

# Dumpster Diving Talk (03/06/06)

Good evening. Dumpster diving is a worthwhile endeavor. I have done it myself. I can tell you there are rewards to be found. I don't do it anymore. Really. I wouldn't entirely rule it out. It's just not something these days that I'm drawn to. There's a lot to do out there. I have so little time. So something has to give. A lot has to give. Really.

Others besides me will tell you how great dumpster diving can be. It is something you need to try if you have not already tried it. The best source I've read on dumpster diving is *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving*. I believe the author was someone named John Hoffman.

It was illustrated by a dude named Ace Backwards who is renowned in some circles [from what I heard]. Subculture circles. Usually illustrators by their very nature get second fiddle status. But this is [dis]service to someone as talented as Ace. I got this book on interlibrary loan in Stevens Point, Wisconsin from the Marshfield Library. I also saw this book in a Twin Cities library. I read it. There's a sequel. I have not read the sequel.

The book discusses:

- Why you dumpster dive
- The social ramifications of dumpster diving
- How to dumpster dive
- Where to dumpster dive

Plus the author tells you lots of his personal experiences with dumpster diving.

*The Tightwad Gazette*, a journal wrote by Amy Dacyczyn, was compiled into book form. In one of the volumes of the book form, Amy Dacyczyn reviewed *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving*. It was a while ago since I read this, but I remember that she acknowledged "it's good to look for thrift activities such as dumpster diving that she's all about living simply." She stated, "she felt the author was too harsh and rebellious in the tone of the book." I didn't really have a problem with that when I read the book, but that was her perception. As I recall, she didn't expressed that she didn't seem terribly excited about dumpster diving, but was open to considering such. I suppose you don't always have to have dumpster diving. There are other opportunities around, as Amy Dacyczyn, I guess they should tell you.

In my apartment, some are right in front of my face. face, in the laundry room, which is on my floor, a few doors down from where I live, somebody or maybe somebodies give away free items. I have got pans, peanut butter, pickles, spaghetti sauce, Cheerios, cornflakes, Gerber bowls. Isn't that nice when you don't even have to go out to a dumpster to get all of that?

I have known people who are even more excited about dumpster diving than I am. Some people I have known people who are even more excited about dumpster diving than I am. Some people I know are very passionate about it, or at least were passionate about it.

One of these people is my mom. She likes to dumpster dive. Sounds like more than I do. She doesn't call it dumpster diving, though. She calls it "trash picking". She tells me "my desire for living simply runs in the family." She says "one of her relatives, I believe it was her

grandfather, used to go out with a truck years ago and retrieve items from the trash.”

In the book *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving*, I recall the author describing how his family was also interested in dumpster diving.

At college at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, I knew a group who had people really into dumpster diving. Pete Barwis was big on dumpster diving.

He said “he knew the places to go in Stevens Point.” He did it fairly frequently. He said “Stevens Point wasn't extremely fruitful as such places to go since it's pretty small, but he could find some good items.” He even dumpster dived a bunch of food for us for our peace camp event. During that time, I was low on food. So this really helped out a lot.

I hear Pete is now in graduate school at Milwaukee, which I imagine would have many more opportunities for dumpster diving than small Stevens Point.

I imagine the Twin Cities would have a fair number of places, in fact, a great number of places to dumpster dive.

Chris Talbot, who I lived with for a while, was also into dumpster diving. Orion Wellings and Will Reiser were really big on dumpster diving as well. One time when they set out to dumpster dive, I made a comment, “hopefully you'll find something that makes you ashamed to be living in this country.” I said this because many proponents of dumpster diving tell “you dumpster diving is a

possibility because our affluent society is so utterly wasteful.”

Orion's sister Ariel takes after her brother, or at least did, from what I know. It's likely some of these people still are dumpster diving, I just have no way of knowing for sure right now if I could find it out. Perhaps. Ariel even got a shirt from her parents which said “Dumpster Diving Team”.

Perhaps the

most excited person about dumpster diving is my friend Blanca. Blanca talks and writes about it all the time. It is one of her favorite pastimes. It may be her absolute favorite pastime. It is something I have dabbled in, while it is something she does on a regular basis.

I have dumpster dived with her. Once we were dumpster diving behind the dorms at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where I got my undergraduate degree. We actually got inside the big dumpster. While we were inside, somebody from one of the dorm rooms called out to us, asking, “what are you doing?” Blanca quipped, shopping. During that time, a campus official was suspiciously watching us. He didn't take us away or anything like that, but he made us awfully nervous. He wanted us to go. While he was keeping his eye on us, someone from that dorm, probably the same person who called out to us, threw some water at us. I told the university official “he should do

something.” I said, “that's a conduct violation.” He didn't seem to care. He made a remark sometime

that “we should grab our items and get out of there”, though he didn't say it so politely.

Blanca frequently refers to dumpster diving as “curb shopping”, particularly when she looks for items in residential areas.

Once my mother took me to visit Stevens Point. Blanca was one of the people I wanted to visit. Blanca informed me I “still had a box of belongings stored in her storage unit.”

Since I was there, that was a prime opportunity to retrieve it. My mother gave us a ride over there. My mother, not being aware of Blanca's fondness for dumpster diving, said, "I wonder what the best item I ever got from a trash was." Blanca said, "that's so hard to decide" or something like that.

In *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving*, the author discusses all the great finds he got. I too could tell you I have found some wonderful finds. Blanca will tell you she's found so many great finds, as evident by that statement she made to my mother.

When I was dumpster diving with Blanca, I found two phone cards. gave one to her and kept one for myself. They had significant minutes still on them. I also found a tape recorder that worked for a couple years. I love to record, so that's awesome. Even if you already have a tape recorder, it's good to have extra on hand. I remember one night I had several and I couldn't get one to work.

When I was in La Crosse, Wisconsin, one time, I found several backpacks in dumpsters. I could have even gotten more. The only problem was they were made out of leather. Will Reiser told me "he found money", as I mentioned earlier. I've heard other people talk about finding computers. Sometimes you don't even have to look too much. Sometimes wonderful items are just right out there in the open.

Both Amy Dacyczyn and *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving* addressed the legal concerns. Both conclude it's pretty legal. The author [Jim Hoffman] does discuss situations where you may be aroused in suspicion. He says in such circumstances it's usually good to just say "you're looking for boxes." As I recall, he didn't encounter hardly any trouble, if any at all, during his time dumpster diving.

I read in a couple of more mainstream books that some identity thieves go dumpster diving. Most people who dumpster dive I know don't do that. Also, I doubt if anyone would make the connection. As the Art and Science of Dumpster Diving suggested, people aren't very familiar with it in the first place. So people aren't going to probably think, you're the dumper? You are an identity thief. I just don't see that happening.

Of the times I have dumpster dived, I don't recall ever having a cop come. I don't recall ever dealing with a cop. Besides that encounter with that university official, who I don't even think was campus security, not much has happened. Even that was pretty harmless. Than a nuisance more than anything else.

I convinced my stepbrother to go dumpster diving with me. My stepmother heard about this and she was concerned about the legal issues. My stepbrother said, "if I was doing it, it was [legal]".

Since he got the impression that I'm a goody two-shoe. When I dumpster dived in my parents' old subdivision, I saw a bunch of romance novels in a dumpster behind MediaPlay, which is a book, computer, music store. I grabbed one, I believe, just to grab it. If you were really into romance novels and you were there, that would have been awesome for you, I imagine. Behind Barnes and Noble, I saw a bunch of discarded magazines.

Blanca did write about one time the police coming when she dumpster dived. Considering all

the times she has dumpster dived, the odds of police coming seem to be very few. Very small odds indeed, it seems. The time the police came, [she said] she and her partner were dumpster diving behind Goodwill. She was not thrown in jail for the rest of her life. She wasn't even charged with anything. So it was all okay.

The author of *Dumpster Diving* talks about some items you find that are not intrinsically valuable but are very interesting. He talks about some places you can get some really juicy information. I don't are very interesting. He talks about some places you can get some really juicy information. I don't remember finding anything super juicy, but I did find some interesting items when I went to places you wouldn't think would be the most fruitful sources for dumpster diving.

In La Crosse, Wisconsin, I looked at the library dumpster. I saw some discarded books. I think there were books the library couldn't sell in its book sale. Book sales are often used by libraries to get rid of unwanted books. So if those can't sell, then there's no way, I guess. I also dumpster dived behind a church. I found some old church bulletins from the 70s or so. They were very interesting to look at. I imagine old church bulletins wouldn't interest everyone, but they interested me.

The author of *Dumpster Diving* discusses finding food from dumpsters. The author talks about eating whole meals from dumpster-died foods. I don't recall ever eating an entire meal from dumpster-died foods, but I have eaten significant portions of meals from dumpster-died foods. The author even talks about “grabbing items without labels.” He talks about once finding dog food. He says “part of the excitement is eating items from cans you're not even sure what the cans are.” Since I'm a vegan, that doesn't exactly work. Vegans are all about reading labels [like others say]. The labels aren't there. You can't just look at something and guess. Perhaps if it was painfully obvious what it was, then it might be okay. But otherwise, you would have to be awfully cautious. Many are more intrepid than I would be. To me, if something was unopened, it could be okay. If it was opened, I probably didn't want to touch it.

Chris Talibot was particularly intrepid. She would tell stories of eating food that was decayed. She [said she] “would either push away the decayed part”, or she even said that “mold gives food character. I personally wouldn't go to that length, but to each his or her own.

One of my best food finds from a dumpster was some boxes of unopened generic potato chips behind one of the dorms at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving* is good at addressing safety concerns. It tells you how to be safe. Though, I don't know any dumpster divers who would be as careful as the author recommends. He even goes as far as showing you exactly what to wear. He says “you need good boots, or at least solid shoes, because you may be stepping on some dangerous or at least unpleasant substances.” He advises bringing a flashlight, which pretty much everyone does at night, if people have one. He also recommends “bringing some stick so you can poke items before you touch them with your hands.” I believe he also said something about “long clothing plus gloves.”

I don't recall any accidents I've had with dumpster diving. The author did talk about how “it could be dangerous dumpster diving behind a hospital.” I vaguely remember a story of him dumpster diving behind a hospital for some reason. I recall doing it once just to do it, though I

was leery for good reason. Once when Pete Barwis was sitting out to dumpster dive, I joked with him that he should jump on some syringes in the hospital dumpster, [like *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving* mentions].

Wouldn't it be awesome if the Supreme Court dealt with dumpster diving? There could be some interesting property rights issues. If the Supreme Court ruled that dumpster diving was legitimate, it could say something along the lines, when a private party puts debris out at the curb, the implicit message [like dumpster divers themselves say]. The implicit message is such item is abandoned and therefore no longer belongs to the original owner, [like dumpster divers themselves say]. Therefore, it is acceptable for any citizen to retrieve the items as long as other property rights are not violated, [like dumpster divers themselves say].

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If the Supreme Court was against it, it could say, although property is abandoned through the trash, [like dumpster divers themselves say] retrieval process, there is a very specific source the trash is left for, namely the sanitation companies. Therefore, it is illicit for anyone but these companies to remove the trash from the curb or other point of retrieval, except for the original owner or those the original owner has given explicit consent to. I doubt if the Supreme Court would rule on that, but that would be awfully interesting.

*The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving* talks about how “dumpster diving is going against the grain of this respectable society.” The author views “dumpster diving as one way to thumb his nose at this overly polite, respectable society, which frowns upon dumpster diving. “The people I know who dumpster dive are definitely the type who want to thumb their nose at polite society.

A couple months ago or so, I gave a lecture about respectable people. I gave this lecture to talk about what makes a person respectable and how respectable people think. I did not specifically mention dumpster diving, but that would be something forbidden to respectable people.