

YOU CAN'T SPLIT THAT CAR, PAINTING OR PITCHER IN HALF

As some of you are faced with liquidating your parent's estate, several challenges arise and most of them are family. Brothers and sisters, a few distant cousins, an evil nephew and throw in a touch of the dreaded daughter-in-law and... boo! Scared now, aren't you?

One of my favorite auction adages is, "It's easier to split money than it is stuff." I have seen many a family fight over things that would shock and amaze you.

Years ago in Hellertown, Pennsylvania a 47-year-old brother and a 42-year-old sister met with their individual lawyers in their deceased mother's very modest home. Enter me, a green auctioneer and appraiser, asked by the administrator of the will to oversee a fair and equitable split of a few items the siblings disagreed over. It sounded simple. After all, there was not much in the house.

It seemed civil, but odd and then a nerve was touched. I valued a Waterford Crystal pitcher at \$300. The sister thought it was priceless and the brother wanted it. A few choice words came and then a fist that sent sister to the ground like they were four-year olds. I was speechless. The two attorneys were as well. We witnessed a physical assault over a pitcher. I broke up the fight by threatening to smash it. I explained they could each go to Macy's to buy one. This was not a rare family heirloom. It still had the label on it. I couldn't leave fast enough. I thought, "Crazy." I never thought I'd see anything like that again.



Fast forward many years and now I have seen most all of it. Unfortunately, it is something we see often. I remember a few of them by special names, like the “The Fighting Sisters.” They would argue, fight, micromanage and cry every time I was at the house and all over just plain old stuff. Then there were “The Evil Twins” that lived on opposite sides of the country for good reason. These identical twins met at mom’s estate, having not spoken in 10 years and after that process, I bet they won’t speak again. Another is “The Sister-in-Laws Have Claws.” Two peaceful, loving brothers brought their better halves to the property to split and I wanted to split! The boys didn’t care about “the stuff,” but their wives did.