

## **Garage Sale Gal**

# **A doctor of Garage-sale-ology**

**THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC**



**Lynda Hammond**

It happened in the 60s.

Spotting garage sales in the American landscape was—at best-- sporadic early in that decade. But thanks to magazines such as Good Housekeeping, their popularity would soon explode. “The media began writing stories on garage sales and that legitimized it for women. It was suddenly okay to have a garage sale.”

And Gretchen Herrmann should know. She’s studied my favorite pastime for years. Gretchen is a librarian at State University of New York (SUNY) Cortland. She also wrote her college dissertation on garage sales. So, she’s considered somewhat of a garage sale historian. I learned about her fascination with garage sales while surfing the net and I knew I had to talk to her.

While researching the topic of bargain hunting she charted the number of ads for garage sales in newspapers in upstate New York. She noticed an increase in the 60s and 70s and attributed the upswing to several things including a decrease in long term income for Americans. “It also became chic to have used things. And recycling was important—remember this was right around when Earth Day started.”

Garage sales picked up steam and—thankfully-- continue chugging along today. “We are a society that loves stuff. And it’s gotten even more that way thanks to TV shows that celebrate stuff—the shopping channels, Antiques Road Show--we create our identities through our stuff.”

Here are more reasons Gretchen says garage sales are so popular today, especially here in Arizona.

**1/Demographics-** People with children have a lot of garage sales. They grow out of clothes and want new toys. So, if you have kids you’re more likely to have—and go to-- garage sales.

**2/Moving-** When we move we have a garage sale to lighten the load. “Especially out there in Arizona. You have a lot of people moving into the state. Plus, you have snowbirds who are quite mobile and that means lots of garage sales, too,” Gretchen says.

**3/Changing identities-** Remodeling the house is a good reason for a sale. But some of us like to give our personalities an overhaul, too. So, changing hobbies or clothing styles is easy and inexpensive to do at garage sales.

**4/We are voyeurs-** Gretchen says we garage sale lovers are voyeurs. We love to get a peak into other people’s lives. All of us are interested in seeing how others live and we can see all that laid out on sellers’ driveways.

The amount we spend on garage sales proves just how popular they are nowadays. Gretchen says about \$4 billion changes hands in America each year at garage sales. Wow! That certainly helps to keep the economy churning.

And I’m definitely doing my part—just ask my husband!

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**MY FAVORITE FIND**



Gretchen Herrmann, 58, visits a garage sale on a recent cold, late September weekend in Ithaca, NY. The university librarian goes garage saling every Saturday and keeps her eyes open for almost anything. But she's especially fond of "flax" clothing. "If I can pick it up for a dollar or two it beats paying full price."

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*Do you have a garage sale find you love? Something that makes you smile when you look at it? Share it with us. Send us your picture. Include your name, email address and phone number and email it to: Lynda@GarageSaleGal.com. Watch for the story of your treasure in this column!*

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