

What happens to your tools after you die?

by Stan Stephens

Recently a club member approached me and suggested I address the topic of what happens to your tools after you die. I'm not sure why (he had reasons) and at the time I considered this a morbid topic and gave it no further thought. Then I read a weekly editorial at Woodworkers Journal Magazine that addressed this topic. It was amazing to see the level of readers interest and responses to the article.

The club receives inquiries almost monthly from family members who have lost a woodworking loved one and need assistance with the disposition of tools. Occasionally this is a club member, but usually it is someone from outside the club. I have learned to be cautious because in many instances the tools are of low value and the club does not want to wind-up storing or trying to sell this stuff.

However, there are occasionally some great opportunities offered to the club. In the last couple of years, we have been fortunate to have received donations by several families of high-quality tools that we have been able to auction off to the benefit of the club and our members.

What happens to your tools after you die?" Again, this seems like a morbid question that is best kicked down the road. However, it would be a lot easier on your family if you gave this topic some thought and took action before it's too late. Without planning your family is left with a bunch of wood working tools with no knowledge of their value or how to properly dispose of them.

Over the years you have spent a lot of money on high-quality tools that you love and truly value and appreciate. Wouldn't it be nice if these tools went to someone that appreciated them as much as you do rather than donated to a thrift store or sold at a yard sale?

In some cases, deciding what happens to your tools after you die is easy because you have a child or close relative that is a woodworker and you can simply pass the tools on to them. If this is not the case, then you need to consider other options. You might want to sit down with your wife, trustee or the executor of your estate and discuss the disposition of your tools after your passing. Having written general or specific direction will be helpful. If you wish to ensure these instructions are followed a codicil that is properly signed and witnessed by two witnesses would be required in California.

Consider disposing of some tools while you are still alive. This could begin as soon as you are sure you will no longer be using them. As we get older, some of our facilities begin to decline. You may not be comfortable using some of your power tools and these could be disposed of under your guidance.

If you decide that selling the tools is the best option, having an approximate value on your tools is helpful for whoever is responsible for your estate. Make a list of at least

the major tools with information including brand, model number, condition, and approximate value. A general rule of thumb for tools in good condition is about half what they cost new. Having a non-woodworking trying to place a value on tools is the most common problem we get contact about.

You could give or sell tools to close woodworking friends. Another option might include donating your tool collection to the local woodworking club. The tools would be sold with the proceeds going to the club (could be a tax deduction for the family) or some or most of the proceeds could be returned to the family. Other options could include donating to a local school, retirement homes that have a woodshop, or the Habitat for Humanity ReStore shop.

I think this can all be summed up by one of the responders to the editorial as follows: "The last thing you want to do for eternity is to be rolling over in your grave, because my prized Lie Nielsen plane was sold for \$10.00, or someone is sharpening my Veritas chisel on the grinder. Remember, life is too short, and you never know when you will be doing the dirt dance." Do your family a favor...give this topic some consideration.