

Yard Sale Catharthis

by Mad Dog

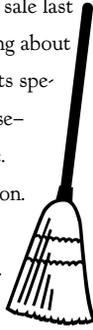
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PEOPLE WILL BUY ANYTHING. I'M NOT talking about the run-of-the-mill odd things like Gianni double CD sets, microwave fondue pots, and peach scented tube socks. No, I'm talking real weird. Like chipped ashtrays, pens that don't write and exercise bikes without pedals.

I found this out first hand because I held a moving sale last Saturday. I don't know what it is, but there's something about a yard sale that attracts people like Bill Clinton attracts special prosecutors. For me the yard sale served one purpose—I'm moving and didn't want to take all this junk with me. For yard salers it serves another—the fulfillment of a mission.

I'm not a big collector though, like everyone, I manage to amass things. Not useful things. Just things. I suspect it's related to gravity. Or centrifugal force. Human bodies, much like planets, attract stuff. The difference is planets attract moons and meteors while we attract lamps filled with seashells and unmatched shoes in the wrong size. I'm sure if Isaac Newton had lived just a few years longer he would have postulated a theory, which



 would have been funny since we all know how embarrassing that can be, especially in mixed company. Had he thought about it, Newton's Fourth Law of Thermodynamics would have gone like this: Matter can neither be created nor destroyed but can always be foisted off on someone else at a yard sale.

Since I'm moving clear across the country I knew I didn't want to ship anything I didn't really want. What's the sense of going to a new city and staring at the same junk you had in the old one? If that's what you want to do you might as well just put travel posters in your windows and pretend you're somewhere more exotic than, say, Seacaucus, New Jersey.

That's why I instituted the One-Year Rule: If I haven't used it, worn it, listened to it, or thought about it in a year it went in the yard sale. I cleared out clothes, record albums, CDs, books, broken calculators, jars full of bent nails, ex-girlfriends, half-used rolls of scotch tape, and an empty Pez dispenser.

The scary part is people bought it all.

 What do they do with these things? These aren't exactly the most useful items in the world, excepting, of



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course, the jars of bent nails which make handy paperweights during hurricane season. I suspect people buy this stuff so they can put it in their garage until it's time for them to move, at which time they put it in their own yard sale. This way they can sell it back to the people they bought it from, giving rise to Newton's Fifth Law of Thermodynamics: One man's junk is another man's future junk. 

I want to know what drives these people to wake up at 6:30 on a Saturday morning so they can dig through a box of ten-cent trinkets—mostly broken or missing pieces—as if they were uncovering the bones of the fabled Australopithecus Sanford-and-Sonus. The first wave, who were there before I was, were pros. It was obvious they planned on reselling the ripped Superbowl pennant, the handleless dust brooms, and the cute little Hummel figurines with the heads glued on backwards to some unsuspecting fool who could have bought it cheaper from me had he just woken up a half hour earlier.

Next came the hobbyists, who were simply looking for things to help fill their empty garages. Last were the thrill-seekers, like the woman who spent an hour and a half looking around so she could buy three items totaling \$140 and thank me because she had such a good time looking through my junk.

But everyone bought something. Even the mail man couldn't resist. He left me two bills and a magazine but walked away smiling because he had a brand new (to him, anyway) pocket notebook and an empty eyeglass case. Hey, sounds like a deal to me. 

Nothing is unsellable at a yard sale. While sorting through my stuff getting ready for the sale I found myself pulling things out of the trash can saying, "Sure this hammer has no head on it, but I'm sure there's someone out there who could use it." Sure enough, someone did. I was about to throw away some rusty pots and pans—after all, what possible use could they be to anyone?—but I put them out for 50 cents each. Lo and behold someone bought them! What were they thinking? That if World War III breaks out and there's a metal drive they'll have the market cornered and will become the Rockefellers of the post-Apocalypse?  

There are very few things people won't buy. A while back doctors scraped a clump of "bad" cholesterol from an artery in the neck of Philippines President Fidel Ramos, who saved it saying he would sell it at "a fund raising for a worthy purpose." If he'd brought it to my yard sale I guarantee someone would have bought it.

Lest you think I'm complaining, I'm not. I took in enough money at my yard sale to pretty much pay for my trip across country. With enough left over in case I come across any good yard sales along the way. Hey, you've got to start over sometime, don't you? 

"We are here and it is now. Further than that, all human knowledge is moonshine" — H.L. Mencken