That title may fit some of you in a lot of aspects of your life. I chose it because it represents a verbal “finger shaking” by me to me. Planning ahead is something many of us intend to do but quickly put aside if it makes us uncomfortable. Estate planning isn’t always an exciting topic, but is certainly one that every adult should consider.

When you are gone, someone has to properly handle your “stuff.” It is one of the facts of life. so you might as well deal with it. If you have a grudge against your executor, you can leave old shoes in the closet and stock your garage with broken tools. On the other hand, if you are expecting someone you actually like to handle your estate, you should want to plan ahead.

The person who must take responsibility for your estate when you are gone is your executor. If this is someone who cares for you, then the already difficult tasks of handling your final plans and expenses, settling your financial obligations, handling legal aspects and missing you are overwhelming. Estate planning is one way you can make that responsibility easier.

I suggest you involve your insurance agent, lawyer and financial advisor or accountant in the process. Each of these professionals can help you with adequate life insurance and a will, which will help in distribution of property and settling financial obligations, including any tax burden you may have. Many times, a professional appraiser should be part of the process. Knowing the value of both real estate and personal property is necessary for accurate planning.

With estate taxes being talked about in the news so much recently, it’s hard to decide how you will be effected. A complete financial plan should leave you with a clear picture of the value of your property. No matter the current political climate, you should be prepared to make adjustments to your plan to provide adequately. Appraisals for Fair Market Value (what the IRS uses to determine tax liability) indicate what your estate would net if sold in a timely manner. I'm sure there are items in your possession which you wish to pass to a family member, friend or organization but they still need to have an assigned value. Some of my clients do not anticipate a tax burden, but simply wish to divide their estate equitably among the heirs. Others must plan for both. I have seen many family treasures sold to cover estate taxes when better planning could have made that unnecessary.

When I was discussing this article with my associate Charles McCracken, he commented that the most satisfying part of doing appraisals for estate planning, in his opinion, is helping people who are in an emotional situation find some peace of mind in having a plan for the possessions their loved one has left behind. He reminded me of a job we had done together for the adult children of an art and antiques collector who had lived in a large, and full, Victorian home. They already had established homes and chose to select items with sentimental meaning, but needed to dispense of many pieces. They felt responsible for being good stewards of their parents' antiques and were comforted by knowing the value of the pieces and having help in finding the best markets for selling items. Some items were chosen to benefit family charities. Even though every piece wasn't to be kept in the family, they were comforted in knowing their parents had some say in where things were going.

I don't often lecture my readers… well, my husband says I do, but I do it out of concern. My wish is that you will all experience the peace of mind that comes from planning ahead for events that cannot be avoided. In the words of Richard C. Cushing: "Always plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark."

Libby Holloway is a Certified Appraiser of antiques and residential contents. She is a member of the International Society of Appraisers where she is currently serving as Secretary of the Board of Directors. She has recently joined the crew at Antiques and Such as a partner. Libby can be contacted at www.LibbyHollowayAppraisals.com

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