

Dollar Stores

When I was growing up, my brother's and I loved going to my father's hometown of Columbia, Kentucky and visiting our grandmother and all of our other relatives. Being "city kids," we were fascinated by the ambience of small town life. My father's family, the Walker's, had practically started the town, so any Walker offspring enjoyed a bit of celebrity status.

In a small town, celebrity status meant things like being recognized by the elderly, having a sentence or two written about your visit in the newspaper, and getting a free cola at the fountain in the Meadow Hill Inn, which just happened to be owned by our cousin Bill Walker and his wife Maxine.

When we visited my grandmother Vevia Walker and her sister, my great aunt Clarice, there was one thing my brother's and I could always count on: lots of hugs and comments about how much we had grown, and nine dollars. You see, my great aunt, or auntie, as we called her, always gave us four dollars, and my grandmother (never to be outdone by her younger sister) upped the ante to five. Times have changed, I know, but at that time, nine dollars seemed like a fortune.

Once we had pocketed our nine dollars, the four of us headed straight for town. Our walk was also quite a novelty. There was no fear of strangers abducting us or cars running us over. People came out of their homes to wave to us, and those who did not know who we were no doubt went next door to inquire and speculate. Once in town, we went straight away to Ben Franklins, the five and dime store on the square. Of course this was the early seventies and there were few things for a dime, much less a nickel. But still, we loved that store and always found things to spend every bit of our nine dollars on.

I know Ben Franklins is probably no longer there and I am equally sure that most people head to their nearest super center to shop. But there is one chain of stores that is at least somewhat similar to the five and dime of yesteryear. That place is the dollar store. I used to think dollar stores were places to take your kids when they had saved a little money or if they were due a treat--- especially for people like us who have numerous children. After all, a trip down the toy aisle in a big store (much less the toy store) could potentially set you back forty dollars or more. Not so at the dollar store. For years I barely glanced further than the toy aisle in these little stores that seem to be in every strip mall next to every dry cleaners and nail salon. But a few years ago, I baked a cake for a favorite schoolteacher of one of my children. I wanted to give her the cake, but I did not want her to have to worry about getting my cake container back to me. My mother suggested the dollar store.

I found the perfect plastic storage container and happily gave the cake and container to the teacher. Needless to say, I wondered what else the dollar store might have to offer.

Now I make stopping in at the dollar store part of my monthly shopping run. Each and every time I am amazed at the bargains I find. Just a few weeks ago, I found some brightly colored plastic plates. They were quite roomy and had a built in "bowl" for salsa, dips, etc. Six dollars later, I had a new set of plates for the family. The other day I found adorable plastic containers that matched my girl's rooms and bathroom---perfect for storing smaller toiletry items and toys. Gift bags, wrapping paper, gift cards, tape, candles, etc are also plentiful. These are items you usually pick up when you are at a large super center, but are much less expensive at the dollar store. In addition, the dollar store is a great place to pick up things for children's birthday parties--for gift bags or prizes for games. I have also found items that are perfect for hostess gifts, teacher gifts, coach's gifts, etc.

I was talking about the dollar store phenomenon with a friend of mine, and she said seriously---"Yes, but all dollar stores are not created equally." And she is right. Some seem to have tons of toys; some have more things for your home. My suggestion? Check out several---and remember that they are constantly getting new merchandise in, so just about every time you go, they have new items. Happy shopping!