she started taking inventory.

We went carefully room by room through the house holding our noses, breathing through our mouths, and stepping gingerly over all the debris and cat feces scattered on the floors. To my surprise the possibility of an auction was beginning to look more promising. Don had been a musician and decided he no longer needed his instruments. We ended up with a clarinet, trombone and three saxophones. We also found an early Lazy Boy recliner, a collection of Franklin Mint cars and some antique furniture which had seen better days. This was in addition to all of the common household. I had yet to discover the half dozen guns he had forgotten about and he wasn't even aware of the jewelry in a dresser drawer that very nearly got tossed in a large trash bag. Don had told Rebecca there was nothing of value in the drawers as he had already given away any good jewelry.

A small white cabin adjacent to the house contained a drop leaf kitchen table, a buffet no one in their right mind would want, an antique oak highboy and some garage tools. Quite a combination. The garage appeared to be a major disaster area with the exception of the 20 year old Ford garden tractor in immaculate condition. It would be a challenge to find anything else of value, but I knew I would be searching. A beautiful 1983 Honda motorcycle that had set in a shed undriven for over ten years looked to be an interesting item and we found the pontoon boat down at the lake sitting across the dock from a small fishing boat. A 4 by 8 ft utility trailer was discovered hiding in the weeds on our walk back from the lake. This was looking like a real

possibility in spite of all of the drawbacks. The auction was booked, with the date set and the contract signed. The only day that would work for Don was the 18th of November. Rebecca had surgery scheduled for the 31st of October and we both knew that she would not be recovered enough to be with me the day of the auction. That would create a void I did not wish to think about. This also just happened to be the same day as the big Michigan-Ohio State football game. Nothing like borrowing trouble! You just do not book an auction on Game Day!

I returned alone a couple of weeks later faced with the daunting task of separating pure trash from pure treasure. I will never forget walking back into the house. I guess I had forgotten the condition of the home and of course, the ever present aroma of the cats! With the auction scheduled for mid November, the uncertainty about the weather and because of my desire to protect the musical instruments as much as possible, I had decided that some of the better items would be sold in the living room and Wendy, my cashier would be comfortably warm, and pleased she could conduct business in the small office just off the living room. As I looked around the house, my heart sank as I wondered how I would ever be able to get this auction ready to meet my standards. So much to do. So little time.

The best way to start and complete an utterly overwhelming task is to mentally divide it up in to many small tasks and focus on the single small task and try not to think about the job in its totality. I decided the first order of business was to get down on my hands and knees and pick up paper clips, rubber bands, loose change, scrap paper and cat feces. I literally spent hours and hours doing this, questioning my sanity the entire time. I also spent about thirty dollars out of pocket on carpet freshener trying to eliminate as much of the odor as I could. As I loaded large trash bags with trash picked up off the floor, they were placed in one of the bedrooms. I picked this room to be the trash room as this was also the room where the cats spent most of their time for most of their activities, which included personal hygiene! I had no desire to clean that particular room. This was a slow, tedious, but necessary part of my auction preparation.

My tact and diplomatic skills came to the forefront the day Don walked in while I was busy spraying the carpet with carpet freshener and I explained I was trying to get rid of the smell. He had lived there so long that he had become accustomed to this and had no idea of what I was talking about. It is a challenge to explain to someone that their house stinks and is offensive and do it in a way you do not anger them or hurt their feelings. I am not sure I was at all successful, but after he had been in his new apartment for awhile and then came back to the house for a visit, his nostrils took over and told the story. The next time I came back to work I noticed he had purchased some plug-in air fresheners in an effort to help freshen the house up. Ever so slowly, I got the house picked up and in a condition where I felt as though I dared to call on my three sister-in-laws to come in and wash dishes and finish what cleaning needed to be done.

The day before Rebecca's surgery date, we made a trip to the auction site so she could look around and see if I had overlooked any treasures. I thought I had done a very thorough job, but when Rebecca went into the 'trash' room, she headed for the bedroom dresser searching for jewelry and whatever else she could find. I had already searched all the drawers and pulled out what I found of value and laid it on top of the dresser, leaving the drawers still nearly full of pure trash. Apparently I had overlooked some more jewelry and a plain gold wedding band with the date December 16, 1899 inscribed on it. I am so happy I let my observant wife dig through the

drawers again as that ring sold for \$95.00 and we sold over a thousand dollars of jewelry that would have been thrown in the trash bag, were it not for Rebecca's meticulous search. She found cheap jewelry in the jewelry boxes, but the really good stuff was lying loose in what appeared to be drawers full of garbage. We then went out to the garage and found vintage Christmas that had been stored in cardboard boxes for forty plus years. Most of it had deteriorated, but what we could salvage proved to be very popular on auction day. Another popular item was a fifty dollar rocket bank I found under a pile of throwaways in the garage. My seller was totally impressed with his 'new in the box' yogurt maker, but where we found the real money was in all the hidden treasures we uncovered, most of which he either thought had no value or did not even know he owned. He told me at one point that based on what he had learned from watching me, he had probably given away or thrown away thousands of dollars in items he thought were worthless.

I had worked weeks on end, sorting, cleaning and organizing. Although there was an abundance of less than desirable items (auctioneers are never allowed to use the word 'junk,' I had found enough items of interest to start feeling good about the auction. We had the pontoon boat, fishing boat, utility trailer, motorcycle and the Ford garden tractor, along with a wagon load of tools and garage items. We also had some turn of the century furniture, although I was not nearly as impressed with that as it had all seen better days and had been years since it had been cleaned or polished. In the living room we had tables holding the musical instruments, the shogun, rifle and vintage revolvers I had found and two display cases filled with jewelry and other small collectibles.

When I booked the auction, I thought perhaps this could be a small three to four thousand dollar auction, but the day before the auction as I stood in the drive and viewed the array of items waiting patiently to be sold, I quietly raised my estimate of gross sales. I remember standing in the driveway and looking south towards the lake. Some tables of small primitives and household stretched in front of me. To my right stood the small cabin. Inside we had two beds filled with linens and fancy work. Looking back down the rows of tables, I could see into the garage where we had lined up the better antique furniture and to the south of the cabin sat the pontoon boat alongside my 16 foot tandem axle trailer filled with tools and other garage items. Stretching beyond that and over a wide area to the right of the garage was a large variety of miscellaneous items, but also a nice Ford garden tractor, utility trailer and the motorcycle. Behind the house I had set up tables filled mostly with good glassware. Under the patio roof we had placed some more furniture, books and records. Entering the living room, the walls were lined with tables filled with musical instruments, guns, Franklin Mint cars and two display cases filled with many small treasures.

I knew by now the weather was going to cooperate and based on emails and phone calls, I realized that in spite of this being the same day as the Michigan/Ohio State football game, I was destined to have a very good day. Yes, there was a lot of miscellaneous and junk, but I had some very good items too. Perhaps I could dream of seven or eight thousand dollars in gross sales on auction day! I climbed on a stepladder at the side of my trailer filled with tools and other guy stuff and started the auction surrounded by eager bidders. My pre-auction nerves had largely disappeared as I saw the buyers come swarming in. It is a good sign when they arrive walking briskly as though they are afraid they might be missing something. We sold for about 45 minutes, and then broke into two rings. My second auctioneer, Cal Short, went in the cabin and

sold soft goods and from there into the garage to sell furniture. I remained outside selling a large variety to the right of the garage. I had just gotten to the motorcycle when auctioneer Gary Schwert arrived, so I turned the selling over to him and he got an excellent price for the motorcycle. I had advertised the pontoon boat would be sold at noon and it was exactly noon when I stepped up to the pontoon boat. All auctioneers love it when they can time things that perfectly and it impresses the heck out of the bidders. Don had asked if I thought I could get \$1,200.00 for the boat. He was absolutely thrilled when I sold it for \$2,150.00! From there we headed for the house.

We had what I thought was a large crowd watching the sale of the boat so I was taken aback when I stepped into the living room and saw the crowd that had been patiently waiting inside. We could barely squeeze our auctioneers into the living room and there was another large crowd standing outside peering through a large wall to wall set of windows. I found myself taking bids from a gentleman who managed to work his way to the window, but was unable to actually get into the house. There must have been at least a hundred people packed tightly together in that room and at least half that many outside peering through the window. You could just feel the electricity in the air as everyone waited for the bidding to start. I don't think anyone other than a handful of serious buyers knew exactly what was about to happen, but everyone had a sense of wonder and anticipation about them. It was evident because of the size of the crowd, the excited look in their eyes and the constant jockeying around for position. At this point the auction had been very good. It was about to transcend into greatness!

I had auctioneer Cal Short sell first. This was because I had a telephone bidder, another member of my staff had a couple of absentee bids, and Gary Schwert, my third auctioneer had told me he planned on bidding on some items in the living room. We would soon learn the bidding would be so aggressive that those bidders never even had a chance to participate. We started with the guns and while the bidding was spirited, the prices were no more than what I had expected. We then sold a piano at what I felt was a very low price and a couple of musical instruments were sold a bit cheaply. I wondered what they had all packed into the house for. Then it changed. Cal asked for a \$50.00 bid on a clarinet and had no trouble getting it. The bidding moved quickly up to \$370.00. He then sold an Alto Sax for the same amount of money. That was a decent price, but I was curious as to how he would do with the Tenor Sax and the Baritone Saxophone. Many in the crowd were surprised when the Tenor Saxophone sold for an even \$1,000.00. They were nearly speechless at an unexpected price of \$2,550.00 for the baritone saxophone! I heard from the buyer a few days later when he emailed me to tell me he was very happy with his purchase. He is a serious collector of musical instruments, but had bought this saxophone to give to his nephew as a gift and I think the nephew probably feels as though he has the greatest uncle in the world!

We decided the items in the display cases would be the last items sold in the house. I thought those items would be more appealing to a smaller group of people and we did lose about half the crowd. The rest went outside to see what was left to be sold, while the remainder crowded eagerly around the display cases. They were having a good time and were not yet ready to call it a day. Many of the smaller pieces, such as jewelry and rings, had been hidden in dresser drawers, just lying in amongst paper clips, rubber bands, scraps of paper and general debris. They could have been easily been dumped in the trash bags. We sold over a thousand dollars worth of jewelry, rings, watches and other small collectibles before heading outside to finish up for the

day. We still had about a dozen tables filled with everything from kitchen primitives to Christmas items to good glassware to sell and most of the crowd stayed with us to the end.

We were blessed with good weather, and a friendly and happy crowd who thoroughly enjoyed the day. The seller was rewarded with good honest buyers and I was rewarded afterward as numerous people came up to thank me for running an auction of that size so smoothly. A few thanked me for getting the job done in time for them to get home and catch the Michigan-Ohio State football game. The two negatives for the day were my wife not being able to make it to such a wonderful auction and also when Michigan lost a hard fought game to OSU by three points. Oh, in case you are wondering, this auction I nearly turned down grossed over \$13,000.00. I mouthed a silent prayer and thanked the Lord for the opportunity to conduct **The Best Auction I Never Wanted!**

**Written by Auctioneer Lyn Liechty, January 1, 2007**

**Photos of selected items from this auction and other LYN LIECHTY AUCTIONS may be viewed on the Auction Highlights Page at [www.lynliechty.com](http://www.lynliechty.com)**