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## Hanks: Clothes swaps are good for the planet, the holiday soul

Posted: 1:07 p.m. Monday, Dec. 1, 2014



By Anna Hanks - Special contributor

Every year I cringe when I read about the crowds on “Black Friday,” the biggest shopping day of the year. Even more terrible is reading about the various deaths and injuries that have occurred over the years in crowds gathered to “bargain hunt” during the start of the Christmas shopping season. A television that you don’t pay much money for isn’t a bargain if it carries a risk of being trampled to death.

Then again, my perspective could be skewed by the fact that when I got up this morning, I put on a pair of pants that used to belong to my friend Eve. As I buttoned them up, I wondered how she was doing, and if she was still

enjoying the aerial trapeze classes that she had been so excited about the last time I saw her.

When I put on my socks, I thought about my friend Katherine, who gifted me today's thin socks when she decided that she only liked wearing thick and cushy socks.

I acquired both of these items at one of my swaps. Over the last few years, I've had a regular series of women's clothing and "thingee" swaps, where a bunch of my friends get together and exchange handbags, misguided wedding gifts, outgrown children's clothing, scented candles where someone had grown weary of the scent, and party dresses that we've worn to too many parties. We've re-homed small furniture, made arrangements to transition a queen-size bed between its first and second owners, and moved a grill that was long-ago left behind by an ex-husband to a swap member who had a pool and no grill. At my swaps, no money changes hands, and all the leftovers are donated to charity as soon as my filled-to-the-brim car can cart them away.

These swaps give me a chance to bond with my friends and clean out my house. Think of it as a post-consumer quilting bee.

I started the swaps after looking around at the overstuffed state of my domicile and coming to terms with the idea that getting up early enough on a Saturday to have a successful garage sale was never going to happen. I am not a morning person, and no amount of coffee will ever change that.

It's also a lot easier to get unworn and decades-old clothing out of your overstuffed closet when you are bringing it to a party with people you know.

In a few weeks, my friend and I are having a "Make Way For Christmas" swap, with a prize given out for the ugliest sweater brought to be swapped. The holiday season is a good time for a swap, as for many of us the Christmas season brings more things into all of our already jam-packed houses.

Over the years, American homes have gotten bigger and bigger while American families have gotten smaller. What's in these McMansions? Lots of stuff. What's in those storage units that are steadily creeping across the country? Stuff that people can't fit into their bigger-than-ever houses. It takes expensive resources to keep all of these possessions safe from environmental damage.

Of course, even when people get their extra possessions out of their lives, those items don't just magically disappear off the earth.

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Edward Humes, author of the new book "Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair With Trash," claims that Americans throw away 7.1 pounds of trash a day, which adds up to more than 102 tons over the average lifetimes.

Our swap group does more than give my friends a good motivation to clean out their closets and have an afternoon of bonding. We're helping save the Earth! I like to think that we are keeping some items out of the landfill and reducing our group's collective impact on the planet.

Given the “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” mantra for saving the Earth, I like to think my swap group is doing something to help the world we all live in by reusing our collective resources.

Give some thought to helping our planet by starting a swap group of your own. It’s a lot less stressful than braving the crowds during Christmas season at the mall.

*Hanks blogs about pop culture at [anninaustin.com](http://anninaustin.com).*

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