

Ask Jo: Those Thrift Stores

I recently got an email from a blog reader, Nita, that read, *"...I've enjoyed reading your blogs, which my neighbor in Florida shared with me several months ago when you talked about going to La Crosse. We summer in Holmen. If it isn't asking for family secrets, I'd love to know the thrift stores you go to. You come home with such interesting finds. And, no, you don't have to worry that I'll snatch some of those nifty furniture bargains you find. Fabrics?.....Well, maybe. We are definitely planning on going to Decorah to visit the quilt shop down there.*

I'm absolutely amazed at all the things you do, sew, quilt, child care, long arm, read, raise African Violets (which I LOVE), and on and on it goes. You expend more energy in one day than I do in a week. Thanks for writing about all the interesting things you and your family do."

I have been asked this question so many times... WHERE ARE YOUR THRIFT STORES???

My thrift stores are not a "family secret". We have great thrift stores all over NE Iowa. You need to know...I am a true thrifter at heart. EVERY SINGLE TIME I go to town, I stop at a thrift store. I plan my trips according to the thrift stores I want to hit up. Certain thrift stores are better for different items. One has bag sales that are anywhere from \$1 for a bag to \$5 for a bag of clothing. When I go there, I get 100% cotton shirts. Others are better for fabric...others for furniture.

I am truly blessed with the shops in our area. Many are run by groups that find work for persons with disabilities. The workers are good at jobs like sorting clothes, carrying donated items in and getting items placed on the shelves. I love my good deals but also love that they provide jobs for

people with disabilities too. Others are run by church charities...others by families that give back to proceeds to the community.

Hubby and I have lived in this general area for the last 26 years. We've scoped out many shops. There are places we stop in so many of the area towns. Some of our favorites are in Charles City, Mason City, Clear Lake, New Hampton, Cresco, Calmar, Decorah, Oelwein, Manchester, Hopkinton and recently we found one in New Albin. If we are in the car, there is a thrift store in most every direction we go and I stop EVERY TIME.

There are lots of times I go and I don't find anything. There are times I go and I spent \$50 at a store where most things cost 50 cents to \$1 each. It's VERY hit and miss. For example- Our daughter Kayla collects Pyrex. I am always on the lookout for Pyrex. I look all the time at garage sales and at thrift stores. About four times a year I find a piece...of those four, one time I'll find five pieces in one swoop. One time I'll find two and other I'll find one. BUT I likely go to a thrift store, 50 times in a year...to find it only Pyrex four times, that's not very good odds.

I'm lucky we have a big family so there are lots of wants I am trying to fill when I look and luckily none of us mind thrifted things. Nowadays I look for clothes for Carver...100% cotton sheets...children's book...100% cotton shirts...things for us to resell that are antique-ish...fabric and crafty things.. redo-able furniture...picture frames...childcare toys...to name a few. Each time I go, I'm looking for all these different things. It makes shopping take longer but it increases the odds that I might find something interesting to me. I always tell you about the crafty things or fabric things that I find. BUT there are LOTS of time I go and don't see a thing...not a single thing.

The key to thrifting is going. AND it's going often. So

often people tell me that they went and didn't find anything. They think it's a waste of time and aren't going anymore. They had a "bad" day...I have them too. I just don't tell you about those.

Something else you need to know is that these shops aren't like Goodwill in the large towns. There is ONE rack with men's shirts on it. There are likely only 10-15 men's cotton shirts in the entire store. I don't go through and pick the red ones only...I might not find a red one for WEEKS ON END. Then one day I'll walk in and 4 of the 10 shirts that in the store are red and I buy them all. Thrifting is VERY hit and miss...THAT IS WHAT MAKES IT FUN!!!

I hate going into a WalMart there is very little different from chain store to chain store. There is something different in the thrift stores each time. There is always something different to see. One day we went and Kayla saw that someone must have gotten rid of a state plate collection. They were selling the plates for 50 cents each. Kayla decided to buy ones from the states she's been to and start a plate collection. That day there were stacks of plates. Since then I see one here or there but they aren't as easy to find as we thought they might be...but we love the hunt.

Not to long ago I went and I got LOTS of things for the childcare kids. There was a Lego cupcake set that the kids have been playing with...



These goofy building toys that I want to get more of because the kids liked them lots. Have you seen these before? They have suction cups on them and stick to the window. Kids can build 3-D and it will stick to the window all at the same time...FUN.



and another one of these Woodkin dolls along with a Cinderella

magnet “paper doll”.



It was a good day for toys. The next time I hit the toy jackpot at the thrift store will likely be in about six months. That's the nature of thrifting.

I do have one word of advice. I have the best luck at places that are not Goodwill or Salvation Army. The best ones, from my experience, are the ones that are run by church groups or charitable organizations...their prices can't be beat. So when I tell you about fabric for 50 cent per piece...it came from a store like that.

If you're a want to be thrifter...my best advice, stop often. Look with an open mind and most of all remember there are good and bad days for every thrifter.