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## ARE YOU A GARAGE-SALE JUNKIE?

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MY WORD

What's behind the obsession with garage sales? Is it a perverse sort of voyeurism? Do people who frequent these sales really want to get a peek at John Doe's bathroom but figure that the garage is better than nothing? Are garage sales an extension of our capitalistic, materialistic upbringing, preventing many of us from throwing out our junk, when there's the slightest possibility that someone else may buy it?

I'm not sure. But, every weekend, they come in droves - in big cars, small cars, trucks, vans and some even riding bicycles. These bands of gypsy-like shoppers descend on once-peaceful neighborhoods early Saturday, and they don't leave until late.

I've named them garage-sale "junkies" - these caravans of bargain-hunting Bohemians who are as serious about buying junk as the sellers - junkers - are about getting rid of it.

But, whether you're buying or selling, there's a certain code of ethics for garage sales. Follow these rules, and you'll get the most out of this weekend ritual.

First, make sure the stuff you're selling has absolutely no value at all. For example, sell only one candlestick from a set of two. Or one ski.

Refuse to budge on your selling price. If you've tagged the candlestick at a price of 50 cents, under no circumstances should you accept 45 cents.

Sit in a lawn chair right smack in the middle of your driveway. Don't appear interested when prospective buyers approach. Just sit there and smile.

Junkies also should heed garage-sale etiquette. Always, I repeat always, drive by the garage sale first and act disinterested. Then, turn around in the driveway of a neighbor who isn't having a garage sale. Do this as slowly as possible to ensure that you disturb the neighbor and his dog, who will bark, believing that someone has come to visit.

When you approach the sale, don't be tempted by all of the potential: the toaster that toasts only one side of the bread but which, with a little work, will be as good as new; the baby stroller that's just perfect, except for the vomit stain on the seat; the chair with three legs. I know it's hard, but, remember, you still have hundreds of other garage sales to go to this weekend, and you might find something even worse - I mean, better!

You can actually plan your garage-sale itinerary by checking the classified advertisements. Yes, serious junkies advertise their sales. Most junkies agree, however, that it's more fun just to drive around in the hot Florida sun and see what you stumble upon.

I propose an annual garage-sale day - perhaps even a federal holiday - when people throughout the country could set out their junk at the same time and exchange it. You could get your next-door neighbor's broken mower, and he would get your plastic coasters from Key West.

Better yet, what about a new show on the Home Shopping Channel that would sell your junk electronically? Just think of how much better those old sneakers would look under the lighting - and you wouldn't have to worry about the odor. Although, to the junkie, that might be a selling point.

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