



Popular Recognition Can Be a Checkered Experience

By Mark Wright

May is finally here. After a long, tough winter, we can celebrate the start of pool season, Memorial Day and—most importantly for some of us—the Indianapolis 500.

What does the Indy 500 have to do with self storage? Well, that's the problem: absolutely nothing.

Wouldn't it be great if the winning driver jumped out of his or her car and yelled, "Who wants to visit my climate controlled self storage facility and take a spin on the new Suzuki ATV I've been hiding there?"

It never happens. In fact, self storage doesn't much get its due anywhere in popular culture. It's not flashy. It's not sexy. You don't see a reality series called "Flip this Storage Unit" or an Academy Award for "Best use of a Self Storage Facility in a film adaptation."

The music biz treats the industry no better. How come we never hear an anthem, rollicking rock song or cute country ditty devoted to the men and women of self storage?

There is actually one little pocket of pop culture spotlighting the storage world. A couple of years ago, author Gayle Brandeis released *Self Storage: A Novel*. It's about a woman who resells items she buys at lien auctions.

Pretty cool, right? Self storage is not only featured in an actual work of fiction—it's front and center. I don't think I've ever seen the auction process articulated so poetically:

"Early in my auction career, I waved both arms to bid. Soon I shifted to one flailing arm. Then one calm arm. Then a single hand. Then a finger. Then the chin. I thought maybe I would get to the point where the auctioneer would notice my pupils dilating, and that would be that."

A few words later, though, I get worried. I'm like an Indy driver feeling my car begin to slide.

"It was an older self-storage complex, and the owners hadn't done much to spruce it up over the years. Like most self-storage establishments, it consisted of row upon row of low, rectangular buildings fronted with a series of garage doors."

"The walls were unpainted cinder block, gray and crumbly-looking; the roll-up doors had probably been bright yellow at some point, but now were dinged and hammered into a dull, bruised shade. The asphalt on the ground was dull and pitted, shot through with weeds. I wondered who would want to store their stuff in such a decrepit place."

Ouch...I'm...skidding...into...the...wall!

Maybe attracting the attention of popular culture isn't all it's cracked up to be, or perhaps it's a bigger issue of folks' perceptions of our industry. It's another reminder that self storage professionals must constantly work to project a positive image to average Americans—and apparently novelists. ❖