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You can ask \$5,000 for a Harry Potter first edition, but it might take magic to get it

Q: I have a signed first edition of "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." The inside cover has the following information: "3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2 / 8 9/9 0/0 01 02 / Printed in U.S.A 23 / First American edition, October 1998." J. K. Rowling signed the first page of the book sometime in the late 1990s. Until recently, I had forgotten all about it. Except for a quarter-inch rip in the binding and jacket cover, the rest of the book does not have any torn or bent pages. Is this book of any value? If yes, do I need to take special steps to preserve it? Right now, it just sits on the shelf with my other books. B.A., Freemansburg

A: When people ask me about the value of books I recommend they check abebooks.com and bookfinder.com. Always rank the values from lowest to highest and take the time to make an apple-to-apple comparison in respect to edition and condition.

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Lehigh Valley Local Links

Based upon what I found about the value of a signed copy of "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," any potential buyer would be wise to comparison show. I found copies priced as low as \$316.25 and as high as \$6,889.

One example was an exact match to the numbers and information in the description you provided. The asking price was \$5,000. Shipping was an extra \$5. I would have thought if an individual was paying \$5,000 for something, the seller would absorb the cost of shipping.

As I tell everyone whom I refer to abebooks.com and bookfinder.com that all the books found on these two sites have one thing in common — none of them sold. These are asking prices, not final sale prices.

The wide range of prices indicates that the market for Rowling's signed copies of Harry Potter books is highly speculative. There is nothing to prevent someone

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from acquiring an unsigned first American edition of one of her works and having her sign it. At this point, no one knows and it makes no sense to speculate as to how many signed copies will exist in the long run.

If someone offered several thousand dollars for your copy, I would take the money, kiss the hand that gave it to you, and thank God for delivering such a good buyer. In the meantime, I do recommend that you acquire an acid free "book" box and store the book in it. Keep the storage box in an area where temperature and humidity are constant.

Condition plays a key role in valuing a book. While you cannot do anything about the rip in the binding, you certainly can about the rip in the jacket cover. Buy an unsigned first edition with a "near mint" dust jacket and replace the damaged one on your signed copy.

If the dust jacket did not change in later first edition printings or subsequent editions, you may not have to buy an "early" first edition to make the switch.

Q: I am the owner of a small, beautiful Meissen dinnerware service in the Iris pattern. The rims of the pieces are decorated with a narrow gold border filled with lavender irises. It is marked on the bottom with a central cross with a crown in the top quarter, "R" on the right, and "C" on the left, and "Iris" in the bottom quarter. "Gebrüder Höfchen / Königliche Hoflieferanten / Berlin, Jerusalem Str. 29." is also marked on the bottom of several pieces. The dinnerware service was a wedding gift to my parents. I have enjoyed it for more than 55 years. Neither of my daughters entertains nor cares about porcelain. I am contemplating donating my Meissen dinnerware service to a local museum. Before doing so, I would like to know its value. E.L., Easton

A: Your dinnerware service isn't Meissen, but rather Rosenthal, another major German ceramics manufacturer, made your service.

Robert E. Röntgen's "Marks on German, Bohemian, and Austrian Porcelain 1710 to the Present" (Schiffer Publishing, 1997; 649 pages, \$59.50) identifies the mark, based on the drawing in the letter you sent, as one used by Rosenthal between 1891 and 1907. Similar marks to the one you drew were used into the 1930s.

Philip Rosenthal established the Rosenthal factory in Selb, Bavaria, in 1879. The company flourished, providing figurals and tableware of high-quality workmanship that were simplistic in design. From 1897 to 1936, Rosenthal acquired factories in Kronach, Marktredwitz, Selb, Sophiethal, Wladenburg, and Waldershof.

Following World War II, many of Rosenthal's factories were either lost or outdated. Philip Rosenthal II took control of the company, formed Rosenthal Porcelain AG, and began to rebuild. His goal was to produce moderate-priced dinnerware for the American market. New designers were hired, and under Philip's supervision, Rosenthal again became a success. Today Waterford Wedgwood holds a considerable interest in the company.

Before packing your service and taking it to your local museum, I recommend contacting them to see if they are willing to accept it. Most museums have more dinnerware services than they need. If the museum does accept it, you need to understand that once you sign off ownership to the museum, it is free to do with it what it wishes. This may include selling the service to get the funds to acquire something else they would rather have.

You did not indicate how many pieces your service contained, although you did send me a picture of the covered vegetable and gravy boat. But I am going to assume it is a service for six with some accessory pieces. Given this, your dinnerware service has a secondary market retail value of between \$700 and \$900.

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Q: My friend and I own rescued retired racing greyhounds. We and many greyhound owners collect greyhound-themed items. Recently, we were at a flea market and bought a small cast metal figure about 5 inches long and 3 inches high of a crouching greyhound with its front paws crossed. It is nicely detailed and has a collar with a loop at the front of the neck. At first I thought it came off a lamp base. However, when I turned it over, the bottom was extremely detailed as well. It is marked on the bottom, "3333/J.B." What can you tell me about this? S.F., Bethlehem

A: The major difference between dog and cat collectors is that dog collectors are breed specific and cat collectors will collect anything remotely resembling a cat. Most dog collectors own dogs featuring the same breed of their collectibles.

Although greyhounds appeared in some formal portraiture of the 19th and early 20th century, the breed became a popular fine and decorative art subject from the mid-1910s through the 1930s. The art deco movement stressed angular and symmetrical geometric forms. The greyhound embodied that image.

The "J.B." is the mark of the Jennings Brothers Manufacturing Co. of Bridgeport, Conn. Although known primarily as a clock manufacturer, Jennings Brothers also produced a variety of cast metal items from bookends to jewelry boxes to figurines. The "3333" is a stock number.

You did not mention what you paid for your figurine. As long as it was under \$35, you did fine.

Harry L. Rinker welcomes questions about collectibles from the 20th century. Selected letters will be answered in this column. Rinker cannot provide personal answers. Photos and other material submitted cannot be returned. Send your questions to: Rinker on Collectibles, 5093 Vera Cruz Road, Emmaus, PA 18049. You also can e-mail your questions to harryrinker@aol.com. Only e-mails containing a full name and mailing address will be considered.



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