



Urban Times

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◀ Just a few of Rich Costello's "finds." Says the author, "Our neighbors know, or should know, to check with us first when looking for home replacement parts."

From October 2006:

Confessions of a scavenger

By RICH COSTELLO

EIGHT-FOOT-TALL DUMPSTERS, HALF-demolished buildings, alleys, roadsides and old farmers' dumps: Nothing is off the radar to a certified scavenger.

I think it started when I was five. While sifting through the sawdust of a ground-up tree stump, I made my first 'find' – an Indian head nickel. After my mother told me how old it was, and that some boy, probably just like me, lost it over 50 years before, I was both fascinated and hooked.

Forty years later, this graying adult is still at it.

Today, rehabbing our 1890s Woodruff Place home provides an excuse to collect and save almost anything, especially if it's wood. In the last two years, we have acquired, totally free, tons of oak flooring, a complete 1930s kitchen (cabinet, eight-foot double sink, etc.) from a torn-down house in Noblesville, an entire oak staircase, doors, windows and light fixtures from a condemned farmhouse in Zionsville, and enough brick pavers for several patios, to be bordered by old limestone window sills. A newly erected grape arbor rises from two fluted columns thrown away on Washington Boulevard.

My wife's tolerance for these objects of beauty is – surprisingly – lower than mine. As my number-one helper, lifter and spotter, she is supportive of the finds we can actually use. The other 98 percent often met

with hands on hips, followed by phrases such as, "We're never going to park in the garage, are we"? Or, "There's medication for this." I keep gloves in the car for her hands and use the word "we" delicately.

My teenagers' reactions are entirely predictable. On any trash day, a small end table sits next to a garbage can. I slow the car as we drive past. Groans. They sink in their seats, not wanting to be seen. I might as well have on a clown suit, flagging cars for the grand opening of a new pizza joint, to cause this level of embarrassment.

Lately, if the find will take at least two people to lift, they've learned to pop out of the car the second I park; the sooner the find is in the trunk, the sooner they're out of there.

Our Woodruff Flea Market is a godsend. The number of items set aside for this event is increasing at an alarming rate. But saving an eight-foot, six-paneled door from the garbage truck, in hopes that someone else may actually need it for their

house, is worth it. And our neighbors know, or should know, to check with us first when looking for home replacement parts.

Scavenging can take place even in your own house. We found a stash of ceramic marbles in our attic, left by children over 100 years ago. To grab them, we had to reach down where the floorboards don't quite meet the walls, through years of nests and pigeon droppings. We also found old newspapers, invitations, keys, bottles, coal and drugstore coins, and seed packets with

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the tomato seeds still intact.

Curiosity is one impetus for scavenging, but it can also get you into trouble. Recently, on a hunch, I commenced digging behind our house where there was a slight depression in the ground. Twenty minutes later and, *voila*, the top of the old cistern! Two hours later, the entire top to this sunken beehive-shaped water tank, made of bricks and mortar, was revealed.

Problem was, it appeared to be nine-feet wide, and was probably 10-feet deep. I felt that I was crossing the line for landscaping our yard and despite finding three intact bottles and numerous bones (hopefully animal) even this obsessive-compulsive stopped. I did not want this huge hole to become some ominous symbol in our marriage. So before my bride came home, a quick search of the Internet produced a New York Times article on unearthing a cistern in the Bronx, complete with lists of wonderful artifacts.

Also, a hurried call was made to one of our local Woodruff historians, who supported my reasons for digging. Armed with two sources as a backup, the crater is safe for now.

On a more serious note, as of this writing, IPS School #54 on E.10th Street is in the process of being torn down. No effort was made to save any of its contents. The tin ceilings, glazed brick walls, and beautiful maple floors are “to die for.” I called and asked if we could go through the building and salvage what we could. The answer was no. Oak doors, windows, oak paneling, and thousands of feet of oak moulding are being splintered and turned to sawdust. Almost every classroom had beautiful double glass-door cabinets. The Bobcats run headlong into the doors and scrape it all into a pile.

It seems to me, and many others, that this is extremely wasteful, if not sickening. Many of us might be interested in a piece of school history, or in the beautiful woodwork.

Price that stuff out at White River Antiques and Salvage. Cost-effectiveness is given as one reason to abandon old schools and build newer ones with less expensive upkeep. Then let's be cost effective and sell those great doors and oak framed chalkboards for money. The total would equal all the IPS gift-wrap sales for the year.

It will be curious to see if they approach the just-



▲ The author believes great treasures are being lost at places such as IPS School 54, being demolished without any attempt to salvage the many jewels within.

announced demolition of the John Roberts School, which is next door to Woodruff, in the same fashion. Those beautifully carved art deco pieces of limestone all around the front of the building, will they be pulverized as well? We'll see.

In the meantime, if you are a homeowner or contractor, and feel you must replace your old, solid wood doors, windows, beadboard or crown moulding with a vinyl substitute, please, store the original material in your the basement or attic. Some future homeowner may have different ideas than you about rehabbing, and may actually want them. Once gone, gone forever.

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Rich Costello is a two-year resident of Woodruff Place, a realtor, and a 40-year scavenger.