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'Roadshow' looks back at Dean's book

By Tom Dorsey

tdorsey@courier-journal.com

Courier-Journal TV and Radio Critic

How much would you pay for James Dean's signed 1948 yearbook from his high school in Fairmount, Ind.?

Michele Rose of Cincinnati was delighted to get an expert opinion saying it was worth at least \$3,000 to \$3,500 when she appeared on PBS' "Antiques Roadshow" from Louisville in 1999.



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That celebrity-item is just one culled from the program's archives for a "Fame and Fortune" special at 8 tonight on KET2 that caps off the show's 10th season.

The moment came about when Rose heard that the show would be taping in Louisville in 1998 and mentioned it to her uncle, Michael Jacobsen, who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., and is

a collector.

He had bought what was purported to be Dean's high school yearbook but had always wondered what an expert would say. So he shipped it to his niece and dispatched her to Louisville.

"It has some pretty geeky pictures of James Dean wearing glasses when all the pictures you see of him now are pretty cool," Rose recalled recently. One shows Dean in his basketball uniform and another as part of the class play. He signed it with his nickname, Rack, on the back cover.

The yearbook wasn't anything like the slick productions of today.

"The cover was like cardboard and held together with two staples," Rose said. That's part of why Caroline Ashleigh, the expert to whom Rose was assigned on the show, thought it might be authentic, although appraisers have to be careful.



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"We ask a lot of questions ... because this world (of antiques) is fraught with many frauds," Ashleigh said. Rose remembered that before the taping the experts had passed the book around and were convinced it appeared to be the real McCoy.

What "Antiques Roadshow" offers are essentially very educated opinions. If an object goes to an auction house it would be "put under a microscope and researched" to make sure it was authentic," Ashleigh explained. Another of Dean's yearbooks recently sold on eBay for \$5,500. "If it came up for sale in a gallery, it might sell for \$10,000 to \$15,000, Ashleigh said.

Other objects in the show tonight are the Lone Ranger's mask, personal items that belonged to Marilyn Monroe, a photo signed by Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley and a collection of original comic strips by "Peanuts" creator Charles Schulz, which might sell at auction for as much as \$200,000.

The most valuable items Ashleigh ever saw were the ruby slippers Judy Garland wore in "The Wizard of Oz." "They sold for \$660,000," she recalled.

Dean's yearbook is worth so much because he falls into that special class of "people with very short and illustrious careers who died at an early age," Ashleigh said. The Marion, Ind., native was just 24 when he died in a car crash in 1955. There is only so much of his memorabilia around, which jacks up the price.

"The amazing thing is that he only made three films, all within seven years of signing that yearbook," Ashleigh said. Dean had bit roles in four others, but his name wasn't even in the credits.

Dean was "one of the heavy hitters who will always have a following and whose things will always be sought after," Ashleigh said. More than 4 million people joined his fan club within a year of his death, and it's still going strong today.

You have to wait around until after most celebrities die to know what their stuff is worth, although Ashleigh guesses that the Rolling Stones and Paul McCartney will join that Elvis and Dean group.

"They'll still be on the hit parade long after they're gone." She's pretty sure, however, Paris Hilton is worth more alive than dead. "The luster vanishes over time for certain stars."

Rose's uncle still has the yearbook and plans to keep it. "Actually, I get it in his will, so it will be mine someday," she said.

Is she concerned Dean's stardom might dim with time?

"I don't think that will ever happen," she said. "He's already survived more than half a century of celebrities."

By the time she inherits the yearbook, the price may have appreciated a lot. Will she sell?

"I will definitely keep it," she said. "I will not sell it. I have two children, and I'll will it to them."

Reporter Tom Dorsey can be reached at (502) 582-4474.

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