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Sifting Through the Thrift

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No longer does thrift shopping have a stigma attached to it; instead, thrift shopping has become accepted in popular culture. Thrift stores differ from one another depending on the location they are in. This weekend, a friend and I set out to scour the thrift world and compare different store locations and companies.

For those of you who donate to the Cerebral Palsy Foundations or to any diabetes foundations, your clothes are then sold at a low cost to Value Village. Value Village held many surprises on our recent visit to its Burlington location, located on Fairview Street. Not only did the store resemble the interior of Winners with its large location and open-concept store with rows and rows of categorized clothing, but Value Village also felt similar to Winners, with a bustling crowd and lines for the change rooms. Don't let this deter you though—Value Village turned out to be a great stop, with loads to choose from. They have many vibrant selections of clothing (which can be distracting at times) which are all labeled and categorized. The huge signs above the clothing prove to be a big help. As for the selection, you will be impressed with the variety of pants and skirts. If you are a long-time vintage shopper, you may not be impressed with jeans going for \$9–12, but many were Silver, Managers or Bongo brands.

As for the upper half, although they do have a large selection of t-shirts and blouses, you literally have to go through each, one by one. To make it a bit easier, the shirts and sweaters are put in colour groups, so you can run to the red group of t-shirts or flail to the blue group of long-sleeved shirts. As for the blouses, all I can say is that a country line dancer would be in heaven. Since there is so much clothing sticking off the racks, it is a bit difficult to find out where the “small” turns into “medium,” or “medium” into “large.” We quickly realized that to be a successful shopper, you have to be aggressive. Throw yourself into the racks if you have to. Yes, this is an aggressive sport.

What makes this Value Village very impressive is its selection of spring coats and jackets. There is a vast amount of corduroy jackets, velvet jackets, and sexy tweed jackets. You could spend a large part of the time there, I promise.

As for the Value Village atmosphere, it appears to have taken advice from other department stores. They have strategically placed boots, shoes and belts all over the store, and shoppers can't help it but look in every direction so as to not miss another great find. Shoppers are constantly looking around at the displays, and running from one area to the next.

As great as this store may appear, there is a down side. According to Janelle Windhorst, a dedicated Value Village shopper, “their prices never used to be this high. They seem to have acquired a lot of brand names now, and now higher prices.” For a first-time Value Village

shopper, I was impressed with buying sparkly shoes for only \$6, and a sweater jacket for \$9. But while Janelle was impressed with the selection, she was not impressed with the prices.

To entice you to come back, at the end of your shopping adventure, you are given a small “Spring into Value Pass.” Every time you spend 5\$, you get a stamped. Once your card is has ten stamps, you can get 30% off your next purchases. There is a catch, though: to get your 30% off your next purchase, you'll have to arrange another trip to Value Village by April 22. But since spring is coming our way, this could be a great time for you to stock up on clothes for the warmer days. If you have a tight schedule, the village of value will also impress you, as their hours are Monday–Saturday: 9AM – 9 PM, and Sunday: 10 AM – 6 PM.

The Salvation Army has dedicated itself to reconstructing the lives of people in need. This committed organization depends on its supplies of clothing and housewares from various people who take the time to deliver their goods to this store's many locations, unlike organizations like CP or diabetes foundations that pick up the donations. Right away, you can tell that the Salvation Army doesn't have the Winners-esque—or commercial—feeling that Value Village has. Instead, Salvation Army (at their Burlington location, also on Fairview Street) was much smaller and felt more like what a thrift outing should feel like.

Although it was not as spacious or clean as Value Village, there were many bright sides to shopping at this store. The change rooms were larger at this store than at Value Village and had bigger, full length mirrors. It wasn't just the mirrors that impressed us—so did the selections of skirts. However, the rows of pants and shirts didn't make us jump for joy. The pants mostly would suit an older taste. As for long-sleeved shirts and sweaters, you will be pleased with your discovery, if you take the time in your search. Lots of retro and vintage sweaters can easily be found, for relatively cheap prices. For a small store, Salvation Army proves to be a good stop, though. If you're looking for great deals, head over near the end of the month, or at the end of a season, as they often have End of Season specials, which result in many items being half-off.

The last stop we managed to squeeze was The Goodwill Amity Group, located on Upper James and Rymal Road. Although Goodwill's hours are not nearly impressive as Value Village (their hours being mostly 9:30 AM – 5 PM except for Thursday and Friday: 9:30 AM – 9 PM), the wide range of shirts and sweaters to choose from was more impressive than any other store. It was easy to find thick, cable-knit jackets and sweaters here. Surprisingly enough, Goodwill had a larger selection of shoes than I was expecting. If you're in the search for shoes with character, such as shiny tall black platform boots or brown bowling shoes, you can have come to the right spot.

While Value Village felt a bit more corporate and commercial, they did have the largest selection of modern and unique skirts, and sweaters, as well as jackets and belts. However, their prices were also the highest.

Goodwill and Salvation Army had less selection, this being because they are not nearly as big as Value Village. However, if you take the time to dig through the clothes they have, you are more than likely to find a few good prized possessions that are of durable quality and hold a lot of character.

If I learned anything while thrift shopping, it was to grab a bottle of water and to allow plenty of time to sift through the vast amount of clothing. Although you will probably look a little frazzled and feel dazed after sorting through aisles and aisles of clothing, you'll be impressed with the money you save. Your wallet will thank you.