

# The Art of Scrounge

by Dame Katyrina von Katzenelnbogen (aka Tricia Whealan)

Scrounging truly can be an art form. Going to flea markets and garage sales is not enough, armed with a certain savvy and yes, after doing a little homework, the great finds and bargains of the flea market scene are no longer so rare and so few and far between. As a newby, I was determined to be equipped with my own gear as soon as possible but quickly discovered that I just plain couldn't afford it. So I borrowed stuff for a while from whomever I could borrow it from. And took the time to figure out what I was looking for and what it was worth on the flea market scale.

Now, if we are talking gear, as in bowls, plates and such, flea markets are the place to go. Garage sales are two chancy. Figure out ahead of time what you are looking for and try to stick to it. Next, know what you are willing to spend and determine how much you would like to pay for an item before you ask the seller how much. Unless the price is so ridiculously low that you couldn't forgive yourself if you asked for less, make them a counter offer, you just might get it. If the offer is too steep, make an offer that is below what you are willing to pay by a bit of a margin. I have been know to put down an item because the price was so ridiculously high that I knew I wouldn't get it for what I was willing to pay.

Check it out before you buy it. Look for cracks in bowls, holes in mugs, (glass bottom mugs at flea markets frequently leak, that's why they are there for sale), always open cloth all of the way, not only to see the mount but the check for whole and grease stains, and try not to hesitate too long between price and counter offer.

I have created several rules for myself that come from by scrounging.

1. Never buy something that you can't fix yourself simply.
2. Look for table that are less organized or appear to have less experienced sellers ( do not be deceived by the grandfatherly types, they have been doing this all of their lives). They will tend to expect less in terms of price and are more likely to be there to "get rid" or old stuff.
3. For jewelry, if every item is arraigned neatly, they will most likely want too much.
4. With wooden bowls, buy a bunch, they crack with time. Wash them thoroughly and oil them well a few times.

Remember it is a flea market not a mall, all prices are negotiable.

Garage sales are a little different. My success with them varies. I usually only go to a garage sale if it is either a block sale or they advertised an item that I am interested in. Things like fabric and sewing machines are advertised in the local paper usually the week before, so are block sales. Know the area that the garage sale is in. In my area, northern NJ, there are a lot of older people who have lived here all of their lives and are now moving. They are selling a lifetime worth of stuff. I have bought wool, trim, a hand sewer, and jewelry at garage sales. Once again, determine what you are willing to pay before you discuss price. Give them a counter offer, but don't drag it out. Keep it simple, if you don't get a reasonable price don't belabor the point. Put it back and keep going. If you are interested in a bunch of items at the same place, ask about them at the same time, don't deal with each item one at a time, you will probably get a better bargain. Once again, at garage sales, the people are there to get rid of old stuff, odds are if they don't sell it, they will toss it or donate it to a charity flea market.

Don't forget the relatives. Some of the best and cheapest ways to get equipment is by being aware of what is in your grandparent's attic. Mom and Dad may have some wooden bowls or plates left over from the sixties. (OK so I'm showing my youth, you may have some wooden bowls or plates from the sixties). Even if you have enough yourself, there will always be someone who doesn't, buy now so you can swap later.

Happy scrounging.