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Defending Heavenly Clients Protecting the rights of deceased celebs

by **Connie Collins**
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"CMG can track down T-shirts in Australia, tea cups in Japan — any item with my mother's picture, they somehow find," says Pia Lindstrom, daughter of screen legend Ingrid Bergman. "They're amazing."

Lindstrom is talking about CMG Worldwide, an Indianapolis based firm that protects the rights of deceased celebrities. Among the "heavenly" client rooster are some of the greatest icons in American history — Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Babe Ruth, Malcolm X, Pete Rose and Rock Hudson, to name a few. Elvis Presley's estate was among the 19-year-old company's first assignments, according to Mark Roesler, CMG's founder and owner.

"At the time, there were few laws protecting images of the deceased," says Roesler, an Indiana University Law School graduate. "We worked with state legislatures to pass laws, and were involved in a number of lawsuits to help establish these rights." For families of the late-greats, such protection has meant a voice in what outsiders can and can't do with a loved one's image.



"They find these things and then the family gets to decide if we want our mother to participate," Lindstrom notes. "If it's an umbrella with a scene from "Casablanca," that's one thing; if it's a thong bikini, that's another. If the use meets our approval, CMG collects a fee which is divided between the company and my brother and sisters."

Fees can range from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands of dollars depending on use, length of use and in the case of product endorsements, the advertiser's budget.

"It's amazing some of the things manufacturers come up with," notes Roesler, citing Marilyn Monroe and James Dean condoms as examples.

"When I started this business, I just didn't think it was right that famous people, when they died, couldn't protect their name and likeness. I talked to family members, they felt the same, so we set out to change that," the 44-year-old attorney says.



According to Roesler, a person's name and likeness is an intellectual property right. "It's what's called the right of publicity, and is an intangible property right that can't be passed on to other people, unless contractually stipulated before that person dies."

The company also has offices in Hollywood and Rio De Janeiro and represents living clients as well — Garfield the Cat, for example. "Garfield is a very important client of ours," Roesler says seriously.

CMG Worldwide's Internet site, (www.cmgww.com) helps selectively market and protect clients, and allows the company to further extend the fame of celebrities it represents.



Roesler also has worked with government agencies. "When the U.S. Postal Service recently did a series of baseball legends, 18 of the 20 personalities were our clients."

For worthy causes, families can waive fees. Unless otherwise stipulated, it's ultimately the family's decision how an image is portrayed.

"It's wonderful to know we have that ability," says Lindstrom, the eldest of Bergman's four children. "Protecting our mother's image is very important to us."