

El Paso jeweler Susan Eisen explores inheritance issues

By Ramón Rentería \ El Paso Times

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Susan Eisen wants people to understand she is not abandoning jewelry, just exploring another dimension within her diverse levels of expertise.

Eisen, 59, shares various stories and experiences she has acquired over the years as an inheritance counselor in her recently self-published second book, "The Myth of the Million Dollar Dishrag -- A Powerful and Effective Plan to Avoid a Family Inheritance Battle After You Die." "I'm still a jeweler," she said. "But I'm going to keep finding all kinds of new directions."

Eisen owns Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry and Watches, the retail jewelrystore and design studio that she opened in 1980. Over the years, Eisen has been called to testify as an expert witness in various court cases. She appraises jewelry and fine art and has earned a reputation as a professional jewelry designer, gemologist and goldsmith.

Hearing countless tales of inheritance heartaches and family breakups inspired Eisen to develop an approach to settling family inheritance issues while people are alive.

"The things you inherit are the only things that remind you of the person who dies other than the memories," Eisen said. "Why take a chance of having those things be negative?"

Eisen once talked about many of the issues in the book at an estate planning conference for women at New Mexico State University. She spent more than two years researching and writing the book on inheritance issues that some families face.

Robert Peterson, gift planning director at the NMSU Foundation, heard the speech. He is now reading Eisen's book.

Peterson contends, like Eisen, that too many families often end up squabbling over valuables like jewelry and even something as insignificant as a cookie jar when their loved ones don't do a good job planning for what will become of their belongings after they die.

"It's an entertaining read, the type of book where people can find something that may relate to their family and get them to be proactive in planning their estates and making sure the family comes first," Peterson said.

"This book helps people make wise decisions on how to divide their family heirlooms or their collections or their sentimentals and do it amicably, without fighting over it."

Eisen suggests parents, grandparents and others list all the things that their children might treasure when they're gone.

"That's your million dollar dishrag, an item that's not really worth anything monetarily but becomes this huge fight in families," she said.

Along with the book, Eisen is also marketing a homework guide, a booklet with fill-in-the-blank worksheets to help families list what they have and how to divide family heirlooms.

"Memories are all that we really leave behind and the more positive the better," Eisen said.

"That's kind of my new purpose as a jeweler, whatever I can do to help clients while they're alive so their kids don't fight when they die."

Eisen urges readers to be proactive and take care of things like wills and estate planning while they are still in good health. Some estate lawyers have told her many people do not even prepare basic wills and sometimes do not even know where to find important documents when they need them.

"Have your affairs in order. Don't leave it up to chance," she said. "Make the treasures that you leave that much more positive."

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To buy the book

- Susan Eisen's book, "The Myth of the Million Dollar Dishrag" and a separate homework guide are available at her store at 5857 N. Mesa, No. 19. They're also available at inheritanceexpert.com and amazon.com.
- Eisen also discusses some of the inheritance topics in her book on her weekly radio show at 12:30 p.m. Saturdays on KTSM-AM (690).
- Information: Call 584-0022.