

Shopping On the Side of the Road

By Lisa Murphy, M.Ed.
www.ooeygoeey.com

I'm sure some of ya'all think I am joking, but I really do like shopping on the side of the road! Out in California, Interstate 15 is the highway that goes from San Diego to Las Vegas and when I lived there it was like a MALL for me! The drive to Vegas typically took 3-4 hours (tops) but would take me all day because I was constantly pulling over, collecting stuff, pulling over, collecting, start, stop, start, stop... It was glorious.

Back when I was married, my ex-husband would notice that I had "seen something good" and he would have the blinker on and be pulling over even before I said, GO BACK! When my brother-in-law and sister were still dating they drove back and forth from Southern California to Phoenix quite often and one time he saw some "good stuff" and told my sister, PULL OVER! What for? Lisa said so! But what does she need THAT for? She didn't say we needed to know what to do with it, she just said to go get it! Good sports the lot of them!

Sometimes after sharing my shopping-on-the-road stories I get emails from people saying they can't drive *anywhere* now without looking out the window for goodies they didn't even know they needed!

But you must use caution! It's tricky business to speed by a ladder, hose, tire or metal hubcap while simultaneously doing a split second analysis as to how you are going to go back and get it! Sadly, there are occasions that you literally have to let opportunity pass you by.

I once spotted a cable spool on the left shoulder of the freeway while in the middle lane of Interstate 5 going through Los Angeles. Of course I decided to stop and run back for it. Now, if you have **never** driven in LA let me tell you that what I did borders on stupid! And, for those of you who have, and more so, those of you currently in LA, ha ha I know very funny very funny. Traffic is so bad these days that if you saw a "good thing" on the shoulder of the road you could casually apply your break, put the car in park, get out of the car, pause and check your email, walk to the thing, pick it up, walk back to the car, respond to a text, open the trunk by waving your foot under the back bumper all while holding your phone in one hand and the thing in the other, toss the thing in, get back in the car, have a few sips of coffee and notice that traffic hasn't even moved, but these were the golden days my friend! The golden days! We are talking pulse racing, heart stopping Frogger on the 5 (if you don't get it, don't worry about it!) days! It was my trickiest acquisition as of yet. Merging from the shoulder back into traffic was wicked stressful, but worth it! Use your blinker and be patient, someone will let you back in. Eventually.

Like many of you, I have given "forever homes" to countless tires, milk crates and cable spools that were "harvested" from behind dumpsters and in parking lots. One time I took my life into my own hands as I ran across five lanes of California traffic to fetch a few hubcaps. I was driving to an early childhood conference in Sacramento and when I got there I boasted, I ALMOST DIED!!! BUT IT WAS FOR THE CHILDREN!!!

And while you thrill seekers might prefer the interstate, please remember that you can creatively acquire good stuff in neighborhoods too! I still suggest driving through the posh parts of town before trash day! One never knows what one might find! I once "rescued" a discarded Little Tykes playhouse while driving home from a friend's house. Wanting to make sure it was really curbed for trash I rang the bell and asked why it was on the curb, the lady said there was nothing was wrong with it, they just didn't want it anymore (!!) I told her I was a child care provider and asked if I could have it. She said sure, so I stuffed it in the back of my VW beetle bug and drove home with my face pressed against the window so it would fit in the trunk!

While on a training run I happened upon disconnected sections of a prefabricated back-yard play set structure that had been discarded on the side of the road. How odd, yet how lucky! I sent my ex and my dad out with the truck with clear instructions as to the sections they needed to bring back! Those pieces remained parts of the yard for years! One section, which we lovingly christened, "the guillotine" was gifted to a close family friend when I moved. It's funny how we can forge such strong emotional connections to inanimate objects. It was sad to have to leave it behind, but made my heart happy knowing it found a home with people who value play, loose parts and juuuuust the right amount of risk for their wee ones.

It should go without saying, but seriously, if you pull over to check something out and it's gross, yucky, busted up beyond repair or really damaged, like that one relationship we all had in college but don't talk about anymore, leave it alone! Best to stick with discarded items that are still in somewhat decent shape. While it is true that one man's trash is another man's treasure, shopping on the side of the road for your program is different than a community service/pick of the trash project. Please leave the overstuffed plastic bags of unidentified whatnot alone and don't even THINK about picking up that bottle of mysterious colored liquid! But if you do find the occasional C note (only happened once for me) I think we are all in agreement that ***states in a sing song voice** finders keepers losers weepers.*

And, to appease the legal department I will add, for the record, do not take items that are doing a job. Like, saaaaay, oh, I don't know, maybe a safety cone??? First off, the transportation department gets kinda crabby with all the merch shrink, but more importantly, it's doing a job. We are looking to gather up discarded, yet usable stuff, not cause an accident!

Some of you know that my brother Tom walked across the USA a few years back. I had a curious (weird?) fascination with what he was seeing on the road... was there a regional pattern? Were there constants? What were the random discards? Sadly of course there was trash trash and more trash but also spoons, shoes, debris from accidents, pee filled (sorry) soda bottles ... but the number one thing he saw as he began his walk????

Nerf darts.

Go figure.

Here is a brief list of my favorite finds:

- Milk Crates
- Hoses
- Cones (that were NOT doing jobs!)
- PVC pipe and connectors
- 5-Gallon Water Bottles
- Ladders
- Painter Pails
- Construction Hats (not on heads!)
- Tires
- Hubcaps
- Cable Spools

And in closing, if you ever feel weird shopping on the side of the road, just borrow a friend's car and go a few towns over - they might not recognize you there! Enjoy!

Lisa Murphy, M.Ed.
Original Article ©2002
Ooey Gooey, Inc. All rights reserved.
www.ooeygooey.com