



EVELYN HART

Before You Let It Go

*A room-by-room guide to the treasures
hiding in your home*



FREE SAMPLE

What to look at before you donate, sell or toss anything.



*For everyone who has stood
in a quiet house,
deciding what to keep.*

*And for the people who left us
the stories that go with the things.*

EVELYN

Before You Let It Go

Evelyn Hart's Room-by-Room Guide to the Treasures Hiding in Your Home

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Evelyn Hart is the host of the Evelyn Hart YouTube channel. She is a character, and her background in this book is part of that character; it is not the record of a real person's life. The true stories, prices, dates and facts are real and come from the sources listed at the end of each chapter.

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Before You Let It Go

For forty years I helped families empty houses. I sat at a long table in my family's auction house in Ohio and looked at what people brought in: the china, the paintings, the jewelry box, the shoebox of photographs from under the bed. I learned early that the most valuable thing in a house is rarely the one the family expects. And the thing they expect is rarely worth what they hope.

This book is what I would tell you if I could walk through the house with you. It starts with the first week and the money that hides in paperwork. Then it goes room by room and shows you what to turn over, what to look for, and what real things have really sold for, with the auction house and the date, so you can check me. It ends with the hard part: deciding what to keep, what to sell and what to give away, and doing each one without getting cheated.

Every chapter opens with a true story. A painting behind a bedroom door. A bowl from a yard sale. A box of baseball cards under a dollhouse. They are here because each one teaches something I want you to remember when you are holding an object in your hands and deciding.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

One more thing, and it matters. I am not an appraiser, and this book is not an appraisal. It is the step before. It's the ten minutes that keep a treasure out of the donation bag, and keep you from paying an expert to look at something that doesn't need one.

THREE RULES FOR THIS WHOLE BOOK

- **Don't clean it first.** Polish, soap and a good scrub can take away value that never comes back (page 13).
- **Look up sold prices, not asking prices.** A price tag online is a wish. A sale is a fact.
- **Never take the first offer.** Get it in writing, get a second one, and be careful with anyone who wants an answer today.

Take your time. The house will wait.

Evelyn



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to Use This Book

Every item in this book has the same parts

THE TELL

The one sign that says "look closer," right under the title.

FROM EVELYN'S TABLE

What I'd tell you if we were standing at the table together.

HOW TO CHECK IT

Short steps you can do at home, in order.

WHAT IT CAN BE WORTH

Real results: what sold, for how much, where and when. If only an estimate or appraisal was available, it says so.

USUALLY WORTH LITTLE

So you can let those things go without guilt.

DON'T

The mistakes that cost families money, or cause harm.

WHERE TO SELL IT

The kind of buyer who usually pays fairly for that kind of thing.

IN THE PRACTICAL CHAPTERS

The first week, research, money, the family side and donating use the same boxes with labels that fit the job: **First step, Why it matters, You can skip, Who to call.**

How This Book Is Organized

PART ONE *First Things First.* Before anything leaves the house: the first week, the ten-second checks, how to research, and the money hiding in the paperwork.

PART TWO *Room by Room.* The walls, the papers, the china cabinet, the kitchen, the jewelry box, the toy box, the closets, the garage and everything in between.

PART THREE *Deciding, Selling & Letting Go.* What's usually worth little, the myths, the family side, how to sell, how to donate and dispose safely, and how not to get cheated.

PART FOUR *Reference.* Quick tables of marks and metals, a glossary, a directory of who to call, and an index of everything by room.

FIND THINGS BY ROOM

Standing in the kitchen or the attic? The Room-by-Room Index lists every item in this book by the room where it usually turns up.

ABOUT THE PRICES

A price in this book is a past result, not a promise. Condition, demand and the day of the sale all change what something brings. For anything that may be valuable, get a written appraisal before you sell, insure or donate it.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The First Fifteen Minutes

If you are standing in the house right now

- 1 Don't throw anything away today, and don't let anyone haul things off yet. Give yourself a week before anything leaves.
- 2 Walk through with your phone. Photograph every room, every wall and every open shelf before anything moves.
- 3 Find the papers: the will, deeds, statements, insurance policies, receipts and old appraisals. Put them in one folder.
- 4 Gather the small things into one box that stays with you: jewelry, watches, coins, keys, anything marked gold or silver.
- 5 Don't clean, polish or repair anything. Not a coin, not a bronze, not a painting (page 13).
- 6 If someone offers cash for "the whole house," or knocks to ask about gold, take a card and say you're not ready.
- 7 Then read "The First Week in the House" and start turning things over.

YOUR KIT

A small magnet, a flashlight, a 10x loupe or magnifying glass, a blacklight flashlight, a tape measure, a kitchen scale that reads grams, your phone's camera and a notepad. "Turn It Over" (page 13) shows you what to do with them.

What's Inside

29 chapters, 195 things to check, 60 true stories, and a reference section

CHAPTER	WHAT IT COVERS
1. The First Week in the House	Secure the House and the Small Valuables · Find the Papers That Matter · Photograph Everything Before Anything Moves · The Mail Tells You Where the Money Is · Who Has the Right to Sell or Give Things Away · Don't Let Anyone Haul It Away Yet
2. Turn It Over: The Ten-Second Checks	Read the Bottom First · The Magnet Test · The Blacklight Test · The Loupe · Never Clean It First
3. Research Like a Pro: Finding What It's Really Worth	Name It First: Marks, Labels and the Exact Words · Search by Picture: Google Lens and Reverse Image Search · Auction Archives: LiveAuctioneers, Invaluable and the Big Houses · Price Guides, the Library and What They Can't Tell You · Ask the Specialists: Clubs, Museums and Free Opinion Days · Describe It So an Expert Can Answer
4. Money Hiding in Plain Sight	Unclaimed Property: Money the States Are Holding · Paper Savings Bonds in a Drawer · Old Stock Certificates · Life Insurance, Annuities and Old Policies · Safe Deposit Boxes · Cash, Coins and Gold Hidden in the House
5. The Walls: Paintings & Prints	Painting or Print? · The Back Tells the Story · Reading the Signature · Numbered Prints and Lithographs · American Regional Painters Worth Knowing · Frames Worth More Than the Picture · Posters: Movie, Travel and Concert · Folk Art: Samplers, Silhouettes and Primitive Portraits · Religious Pictures and Prints
6. Photographs, Negatives & Family Papers	Daguerreotypes, Ambrotypes and Tintypes · Old Photos of Famous Faces · Negatives, Slides and Who Owns the Pictures · Letters and Autographs

THE FULL BOOK

CHAPTER	WHAT IT COVERS
7. Stamps, Postcards & Paper Collectibles	The Stamp Album in the Closet · First Day Covers and Postal Souvenirs · Postcards: Real Photo Cards and the Rest · Old Newspapers and Magazines · Trade Cards, Labels, Menus and Paper Ephemera
8. Books, Letters & Documents	Is It a First Edition? · Signed and Inscribed Books · Historic Documents and Facsimiles · Family Bibles, Maps and Old Papers · Children's Books Worth Money · Diaries, Scrapbooks and Autograph Albums
9. The China Cabinet: Porcelain & Pottery	Reading a Backstamp · Chinese Porcelain and the Fakes · American Art Pottery · Figurines: Hummel, Lladró and Royal Doulton · Crystal and Stemware · English and European Porcelain: Meissen, Limoges, Royal Crown Derby · Transferware and Flow Blue · American Dinnerware: Fiesta and Friends
10. Kitchen Glass & Cookware	Pyrex Patterns That Sell · CorningWare and Fire-King · Depression Glass and the Reproductions · Cast Iron: Griswold, Wagner and the Smooth Bottom · Art Glass: Murano, Venini and Signed Glass · Cookie Jars and Kitchen Pottery · Colored Cookware: Le Creuset, Dansk and Enamelware · Kitchen Tins, Bakelite Utensils and Small Tools · Stand Mixers and Small Appliances
11. Silver & Gold	Sterling or Silver Plate? · Flatware and Melt Value · Gold Stamps and Gold-Filled · Scrap Value vs. Antique Value · Silver Tea Sets and Hollowware · Mexican, Scandinavian and Designer Silver · Pewter, Brass, Copper and 'German Silver'
12. The Jewelry Box	Real or Costume? · Signed Costume Jewelry Worth Money · Is That a Diamond? · Watches: Wrist and Pocket · Pearls: Natural, Cultured and Fake · Native American Jewelry and Turquoise · Bakelite and Vintage Plastics · Victorian Jewelry: Cameos, Locketts and Mourning Pieces · Cufflinks, Class Rings and Men's Jewelry

THE FULL BOOK

CHAPTER	WHAT IT COVERS
13. Coins & Paper Money	Key Dates in the Coin Jar · Why You Never Clean a Coin · Gold Coins · Old Paper Money · Silver Coins and Melt Value · Morgan and Peace Silver Dollars · Proof Sets, Mint Sets and Commemoratives · Foreign Coins, Tokens and Medals · Rolls, Folders and Albums: How Collections Usually Look
14. The Toy Box	Comic Books · Baseball and Sports Cards · Video Games · Toys: Tin, Cast Iron, Star Wars and Hot Wheels · Dolls and Barbies · Model Trains: Lionel and American Flyer · Teddy Bears and Steiff · Board Games, Puzzles and Marbles · G.I. Joe, Action Figures and Lunch Boxes
15. The Sports Shelf	Autographed Balls, Bats and Photos · Tickets, Programs and Yearbooks · Pennants, Pins, Bobbleheads and Stadium Giveaways · Golf Clubs, Wooden Rackets and Old Equipment
16. Holidays & Seasonal Decorations	Christmas Ornaments: Shiny Brite, German Glass and Feather Trees · Halloween: Papier-Mache, Paper and Early Costumes · Blow Molds, Ceramic Trees and Light-Up Decorations · Christmas Villages, Keepsake Ornaments and Collector Series · Easter, Valentine's and Fourth of July
17. The Closet & the Record Shelf	Vintage Clothing and Labels · Game-Worn Jerseys and Sports Gear · Records: First Pressings and Acetates · Guitars and Instruments · Designer Handbags and the Fakes · Furs · Scarves, Hats, Shoes and Accessories
18. Pianos, Cameras & Electronics	Pianos and Organs: The Hardest Thing to Give Away · Vintage Stereo and Hi-Fi · Cameras and Lenses · Radios, Phonographs and Early Televisions · Typewriters and Sewing Machines · Old Computers, Phones and Calculators

THE FULL BOOK

CHAPTER	WHAT IT COVERS
19. Military Items & Wartime Keepsakes	Medals and Decorations · Uniforms, Helmets and Insignia · Swords, Bayonets and Knives · War Souvenirs and the Danger of Live Ordnance · Service Records, Letters and Photos · Guns in the House: What to Do First
20. Furniture & Big Things	Is It Really Old? · Labels and Makers · Mid-Century Modern · Bronzes and Sculpture · Rocks from the Sky and Bones in the Ground · Oriental Rugs · Lamps: Tiffany, Handel and the Fakes · Clocks: Mantel, Wall and Grandfather · Mirrors, Stained Glass and Architectural Salvage · Weathervanes, Garden Statuary and Yard Ornaments
21. Asian, Native American & World Art	Jade and Carved Hardstone · Japanese Woodblock Prints · Asian Bronzes, Netsuke and Small Carvings · Native American Pottery, Baskets and Weavings · African, Oceanic and Tourist Art
22. Collectibles & Odds and Ends	Advertising and Coca-Cola · Political Buttons and Campaign Items · Perfume Bottles, Compacts and Vanity Items · Fountain Pens and Desk Items · Pipes, Lighters and Tobacco Tins · Old Bottles, Fruit Jars and Unopened Whiskey
23. The Garage, Basement & Barn	Old Hand Tools · Porcelain Signs, Oil Cans and the Fakes · Barn-Find Cars and Motorcycles · Fishing Tackle, Decoys and Pocket Knives · Gas Station Collectibles and License Plates · Bicycles and Scooters · Farm Antiques and Stoneware Crocks · Slot Machines, Jukeboxes and Arcade Games
24. What's Usually Worth Little	The Kitchen and Dining Room · The Living Room · The Bedroom and Closet · The Attic and Basement · The Garage · Big Brown Furniture and Dining Room Sets · Collections by the Box: Precious Moments, Department 56, Longaberger and Friends · The Sewing and Craft Room

THE FULL BOOK

CHAPTER	WHAT IT COVERS
25. Myths, Viral Prices & Wishful Thinking	'Rare' Pennies and the Viral Coin Lists · Two-Dollar Bills, Bicentennial Quarters and Other Pocket Change · The Black Diamond VHS and Other Tape Myths · How a Listing Becomes a Headline · Old Doesn't Mean Valuable
26. Keep, Give or Sell: The Family Side	Dividing Things Fairly · What to Keep, and How Much · Saving Photos, Slides, Home Movies and Tapes · Write Down the Stories (They Add Value Too) · Downsizing Your Own Home · When Nobody Wants Grandma's China
27. Before You Sell: Never Take the First Offer	Sold Prices, Not Asking Prices · Who to Call: Auction House, Dealer or Appraiser · What It Costs to Sell · Estate Sale Companies: Read the Contract · Selling Online Safely · Run Your Own Yard Sale · Photos and Listings That Sell · Consignment Shops and Pawn Shops · Shipping Fragile and Heavy Things
28. Donate, Recycle & Dispose Safely	Donating Without Regret: What Charities Take · The Tax Deduction: What the IRS Requires · Old Medicines and Household Chemicals · Computers, Phones and Personal Data · Papers: What to Keep and What to Shred · Hazards in Old Houses
29. Scams, Fakes & What You Can't Sell	"We Buy Gold" and the Door Knockers · Reproductions and Their Tells · Forged Signatures and Fake Papers · Things the Law Won't Let You Sell · When It Might Be Stolen · Scams After a Death: Calls, Letters and Identity Theft



CHAPTER TWO

Turn It Over: The Ten-Second Checks



At our family's auction house we had one rule, and I heard it so often it still rings in my head. Turn it over. Before you price it, before you box it, before you decide it is junk, turn it over and look. Most of the time the bottom tells you nothing special. Every so often it tells you everything.

This chapter covers the quick checks I still do on every piece, the ones that take ten seconds and cost almost nothing. You need a strong magnet, a small blacklight, a magnifier called a loupe, and the patience to keep your cleaning rags in the drawer. None of these tools will tell you what something is worth. They tell you when to slow down.

In this chapter: reading marks and labels on the bottom, the magnet test, the blacklight test, using a jeweler's loupe, and why you should never clean anything before an expert sees it.

The Painting Behind the Bedroom Door

Paid \$2,000 for a whole

Valued at about \$100 million

Silver City, New Mexico,

On the day after Thanksgiving in 1985, a man and a woman followed a staff member into the University of Arizona Museum of Art in Tucson as it opened. While the woman talked with a guard, the man went upstairs, cut Willem de Kooning's *Woman-Ochre* out of its frame with a blade and hid it under his clothing. They were gone in about fifteen minutes. The case went cold for 31 years.

In August 2017, three partners from Manzanita Ridge Furniture and Antiques in Silver City, New Mexico, paid \$2,000 for the contents of a house in Cliff, New Mexico. The owners, retired teachers Jerry and Rita Alter, had both died. Behind the master bedroom door hung an abstract painting of a woman. David Van Auker, one of the partners, first took it for a print, and they hung it in the shop.

Then customers started looking closely. One said, 'I think that's a de Kooning.' Others said the same, and one offered \$200,000. Van Auker searched online, found a newspaper story about the theft and called the museum within minutes. Conservators in Tucson later matched a brushstroke on the canvas to the strip of canvas the thief had left behind in the frame.

The painting is now valued at about \$100 million. After a long restoration at the Getty, it went home to Tucson in 2022. Jerry and Rita Alter, both dead by then, were never charged, and the FBI case has never been officially closed.

Here is the part I want you to remember. Buck Burns, another partner, later told a Tucson TV station that it probably would have walked out of the store for 500 or 600 dollars. Luck did not save it. People stopping to look closely did, along with dealers who were willing to check before they sold.

Sources: University of Arizona Museum of Art; KOLD News 13; Getty; Artnet News. More in the chapter's source list.

The Nickel Everyone Called a Fake

Inherited

Sold for \$3,172,500

Heritage Auctions,
Schaumburg, Illinois, April
2013

George O. Walton, a North Carolina coin collector, bought a 1913 Liberty Head nickel in the mid-1940s for a reported \$3,750. Only five genuine ones are known. On March 9, 1962, Walton was killed in a car crash, and the coin was found among hundreds of coins scattered at the scene.

After his death, experts looked at the nickel and declared it a fake. They suspected the date had been altered. The coin went to his sister, Melva Givens, in Salem, Virginia. Her son later said she kept it in a box with family items in a closet, and it stayed there for four decades.

In 2003, a coin company announced a search, with a reward, for the missing fifth nickel. Her children brought theirs to a big coin show in Baltimore, where the other four known 1913 nickels were on display. A team of experts compared it with the others, right down to a small flaw under the date that they shared. The 'fake' was the real thing.

In April 2013, Heritage Auctions sold it at a coin convention in Schaumburg, Illinois, for \$3,172,500. At the family's request, it stayed in the custom holder Walton had used since the 1950s, with a certificate attached.

The lesson for this chapter: a quick verdict, even from an expert, is not the last word. The family kept the coin, and when better eyes finally looked closely at that date, the answer changed by more than three million dollars.

Sources: *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2013; *CoinWeek*, 2013. More in the chapter's source list.

Read the Bottom First

The underside is where makers signed their work.

THE TELL A maker's name, foundry stamp, hallmark or country name on the underside, or an old paper label.



FROM EVELYN'S TABLE

In forty years of estates, I learned to turn everything over before I priced it. The bottom of a vase, the base of a bronze, the back of a silver piece: that is where makers put their names, and where import rules put the country. A mark does not make something valuable, and plenty of fine pieces have none. But a mark gives you a name to look up, and a name is where every honest answer begins.

HOW TO CHECK IT

- 1 Turn the piece over onto a folded towel in good light. Hold a flashlight low to the side so stamped marks cast small shadows.
- 2 Write down every name, number, symbol and paper label exactly as it appears, and photograph it before anyone handles it further.
- 3 Treat country names as clues to age. U.S. law required imported goods to be marked with their country of origin starting in 1891.
- 4 On Japanese porcelain, 'Nippon' usually points to about 1891 to 1921, and 'Japan' came after. 'Occupied Japan' points to 1945 to 1952, though fakes exist.
- 5 On bronzes, look on the base for a foundry name and a cast number, such as the Roman Bronze Works stamp on the Remington bronze below.
- 6 Search the exact wording of the mark in quotation marks, then compare your photo with marks shown on museum and auction house sites.



WHAT IT CAN BE WORTH

- \$ A Frederic Remington bronze, *The Bronco Buster*, signed and stamped by the Roman Bronze Works foundry, sold for \$138,500 at Thomaston Place Auction Galleries in Maine in an August sale reported by *Antique Trader* in December 2014.
- \$ A Gorham silver ice bucket from 1872, marked with Gorham's lion, anchor and letter G and the word STERLING, sold for \$23,750 at Heritage Auctions in May 2021.
- \$ A William Spratling sterling punch bowl from Taxco, marked SPRATLING and MADE IN MEXICO, sold for \$16,250 at the same Heritage sale in May 2021.

USUALLY WORTH LITTLE

- Dinnerware marked with a modern country name plus 'dishwasher safe' or 'microwave safe.'
- Souvenir china and gift-shop figurines with only a paper 'Made in' sticker and no maker's name.
- Light, hollow 'bronze' figures with no foundry mark or cast number. Have one looked at, but expect a decorative copy.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't peel off old paper labels or price tags. They can hold a dealer's name, a date or a collection history.
- ✗ Don't trust a mark by itself. Marks get faked, 'Occupied Japan' among them. The quality of the piece should agree with the mark.
- ✗ Don't stand a heavy piece upside down on a hard counter. Turn it over on a folded towel.

Where to sell it: For marked silver, bronzes and art pottery, a regional auction house with a decorative arts specialist is a good first call. Send clear photos of the marks with your first email.

The Magnet Test

A small magnet can rule things out. It cannot rule them in.

THE TELL Metal that ignores a strong magnet and is stamped Sterling, 925 or with a maker's name.



FROM EVELYN'S TABLE

I keep a strong little magnet in my apron pocket. Gold, silver and platinum do not stick to a magnet. Iron and steel do. So when a 'gold' chain jumps to the magnet, I know what I am holding, whatever color it is. But a magnet that does nothing proves very little, because plenty of cheap metals ignore it too. Use the magnet to say no. Never use it to say yes.

HOW TO CHECK IT

- 1 Use a strong magnet, such as a small neodymium (rare earth) magnet from a hardware store. A weak refrigerator magnet can miss a faint pull.
- 2 Test the main body of the piece, not only the clasp. A steel spring inside a clasp can pull even when the chain is real gold.
- 3 If it sticks firmly, there is iron or steel in it, whatever the surface looks like. Real gold, silver and platinum are not magnetic.
- 4 If nothing happens, look for marks. Under federal guidelines, 'Sterling' means at least 92.5 percent silver (often stamped 925), and 'Coin' at least 90 percent.
- 5 'Gold filled' means a gold layer at least 1/20 of the metal's weight over base metal. 'R.G.P.' and 'G.E.P.' mean thinner gold layers. None is solid gold.
- 6 For 1943 pennies: the ordinary ones are steel and stick. A rare copper-colored one should not stick, but a 1948 penny with a filed-down 8 won't either.

NO. 2 • THE MAGNET TEST

WHAT IT CAN BE WORTH

- \$ Don Lutes Jr. found a 1943 penny in his school cafeteria change in 1947. It was one of the rare bronze strikes from a year of steel cents, and it sold for \$204,000 at Heritage Auctions in January 2019.
- \$ A magnet won't move a silver spoon, and that is where the real work starts. A table spoon made about 1790 by Paul Revere Jr. and marked REVERE sold for \$32,500 at Heritage Auctions in May 2021.

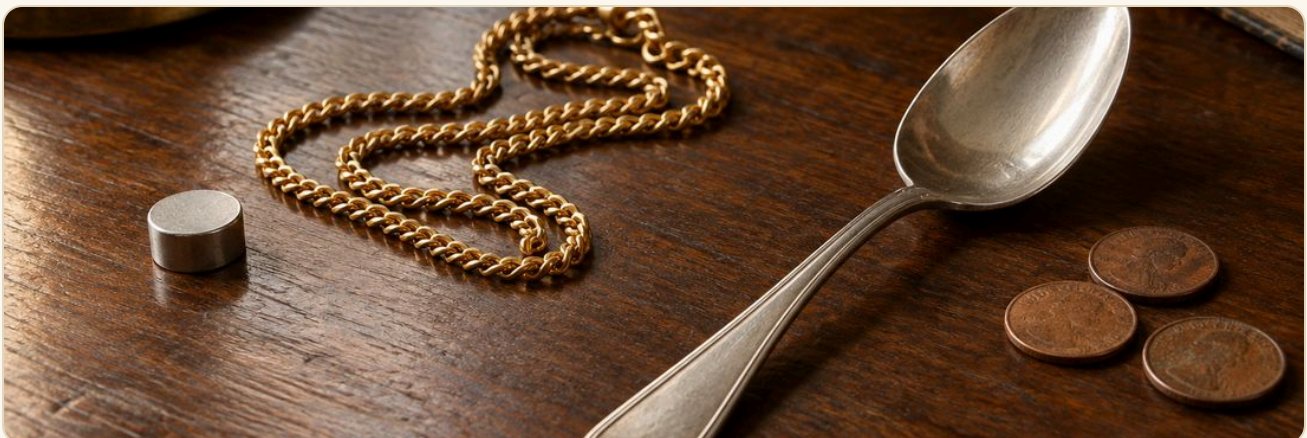
USUALLY WORTH LITTLE

- Jewelry that pulls hard toward the magnet. Under the shine, it is steel or iron.
- Pieces marked 'gold filled' or 'gold plate.' The gold is only a layer over a cheaper metal.
- Flatware with no 'Sterling' or '925' mark. Silver plate is a thin coat of silver over a cheaper metal.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't sell gold or silver by weight before someone checks the marks. A maker's name can be worth far more than the metal.
- ✗ Don't scratch or file a piece to see what is underneath. Leave acid and scratch testing to a jeweler or dealer.
- ✗ Don't treat 'no pull' as proof of gold or silver. Some fakes ignore a magnet too.

Where to sell it: Marked sterling and gold go to an auction house or a specialist dealer before they ever go to a scrap buyer. Rare coins belong with an established coin dealer or a coin auction.



THAT'S THE SAMPLE

The Rest of the Book



You've read two of the 195 things to check. The full guide has 29 chapters: the first week in the house, the money hiding in old paperwork, then room by room through the walls, the china cabinet, the jewelry box, the coin jar, the toy box, the closet, the garage and the barn, with 60 true stories and real sold prices.

It ends with the part most families need most: the myths, the family side, how to sell, how to donate and dispose of things safely, and how to spot the scams. Then quick reference tables, a glossary, a directory and an index of everything by room.

Find it at the link in the description of any Evelyn Hart video.



*"Turn it over
before you let it go."*

EVELYN HART

29 chapters, 195 things to check and 60 true stories. What to look at, what it really sells for, what is usually worth little, and how to sell, give or let go without being cheated.