BILL'S HOME TECH

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A Simple Digital Inventory of Your Collection — For Your Family

So your family knows what you have, what it's worth, and what to keep An afternoon's work that spares them years of guessing

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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1 The Whole Idea on One Page

If you have spent years building a collection — coins, stamps, trains, records, dolls, tools, jewelry, anything you've cared about — there is one tech chore worth doing that your family will quietly thank you for: a simple digital inventory. It is nothing more than an organized list, with photos and a few notes, of what you own, roughly what it's worth, and where it is. That's it. No fancy software, no expertise required.

The reason it matters is not really about you; it's about the people who come after you. A collection that is a joy in your hands can become a bewildering box of mystery objects to a spouse or child who doesn't know a rare piece from a common one. Without a list, treasures get sold at a yard sale for a dollar, and keepsakes get thrown out by accident. A good inventory prevents both, and it takes an afternoon or two, not a lifetime.

1. Pick one home for the list — a spreadsheet or a simple app — and use only that one.
2. For each item, capture a photo, a plain name, a rough value, and where it's kept.
3. Add a note of anything a stranger wouldn't know: why it's special, or valuable.
4. Store it in the cloud so it can't burn or flood away with the house.
5. Tell at least one family member it exists and how to open it.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> You do not have to finish it all at once, and you do not have to do it perfectly. A rough list of your most valuable or most meaningful pieces is worth enormously more than the perfect list you never start.

2 Why a List Beats a Memory

Everything about your collection lives in your head right now — which piece is rare, which was your father's, which one a dealer once offered real money for. That knowledge is the most valuable part of the collection, and it is also the part most easily lost. The moment it's only in your memory, it is one bad day away from being gone for good.

A written, photographed inventory moves that knowledge out of your head and into a form your family can actually use. It turns 'a drawer full of old coins' into 'the 1909-S penny in sleeve 14, worth several hundred dollars, do not spend.' The difference between those two sentences can be thousands of dollars and a great deal of heartache.

- It tells your family what's valuable, so nothing is sold cheap or thrown out.
- It records what you paid and what things are worth, for insurance and for fairness among heirs.
- It captures the stories — provenance — that give pieces meaning and value.
- It gives an executor or spouse a real document to work from instead of guesswork.

> *The most valuable thing in most collections isn't a single rare piece — it's the knowledge of which piece is the rare one. Write that down, and you've preserved the collection twice.*

3 Spreadsheet or App — Which Is Right for You

There are two sensible ways to keep an inventory, and the better one is simply the one you'll actually keep up. A plain spreadsheet is free, flexible, and will still open in fifty years. A dedicated inventory app is friendlier on a phone and makes photographing items quick. Neither is wrong; they suit different temperaments.

If you are comfortable with a computer and like control, a spreadsheet is hard to beat. If you'd rather tap through a phone and let an app do the organizing, a purpose-built app will feel easier. You can even start in an app and export to a spreadsheet later, so you're never truly locked in.

Approach	Strengths	Watch for

Spreadsheet (Google Sheets, Excel)	Free, flexible, opens anywhere, lasts forever	You arrange photos and columns yourself
Inventory app (e.g. Sortly, NAIC app)	Easy phone photos, value totals, sharing	Free tiers have limits; verify before relying
Photos + notes (Google Photos)	Simplest of all; fast to capture	Less organized; harder to search by value

GOOD TO KNOW

Free inventory apps exist, but their free tiers often cap how many items or photos you can add. Check the current limits before you commit a big collection to one, so you aren't surprised partway through.

4 What to Record for Each Item

You do not need a museum curator's detail. A handful of fields, filled in plainly, does the whole job. The goal is that a stranger — your insurer, your executor, a grandchild — could pick up your list and understand what each thing is and what to do with it.

Keep the fields simple and consistent, and resist the urge to make it elaborate. A short, finished entry beats a long, half-done one every time. Here is the sensible set of columns or fields to use for each piece.

- A photo — the single most useful field; one clear picture says more than a paragraph.
- A plain name or description anyone would understand.
- A rough value, with the date you estimated it (values change).
- Where it is kept — the room, cabinet, box, or sleeve.
- A note of anything special: provenance, condition, who it came from, why it matters.

WATCH OUT

Add a 'do not sell / keep in family' flag for the pieces that matter for sentimental rather than monetary reasons. It tells your family which items are about love, not money — a distinction no price guide can make for them.

5 Taking Good Photos Without a Studio

The photo is the heart of the entry, and you already own everything you need to take a good one: the phone in your pocket. You are not shooting for a magazine; you are shooting so a piece is clearly identifiable. A few simple habits make the difference between a useful photo and a blurry one.

Good light and a plain background do ninety percent of the work. Natural daylight near a window, with the item on a plain towel or sheet of paper, will look far better than a dim overhead bulb. Steady hands and a moment's patience do the rest.

1. Lay the item on a plain, contrasting background — a towel or sheet of paper.
2. Use daylight near a window rather than a dim overhead light.
3. Fill the frame with the item, and take one straight-on shot plus any detail that matters.
4. For coins, stamps, or marks, get in close enough to read dates and signatures.
5. Photograph any maker's mark, serial number, or signature — those drive value.

GOOD TO KNOW

For items where small details decide the value — a mint mark on a coin, a signature on a painting — one sharp close-up of that detail is worth more than ten pretty pictures of the whole piece.

6 Estimating Value Honestly

You are not trying to produce a courtroom appraisal; you are trying to give your family a realistic ballpark so nothing valuable is mistaken for junk. For most collections, a sensible estimate per item is plenty, with a note to get a true appraisal on the few pieces that truly warrant one.

Be honest with yourself in both directions. It's tempting to overvalue sentimental pieces and to undervalue things you've had so long you forget they're worth anything. A rough, honest number, dated, is the goal — not perfection.

- For common items, look up recent sold prices online to anchor a realistic figure.
- Record the date of your estimate; collectible values drift over the years.
- Flag the few genuinely valuable pieces for a professional appraisal.
- Keep any receipts, certificates, or past appraisals with the inventory.

WATCH OUT

Be wary of 'what I paid' as a value — some things are worth far more now, and others far less. And be cautious of online 'instant appraisal' offers that are really just someone fishing to buy your pieces cheap. A number for your own records is different from an offer to sell.

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7 Where to Keep It So It Survives

An inventory that burns up in the same house fire as the collection has done nobody any good. The whole point is that the list outlives the house, so it must live somewhere other than a single piece of paper in a drawer or a file on one computer that could die.

The simplest durable home is the cloud — a free account with a major service — because it copies itself to their servers automatically and can be opened from any device, anywhere, by anyone you've given access. A printed copy in a second location is a fine belt-and-suspenders backup.

- Store the master list in a cloud account (such as Google Drive or iCloud), not only on one computer.
- Keep a printed copy somewhere separate — a relative's house or a safe deposit box.
- If you use an app, make sure it backs up to the cloud, not just to the phone.
- Avoid keeping the only copy on a USB stick or a single hard drive that can fail.

> **TIP**
> Follow the simple rule for anything irreplaceable: more than one copy, in more than one place, and at least one of them not in your house. A list of your treasures deserves the same care as the treasures themselves.

8 Making Sure Your Family Can Actually Open It

Here is the mistake that undoes even a beautiful inventory: the family knows it exists but cannot get into it after you're gone, because it's locked behind a password nobody else has. An inventory your heirs can't open is just a locked box with a nicer label.

The fix is to think ahead about access, gently and now, while it's easy. You don't have to hand out your passwords today, but you do need a plan so the right person can get in when the time comes.

1. Tell at least one trusted family member that the inventory exists and where it lives.
2. Make sure they can access the account — through a shared login, a password manager, or your estate documents.
3. Consider sharing the file directly with them now, view-only, so they already have a copy.
4. Note the inventory's location in your will or with your important papers.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> A list nobody can open is the same as no list at all. Spend five minutes making sure the right person can actually reach it — that single step is what turns your work into something your family can use.

9 Organizing a Big Collection into Bites

If your collection is large, the whole project can feel so daunting that you never begin. The trick is to refuse to look at it as one enormous task and instead chop it into small, finishable sessions. Done is better than perfect, and a little at a time adds up faster than you'd think.

Start where the value and the risk are highest, not where the shelf happens to begin. The pieces that would be most costly to lose or most likely to be misunderstood deserve your first hour.

- Do the most valuable and most meaningful pieces first.
- Work one drawer, shelf, or album per sitting, then stop.
- Use consistent categories so the list stays searchable.
- Let a family member help — it's a lovely way to pass along the stories, too.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Cataloging the collection alongside a child or grandchild does double duty: the list gets built, and the stories behind the pieces get handed down to someone who'll remember them. That afternoon together may outlast the collection itself.

10 Keeping It Current

An inventory is not a one-time chore so much as a living document that needs an occasional, light touch. Collections grow, pieces are sold or given away, and values shift. A list that's wildly out of date can mislead almost as much as no list at all, so a simple habit keeps it honest.

The good news is that upkeep is tiny compared with the first build. Once the backbone exists, adding a new piece takes a minute, and a yearly review takes an afternoon at most.

- Add new acquisitions when you get them, while the details are fresh.
- Mark items you sell or give away, rather than deleting their history.
- Review values once a year or so, and update the estimate dates.
- Re-check that your cloud copy and your family's access still work.

> **TIP**
> Tie the yearly review to a date you'll remember — a birthday, a holiday, the start of the new year — so it becomes a small ritual rather than a chore you forget until it's badly out of date.

11 A Word on Insurance

Beyond helping your family, a good inventory is exactly what an insurer wants to see if a collection is ever damaged, lost, or stolen. Many valuable collections aren't fully covered by an ordinary homeowner's policy, and a documented inventory is the foundation for getting the right coverage and for proving a claim.

You don't have to become an insurance expert; you just have to ask your agent the right question and have your documentation ready. The inventory you've built does most of the heavy lifting.

- Ask your insurance agent whether your collection needs a special rider or separate policy.
- Keep your inventory, photos, and any appraisals where you could reach them after a disaster.
- A copy stored outside the home is what lets you prove a claim if the house is gone.
- Update coverage when the collection's value grows meaningfully.

WATCH OUT

Many standard home policies cap payouts on collectibles at a surprisingly low figure. Don't assume a valuable collection is fully covered — ask your agent plainly, with your inventory in hand, before you ever need to find out the hard way.

12 Common Mistakes to Avoid

A few predictable missteps trip people up, and all of them are easy to sidestep once you know they're coming. None of these are catastrophes, but avoiding them saves rework and makes the inventory far more useful.

- Keeping the only copy on one device that could fail or be lost.
- Making the system so elaborate you give up before finishing.
- Forgetting to record where each item is physically kept.
- Never telling anyone the list exists, or how to open it.
- Letting it go years without an update until it's misleading.

GOOD TO KNOW

Almost every one of these mistakes comes from either over-complicating the system or under-communicating about it. Keep the list simple, keep a spare copy, and make sure one trusted person knows how to find it — and you've avoided the big ones.

13 Different Collections, Different Details

The handful of fields in this guide works for anything, but each kind of collection has one or two details that matter more than the rest — the things a specialist looks at first and a beginner overlooks. Capturing those is what turns a generic list into a genuinely useful one for your particular treasures.

You don't need to become an expert in every category; you just need to know which detail drives value in yours and make sure your photos and notes capture it clearly. Here are the usual make-or-break details by type.

- Coins: the date, mint mark, and condition (grade) — a close-up of each.
- Stamps: condition, whether it's used or mint, centering, and the catalog number.
- Records and books: the pressing or edition, and condition of both item and sleeve or jacket.
- Furniture, art, and jewelry: maker's marks, signatures, hallmarks, and any papers.

GOOD TO KNOW

When in doubt about your category, a short search for 'what determines the value of [your collectible]' will tell you which one or two details to photograph up close. Capture those, and even a stranger can tell your rare piece from a common one.

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14 Scanning Flat Items

For flat things — stamps, documents, trading cards, photographs, certificates — a scanner often beats a camera, because it lays the item perfectly flat and lights it evenly. You don't need a fancy machine; the scanner built into many home printers, or even a phone scanning app, does a fine job.

Scanning is especially worth it for the paperwork that proves value: certificates of authenticity, old appraisals, receipts, and provenance letters. A crisp scan of those documents, stored alongside the item's photo, is exactly what an appraiser or insurer will want to see.

1. Place the item squarely on the scanner glass, or flat under good light for a phone scan.
2. Scan at a reasonably high quality so small print and detail stay readable.
3. Save the scan with the same name as the item's inventory entry, so they stay linked.
4. Keep scans of certificates and receipts in the same cloud folder as the photos.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> A free scanning app on your phone will straighten and sharpen a document photo automatically, which is perfect for certificates and letters when you don't have a flatbed scanner handy.

15 Labeling Boxes and Shelves

A digital list tells your family what you own; a bit of physical labeling tells them where to find it and matches each real object to its entry. The two together mean nobody has to open thirty identical boxes to find the one that matters.

You can keep this as simple as a number written on each box that matches a column in your list. If you enjoy a little technology, a printed QR label on each box can link straight to that box's entry — but plain numbers work perfectly well and never stop

working.

- Give each box or shelf a simple number or letter, and record it in your 'location' field.
- Keep like items together so the list's categories match the physical layout.
- A printed label on the outside saves your family from opening everything.
- Avoid labels that advertise value to a casual visitor — keep the detail in the list, not on the box.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Don't write 'VALUABLE COINS' on the outside of a box in the garage. The label should help your family find things, not tell a burglar or a careless helper exactly which box to grab.

16 Keeping It Private and Safe

An inventory is a map of your valuables, so it deserves a little discretion. This isn't about paranoia; it's about not handing a detailed list of your treasures and their locations to the wrong person. A few sensible habits keep the inventory a tool for your family rather than a gift to a thief.

Most of this is common sense once you think of the list as what it is — a catalog of valuable things and where they live. Treat it with the same quiet care you'd give a spare house key.

- Don't post photos of valuable pieces publicly with details about where you live.
- Share the full inventory only with the family or advisors who truly need it.
- If you use a shared cloud folder, use view-only links rather than wide-open ones.
- Keep any printed copy somewhere secure, not on the kitchen counter.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> The same cloud sharing that lets your trusted family open the list can be set to 'view only' and limited to specific people. You control exactly who sees it — use that control rather than emailing the whole file around.

17 Recording Your Wishes

Beyond what each piece is and what it's worth, the kindest thing you can add is what you'd like to happen to it. A collection often means different things to different family members, and a few words from you can prevent both squabbles and regrets long after you can weigh in.

This doesn't replace a proper will — for anything of real value, your wishes belong in your estate documents too — but a plain note in the inventory gives helpful guidance and a sense of your intentions that a legal document rarely captures.

- Note which pieces you'd like kept in the family versus sold or donated.
- Record if a particular item is promised to a specific person.
- Suggest a reputable dealer or auction house for pieces meant to be sold.
- For anything genuinely valuable, make sure your will reflects these wishes too.

WATCH OUT

A note of your wishes in the inventory is a kindness, but it is not a legal document. For valuable pieces, put the same intentions in your will so there's no confusion or dispute later.

18 Backing Up the Photos Themselves

Your inventory is really two things: the list, and the photos the list points to. It's easy to back up the spreadsheet and forget that the pictures live somewhere separate — and a list of photo filenames is no use if the photos are gone. Treat the images as part of the record, not an afterthought.

The simplest approach is to keep the photos in the same cloud folder as the list, so they travel together and get backed up together. If your photos live in a phone's photo library, make sure that library is set to back up to the cloud automatically.

- Store the photos in the same cloud folder or account as the inventory list.
- If photos live in your phone's gallery, confirm it's backing up to the cloud.
- Name photos to match their inventory entries so nothing gets orphaned.
- Check once a year that the photos still open, not just the list.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> When you share the inventory with family, make sure they get the photos too, not just the spreadsheet. A value next to a filename means nothing if the picture it refers to isn't included.

19 A Simple Starting Plan

If you're ready to begin, here is a plan that gets you a genuinely useful inventory in a couple of unhurried sittings. You can refine it forever, but this gets the valuable work done fast.

1. Open a new spreadsheet or install one inventory app — just one.
2. Set up your columns: photo, name, value, date of value, location, notes.
3. Spend the first session on your ten most valuable or meaningful pieces.
4. Save it to the cloud and share a view-only copy with one family member.
5. Over a few more sessions, work through the rest a shelf at a time.

> *You don't need the perfect system. You need a list that exists, lives in more than one place, and can be opened by the people you love. Everything else is polish.*

20 Recap

A digital inventory is one of the kindest, most practical things a collector can do, and it's well within reach of anyone willing to spend an afternoon or two on it. It protects the collection's value, preserves its stories, and spares your family a great deal of confusion at a hard time.

- Keep it simple: photo, name, value, location, and a note, per item.
- Use one home for the list — a spreadsheet or a single app.
- Store it in the cloud, with a copy outside the house.
- Make sure a trusted family member knows it exists and can open it.
- Do the valuable pieces first; a rough list beats a perfect one you never start.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The hardest part is beginning. Pick your ten most important pieces, photograph them this week, and you'll already have done the part that matters most — the rest is just filling in around it at your own pace.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
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GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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