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EDITORIAL: When your wedding dress finds you

There are no accidents. Take for example how I found my wedding dress.

The experience was set to be a day in Toronto spent with a childhood friend, drinking champagne and trying on dresses I cannot afford in boutiques run by ladies with attitude problems. What actually happened was the opposite, yet no coincidence.

It was a Wednesday morning, frustrated by the fact that the ?appointment only? store on Avenue Road would not return my call, I turned to the Internet to see if I could find a dress purchased by someone foolish enough to spend the kind of prices those stores charge. I was okay with the concept of a previously-loved gown.

On Kijiji, I found a dress wholesaler offering clear-out prices. I clicked on her ad and discovered that she was located in Alliston ? my hometown. I called an booked an appointment for later that day. I was excited at the prospect of shopping local, and paying ?bargain basement prices? from this basement dealing merchant.

When I arrived, the owner told me she had previously maintained a warehouse, but had moved her inventory into her home. She was getting out of the ball gown business. Sizing me up, she directed me to her selection of ?larger gowns?. Hey, I could handle the comment if it meant paying a lower price (we must chose our battles, right?). The dresses in my size didn't fit at all, neither did the dresses she carried two sizes up.

?I usually don't fit girls your size,? she said. Since I wear a size 12 in real life, I wasn't convinced of her difficulty but asked if she had anything more forgiving. We exhausted all of the possibilities. I changed back into my own clothes and prepared to leave. Defeated.

?Well there is this last one option,? she said. Turning towards me, the merchant had the most beautiful gown I'd ever seen. ?This one doesn't have a zipper so we may have a shot here.?

I snatched the dress from her and headed back into her laundry room/change room. A corset back. Perfect.

I couldn't pull the dress up over my hips, but I could get it over my head. Holding the dress in place, I emerged. We were both speechless. This was it. This was my dress. Perfect in length, perfect in size.

?I'll take it,? I said, praying the cost didn't exceed the cash I had in my purse ($500).

?Well,? said the store keeper, ?this one can go for as high as $1,000 in my merchants shops. $500 on sale. But since this is the last one I have in this style it's unlikely that a retailer would want it. Plus, I've had other girls try it on and wish I carried it in a smaller size. I'll let it go for $125.?

Could this be true? $125? Sold!

I walked away that day with my wedding dress, and a sun dress to wear to my bridal shower ($75). I ended up wearing something else to my shower, but I was happy to pay the lady $200 and walk away with two great finds.

My fiancé, Craig, was at home that day. Since he was on nights (at Honda) I asked him to wait in the laundry room while I carried my dress up the stairs and hid it in one of our sons closets.

I told him he couldn't see the dress, but told him the story of how I found it and how much I paid. He was trilled, of course.

A few hours later, he came and sat next to me on the couch with a look of worry on his face. ?I want you to take the dress back and buy the dress you really want,? he said. ?You shouldn't have to settle on our wedding day.?

He didn't get it. Not only was this the dress of my dreams (which I happily would have paid $1000 for ? if that's what it cost) but the price was right too. It was a win for the dress wholesaler, a win for the bride and a win for the grooms pocket book. A true triple header.

Later, I called my friend who was to join me on my dress hunting trip to Toronto and told her the sad news. There would be no champagne, no lunch downtown and no expensive boutiques. ?Thank God!? she said, and we laughed.

My wedding dress _ the right size at the right price ? found me, and that's no coincidence.

By Wendy Soloduik