

(Style on a Dime) Finding treasures at the Pawn shop

Written by Marcia Humphrey

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In an effort to expose our three children to various types of experiences while helping them to discover their God-given gifts and abilities, my husband and I encourage their participation in various extracurricular activities (just not all at the same time). The general rule of thumb for this extracurricular fun is that the child must complete the activity season or at least stick with it until the end of the school year (or until mama says otherwise).

Currently, our two youngest children are taking piano lessons. Because I was unsure whether piano lessons would be a short-term or long-term commitment, we had the children practicing on a small electric keyboard which cost around \$100. Although it didn't have the 88-keys like a real piano, nor the "feel" of the real thing, it was fine for beginning students. We are now entering their second year of lessons and I felt it was time for an instrument upgrade. Purchasing a new one right now was out of the question: they are expensive, they take up a lot of space, and they are expensive (I'm only buying one if I know we have the next Stevie Wonder in our midst.) We solved our problem when we found a gently-used digital piano, complete with the full 88-keys, foot pedals, and the "feel" of a real piano. Guess where we found it-priced right? A nearby.... pawn shop... ssshhh.

Yes, I went to a pawn shop, but please don't tell my mama! See, I grew up thinking that pawn shops are the places where thieves go to "fence" stolen merchandise. I even went to a few looking for my stuff when our neighbors "robbed us blind" while we lived in Chicago many years ago. What I have since learned is that most pawn shop customers are law-abiding citizens. In addition, the pawn shop is really a brick and mortar version of Craigslist-a place where buyers, sellers, borrowers, and swappers meet. Before you turn up your nose and stop reading this article I want you to reconsider your nearby pawn shop because it might become your favorite shopping destination.

Is your kid a budding musician??

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Instead of buying brand new top-of-the line instruments for your beginning student musician, check out the selection at your local pawn shop. Our very first pawn purchase was in Georgia a few years ago. We bought our oldest daughter her first flute, so it seemed like a good idea when we visited the St. Louis Park Pawn America last week. (Truth be told, I was really looking for a bike.) We scored when we found our digital piano, because I hadn't seen anything on Craigslist and I hadn't wanted to pay \$1,000 for a new one. Pawn America has 13 locations around the twin cities www.pawnamerica.com where you can buy, sell, and borrow. They even have online shopping.

Are you an electronics fanatic??

Years ago, when I was still suspicious of pawn shops, my brother-in-law would come to visit us and always ask where he could find a pawn shop. Keenan is a DJ and loves everything electronic. He would frequently buy and sell DJ equipment and upgrade when the price was right. In fact he bought DVDs, cameras, etc. If you have outgrown your old electronics and want to find a low-cost upgrade and sell your old one-all in one stop-check it out.

Need new tools in your toolbelt or a new piece of jewelry??

These days pawn shops have it all. Find great prices on all types of jewelry and gadgets. Choose from new, gently used, or refurbished merchandise. Unlike most consignment shops, the pawn shop will buy your items on the spot and give you cash.

Most of us would never knowingly buy stolen merchandise and neither do most pawn shops. They have definitely evolved over the years in ways that have helped to shed their shady image. I remember after our incident in Chicago, I went to the nearby pawn shop hoping to retrieve some of my own stolen items; I was informed that merchandise is only accepted from sellers after a verification process --which involves law enforcement-- to determine that it had not been stolen. At the time that made me feel slightly better about these establishments. I now go (read: sneak) into pawn shops regularly...okay occasionally. Just another bargain shopping option that I thought (some of) you (more daring readers) would like to hear about. Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.