

10/October/Thrift
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10/14/08
Word Count: 712

What ever happened to thrift? Or living within our means, making do, storing up, cutting back, holding off? How about layaway, that ancient idea of delayed gratification in which we only purchased items when we could afford to pay for them. Webster's Dictionary defines thrift as "wise economy in the management of resources, especially of money." Many in our small communities already live frugally, a choice they made in order to live here. But in our falling apart financial world, maybe now's the time for all of us to think about wise economy.

I remember being thrifty as a way of life. My mother's stockpot on the back of the stove was always simmering with leftovers. We made do with one car, walked to town to buy from local grocers and butchers. We supplemented our meals with produce from our garden and seasonal fruits picked at local farms. The root cellar held apples, potatoes, squash, and onions. Shelves shimmered with home canned Mason jars full of jam, peaches, apples, tomatoes and chili sauce.

My mother's button box, the equivalent of my father's garage, held a mishmash of odds and ends, "just in case." You never knew when you might need a bit of elastic, a couple spare buttons or what you might be able to do with a pair of mismatched cuff links. Games often had parts missing, so we used some other object to march around the Monopoly board. It didn't matter that a deck of cards didn't all match. Neither did the dishes or dining room chairs. It was a big deal when we finally got a new Formica kitchen table with four matching chairs.

The walls of my father's garage were hung with spare belts for appliances, sleds

with rusted runners that just needed a bit of oil, lawn mower parts and an assortment of tools. The workbench held odds and ends from spare washers, assorted nails and screws to toilet floats, “just in case.” Once on a road trip, my father broke out a new pair of windshield wipers he had in the trunk to spread butter on bread for our picnic lunch because my mother forgot the knives.

Locally we have many opportunities to be thrifty. Since the local Hope Chest Thrift Shop opened in 1998 it and a second shop in Rockaway Beach have raised \$536,150 for charity. Run by a staff of over 60 volunteers, the shops are well-oiled machines with an efficient method in place to take in, sort, organize, price and display items that will go to new homes. Items they can’t use are donated to the North County Food Bank, Goodwill and Cart’M Recycling. The funds raised (\$86,600 thus far in 2008) benefit such charities as Hospice, Faith in Action, Rinehart Clinic, Secret Angels and a host of others. Cart’M also offers a wealth of low cost recycled items for home and garden use. The local BBQ email service carries a wide range of sale items, news and announcements to over 200 folks up and down the coast. When we recently posted a free woodstove, 15 people called or emailed, most of them within the first few hours.

Thrift is an attitude. You start by looking at things differently. Maps and photographs from National Geographic make delightful mailing envelopes; old nails and screws really are stronger and can be reused; old bricks, metal and lumber have character; “free” piles hold endless possibilities. Books and DVD’s can be rented from the library. Home hair cutting tools, brown bag lunches, carpooling, home repairs, eating out only on special occasions—all can help our budgets. Perhaps we’d sleep better at night, have less stress and richer lives if we lived within our means with more thrift, less waste.

Three Northwest women “united by a lust for rust” wrote a book called *The Salvage Studio, Sustainable Home Comforts to Organize, Entertain and Inspire*. In it, they describe how they rescue abandoned, forgotten or discarded items and find a new or better purpose for them. In their introduction, they say, “Home, family, earth, and community—these are what we hold dear. The rhythm of our lives can be set by the choices we make every day.”

Choices. Maybe it’s not too late to start making wise ones.