

# Storage stooges pay piper

## Secrets sold for best bid

IT HAPPENED to Paris Hilton — and it could happen to you.

New Yorkers who rent storage space and fall behind on their payments are at risk of having the contents — private diaries, X-rated tapes and all — auctioned off to strangers.

Just last week, a Chelsea storage facility took out a public notice for an auction, including the contents of a room rented by the estate of late dance legend Martha Graham.

The executor apparently made good on the overdue bill soon after, because the company on Friday canceled plans to put Graham's belongings on the auction block.

But at least 50 other people who stashed their extra stuff at Chelsea Mini Storage and Bedrock Mini Storage aren't as lucky.

Because they ignored dunning letters and a legal notice in the newspaper, their belongings will go to the highest bidder on Valentine's Day.

"No one wants to auction," said Josh Goldman, owner of Bargold Storage Systems in Long Island City, Queens.

"Most operators, if you went to them and said, 'I'll give you 50 cents on the dollar for my stuff back,' they would say, 'I'll take it.'"

In Hilton's case, stacks of diaries, tapes and photos went unclaimed and in arrears at a Los Angeles warehouse that eventually put the lot up for auction.

An unnamed person bought it for \$2,775, realized what they had was worth way more, and is now shopping around the hotel heiress' secrets for big bucks.

It's rare for a storage auction to yield such buried treasure.

Gerry Cohen of Storage 1-2-3 in New Hyde Park, L.I., said the most exciting items he's seen are televisions, radios and a washing machine that may or may not have worked.

"What happens is people run up a [storage] bill and then decide the items aren't worth that much," Cohen said.

Typically, buyers — antique dealers, record collectors and the like — are only allowed a quick visual inspection of the contents of a storage room.

BY TRACY CONNOR  
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Based on what they see, they gamble on what it's worth and hope for a bargain. They often end up throwing out a lot of what they buy.

"It's generally garbage," Goldman said.

Not always, though.

A lucky bidder got \$250,000 worth of jazz legend Kid Ory's memorabilia in a 2001 auction, and a Florida buyer ended up with Malcolm X's personal writings in 2002.

Cohen said he has resorted to auctions only twice because he'll do anything with

in reason to reunite a deadbeat with his or her possessions.

"There is no joy in seeing anyone's items — valuable or not valuable — auctioned off," he said.

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Paris Hilton