

Everyone needs to do this once, so they will know to never, ever do it again. I'm talking, of course, about a yard sale.

My Beloved and I recently held one. Did okay, actually -- unloaded a lot of cr, uh, items we no longer needed, and made about \$200.



But don't let the dollar signs lead you, like will 'o' the wisps, out into the garage and up into the attic just yet. Once I sat down and figured out the time we spent working on it, it came to about \$1.45 each per hour. And that's not even counting the sheer aggravation, which, as they say in those Mastercard commercials, is priceless.

We've all heard cliches about yard sales and some of the things that happen. What I have found is that these are not cliches so much as very real laws of the universe, as real and as omnipresent as laws of gravity and inertia -- and twice as difficult to defy.

The first law, of course, is, "No matter what time you advertise the sale to start, no matter how clearly you enunciate that you will not accept any early arrivals, the hordes will descend upon your home no less than an hour and a half before the stated time."

To wit, if you say 8, they will be banging impatiently on your door at 6:30. In our case, we advertised 7:30 a.m.; the first one, I believe, arrived at about 6:15.

And they all know each other. They see each other, at the hiney crack of dawn, every Saturday, at some yard sale, somewhere within a fifty mile radius. I'm not sure they have scouts roaming, cell phones at the ready, looking for the biggest amateurs with the most potential.

The second law states, "You will get rid of most of your stuff during the first and last hour of the sale. This does not mean you will make money, it only means those times will see the highest activity."

This is because the early birds will be pawing impatiently through your stuff, muttering to each other, "Whadda bah-gan," then carrying armloads of the most curious flotsam to your cashier, assuming you have one.

After six hours of this, you will ultimately swear two things: One - nothing in the yard is going back into the house, and two, the next poor soul who wanders in here will get loaded up, but good.

Our very last visitors came in because they thought they might enjoy a mismatched set of corning ware I was selling for about \$5. They left with that set, a tea pot, an old batting helmet and flat soccer ball, several assorted belts and buckles, a spice rack, a chafing dish warmer, several sweaters, and a weight bench, which my Beloved stuffed into the back of their truck when they weren't looking.

Another important rule of thumb is that most yard salers aren't really interested in merchandise. They're interested in talking you down. If something's a dollar, they'll try to get you to go to 50 cents.

"How about a quarter for this," said one rather persistent individual, the one who had said she was 'just going to take a chance ringing the doorbell' at 5:55 a.m.

"How about two bucks, like it says on the tag," I said.

I think I let whatever it was go for a buck. It's too early in the damn morning.

I had another one show up and ask me to take a dime instead of a quarter. I finally marked it down to five cents and said, "Talk me down off that."

They bought it for two pennies.

Also, sharpies come in all shapes and sizes. I had a little kid, cute little buzz cut fellow with

big brown eyes and baggy shorts, come up to me with a baseball hat.

"How much is this?" he lisped.

"Fifty cents," I said.

"That's two quarters, right?"

"Yep. Two quarters. Or five dimes. Or fifty pennies. Whatever."

He made a show of carefully searching one pocket, then another, then finally, coming up with nothing, he looked up at me with sorrowful eyes.

"Gee, mister, I don't think I have two quarters."

At this stage, I was tired, I was half buzzed from opening my first beer at 9:15 a.m., and yeah, I was feeling a little sorry for the little guy. I was just about to say, "Just take it, kid," when his grandmother came up.

"Don't you let him have that for free; you make him pay. He's been doing this all day long."

Turned out, the little bast, uh, little fellow had started the day with six dollars in his pocket; he now had seven and some change.

He wasn't a complete liar, though. He didn't have two quarters on him.

Still another universal law is, no matter what you think is worthwhile, the most random pieces of assorted garbage will sell like hotcakes while the things you consider "good stuff" will squat mutely on the table. I sold a mismatched set of splintered, poorly gripped, nearly unsalvageable golf clubs for fifteen bucks. I also sold a nearly new Aero Bed for fifteen bucks.

Which brings me to my next rule: You will never, ever get more than \$15 bucks for anything at a yard sale, whether it is a Ming vase, a new Lexus, or an old mattress.

And that, of course, brings us back to the crux of the matter, and the most important law regarding yard sales. That is, nothing will sell for what it's worth; because that's not what a yard sale is about.

A yard sale is not a money making venture. It is merely a method to get other people to cart your useless cra, uh, stuff you don't need anymore, out of your home. Always remember, the object of the game is to clean out closets, attics, garages, and drawers and get it the hell out of the house forever, much like an exorcism. The money is not the main goal; it is at best a side benefit and at worst an unintended consequence. It's the chocolate sauce on the ice cream of successful de-cluttering.

I can honestly say I am more enriched by this experience. But I will never, ever, ever, do this again.