

Arizona 'tag sales' top those back east!



Aug. 18, 2006 12:00 AM

It's late April in West Hartford, Conn. The flowers are blooming, the trees are budding and the sky is a crisp, clear blue. This is a day Kristen Gustafson will never forget. She was garage-saling in her favorite neighborhood on Quaker Lane when she saw it.

"I was thrilled. It was still in the original box. I grabbed it, gave her the money and I was out of there like a flash. Then I called my husband and told him."

Kristen was beaming about one of her favorite finds ever at a garage sale. She'd just nabbed a 5-quart Kitchen Aid mixer, white with stainless steel. Retail price: \$280. Her price? \$25. "I had a friend who had just found a yellow one three weeks earlier. I knew I had to find one just like it and I did. It was one of my best days ever," she said.

But would those memorable garage sale days last?

Kristen didn't think so.

The 36-year-old mother of three and her husband moved to northeast Mesa. Like most of us, she had the normal concerns when relocating. Where would they live? Would they like it? How are the schools? But one of the biggest concerns for Kristen was the garage sales. Would they be just as good in the Valley as back East? Kristen was in for quite the pleasant surprise. Turns out garage sales are just as popular here as they are back East - in fact, probably more popular. Plus, there's the added bonus of year-round garage saling in the Valley.

"In Connecticut, you couldn't garage sale past October. It's a long winter. We'd have snow on the ground and cold weather through most of April."

And so far the family is loving the huge selections of sales here. "They're better in some ways. They're definitely more competitive."

Competitive indeed. No more sleeping in on Saturdays and definitely no time for a stop at the donut shop like she always did in West Hartford. "My son and I would get a donut and I'd have a coffee and we'd be at sales around 8. Here that would be way too late. If you're not out by 6:30 in the morning you'll miss a lot."

Two of Kristen's children are following in her footsteps. In fact, her son, Ethan, 8, often wakes her up Saturday mornings so they can get their adventure started early. "He's become quite assertive lately when we go to sales. If he doesn't see what he wants (on display) he'll ask the homeowner if they have it inside." And sometimes it pays off. Like the other day at a sale in Gilbert when Ethan asked a 10-year-old boy if he had any Pokemon items to sell. "He said he did and they were in his attic. So, he came out with a whole bunch in a big bag," Ethan said. He paid \$10 for 93 Pokemon toys and cards. Mom and Ethan agree it's their best find yet since moving to Arizona a year ago. Kristen estimates the retail value at \$450. "I felt good. I love sales in Arizona. They're good in Connecticut, too. But the toys are best in Arizona," Ethan added.

And mom agrees. "We are now converted to Arizona tag sales!"

Back East folks commonly refer to them as "tag sales" since most of the items are typically "tagged" with the price. Kristen says she'll have to get used to calling them garage sales here. But you can bet, whatever they're called she and her kids will be enjoying them each week all year long!

Lynda Hammond runs the www.GarageSaleGal.com Web site, where you can list and look for garage sales online, and read past columns. Reach her at lynda@garage-salegal.com. She also appears on 3-TV's Good Morning Arizona.