

# Trash or Treasure?

## Dealing with abandoned storage goods.

By SUSAN LAUME  
THE CONNECTION

The adage “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure” has been repeated for centuries. It certainly could be the tagline for a number of popular new online services operating in Virginia and across the country which help self storage companies dispose of abandoned storage unit contents. When people who rent storage units don’t pay their bill, after a state regulated process, the contents of the unit go up for bid.

Online self-storage auctions are becoming increasingly popular. Perhaps it’s the opportunity to acquire merchandise at a bargain, the mystery of unknown contents, the thrill of betting on good fortune, or the prospect of potentially making a profit through resales, driving auction popularity. Auction services, such as CubeSmart, Lockerfox, and Storage Treasures provide regular on-line bidding auctions. Online auction services tout the opportunity “to bid in online storage auctions on a computer or other mobile device without having to step foot at a live auction.” Other moving and storage companies, such as Interstate Moving Relocation Logistics, a long distance moving company which operates a warehouse in Springfield, hold less frequent on-site auction offerings.

If you bid successfully, will you be the new owner of trash or treasure? It seems that’s where the mystery and chance come in. Potential online bidders are provided photos of the unit. The photograph may show some individual items or only jumbled cartons and boxes. Content comments provide only vague descriptions, such as “assorted boxes, furniture, household goods,” along with the storage unit size or weight. Bidding may start at \$10 online. Successful bidders typically pay a ten percent buyer’s fee immediately and have only a limited time to completely clear out and clean the unit. So while online technology provides the ability to participate in auctions in distant locations, bidders are wise to consider the logistics of reaching their bid treasures.

At InterState’s recent on-site auction, their first in recent years,

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DISTRICT COURT DIVISION  
FILE NUMBER: 22 CVD 4523

NICOLE FENLEY,  
Plaintiff

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vs.

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Defendant

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Only on rare occasions will unit contents be obvious treasure, such these abandoned collector's items, final bid \$460.



Abandoned self storage unit content - is it trash or treasure? Final bid \$310.



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Interstate's Kenneth Morrisette Jr conducts auctions as needed in the administrative process of dealing with abandoned goods.

# Trash or Treasure?

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three unit contents were on offer. Bidding started at, for the first, \$47,000 for eight containers weighing 11,420 pounds; for the second, \$9,950 for two containers weighing 3,700 pounds; and for the third, \$2,640 for three containers weighing 2,060 pounds. Do the high dollar values indicate a boom of treasure awaiting the successful bidder? The on-site auction conducted in the company's lobby provided no greater ability to know the contents than a reading of items, including books, clothing, furniture, speakers, garage equipment, ironing board, knick-knacks, bookcases, patio chairs, sectional furniture, etc.

The high dollar amounts associated with the units reflect the amount of unpaid rent, not the value of the contents.

There were no bidders at the InterState auction other than InterState itself. Under Virginia's administrative code processes for warehouse, the company's bid allowed it to claim legal ownership of the abandoned goods and dispose of them. InterState's vice

president, Kenneth Morrisette Jr., described the handling as "a very administrative process." He indicated the disposal is the final step and comes only after speaking with the owners, in some cases for many years, attempting to work with them on delinquent payments, posting a legal notice of intent in the local newspaper, and holding the objects, once regarded as their treasures, at any time in the process. A similar process provides relief for self storage business owners under Virginia Code §55.1-2900.

Self storage unit renters are considered delinquent after 60 days of unpaid rent. The owners lose their treasurers but typically the business writes the past due rental off as a loss rather than pursue a lengthy court process for recovery of lost payments.

What's next for these contents? It seems the treasures, though once coveted, protected and secured in paid rental space for months or years, could find a new place either in bidders' homes or through resale. Often they are destined to be re-designated as trash with a permanent home in the county's landfill.

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The pandemic has been a bear, financially and otherwise. Revenue plummeted at the beginning in 2020. Some beloved advertisers have stayed the course supporting us throughout, and many more have done what they can. In the fall of 2021 we saw the return of some advertising for events and Grand Openings, but now omicron clouds the horizon in so many ways. Revenue still remains short of expenses despite our greatly curtailed costs.

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## Wading Into New Territory



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I have been CT-scanned regularly/quarterly for 14 years. Occasionally, given my relatively "stable" existence, my oncologist has suggested increasing my scan intervals to four or even five months, up from the current three months. We have always resisted, especially Dina (being afraid the delay would allow a tumor to grow unchecked or to even get noticed in the first place). This suggestion by my oncologist was not made lightly. Given how well I've done, diagnosis-to-date, and how slowly the tumors in my lungs are growing, adding a month or two to the interval is not going to appreciatively tip the scales against me, according to my doctor. And lessening the amount of radiation, albeit comparatively low, that I'm/have been exposed to over these many years, is a side benefit, in addition to making my life less cancer centric (fewer appointments in hospitals). This suggestion is consistent with what my oncologist has regularly said over the years: that my quality of life was paramount. This new variable seems to have given us (Team Lourie) additional insight into the overall health risks possibly affecting someone who's been scanned as often as I have. (One of the side effects of exposure to radiation is, you guessed it: cancer. And since I already have enough cancer, Team Lourie, more so Dina, has consented to this change in scan frequency.) And in real time, now actually, I'll be getting my first scan after this new, longer interval.

To say I'm anticipating trouble is a bit of an overstatement. To say I'm worried about the consequences of waiting (scanning) an extra month or two longer than usual/normal, to see what's going on inside my lungs – where my papillary thyroid cancer has set up shop (and it's a big shop, apparently), is more accurate. Though the thinking/strategy for extending the scan interval still seems reasonable, faced now with the reality of it, is leading to some sleepless nights and stressful days. If I had it to decide over, I'd make the same decision. Still, this first go-around is a bit more challenging than I anticipated. It's hardly just another day in paradise, is it (as the Brits so often end their sentences with a question mark)? But as long as I'm still in the game, I'll never complain. And even though I've been scanned upwards of 75 times since my initial diagnosis in Feb. 2009, I don't ever take any results for granted. I take them as they come and try to take them in stride.

Still, after 14 years; introducing a new variable to my equation, this very familiar process seems sort of new again. It's as if I'm being scanned for the first time and trying not to think that my life hangs in the balance. Over time, especially considering the number of years I've been a cancer patient undergoing treatment, you develop a sense of rhythm in your life; you learn to navigate and schedule all the cancer-related activities/requirements/appointments so that it becomes routine. And in this routine, you're able (at least I was) live a relatively normal life where the cancer is not totally in control (of course the cancer is in control, but you're able to manage it, sort of, so your life isn't completely cancer centric). Unfortunately, increasing the interval between scans is not an indication that I'm in remission. Though it is an indication that I'm less terminal (if there's such a characterization), but as far as being out of the woods? I'm nowhere near the woods, let alone be out of them.

Though there's a new interval, the process by which I, as the patient learn about the results of the scan, has not changed. By an automatic 'process' scan results are emailed to me by the radiologist, perhaps even before my oncologist has even had a chance to review and even comment on them. What the patient receives is right out of the radiologist's pen. All medical jargon. After a few years of reading these documents, I know where to look for answers. There are two obvious lay-person-type sections. One is called "Impressions." The other is called "Findings." It is under these two headings where, sprinkled amongst the medical jargon, you'll find most of what passes as familiar English. I read it and re-read it trying desperately to discover its meaning. And though I wouldn't want to bet my life on my interpretation of the report, that's exactly what I'm forced to do, since I receive it before my oncologist, and I have spoken about/discussed the results. Granted, it's not perfect, but the release of this information is almost immediate, sometimes even the same day as the actual scan. So even though I'm now waiting an extra month or two for the regular scan than I have been having for years, I am not waiting any longer than usual to receive the report from the radiologist. Thank God! I've spent more than enough time already waiting for results over these last 14 years.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.