

Episode #5 Show Notes: A Life in Antiques

I have friends who love to go to a local spa. It's relaxing, they say, to be massaged in an environment that is quiet and soothing; they drift away. I've been to a spa once in my life, and I was so antsy that I couldn't get out of there quickly enough! That's just not for me. No, I'd rather lose myself in the shade of a tree on a warm day with a good book—or, while walking the aisles of my local antique mall. The largest antique mall in Missouri is less than 10 minutes from my house in Springfield. It's huge! You can't walk the entire space in less than a couple of hours. I normally can only go on Saturdays (and I go *at least* one Saturday a month), but one day I was able to go during a weekday, and the whole experience was every bit the bliss my friends find at their spa. Crowded on weekends, on the weekday I was one of only a handful of shoppers there. Classical music played in the background, and I just meandered along rows and rows of treasures, imagining where they had come from, what I might do with them, piecing together stories they might tell.

It's at those times I start having little fantasies about opening up my own antique shop. How lovely that would be! Of course, being a shop owner or an antique dealer is a lot of work. I've met many of them in my travels, and have learned a little bit about the business from their perspective along the way. In tonight's show I feature a dealer I met a few years ago who agreed to let me interview him. He told me his story, which I recreated in a blog post out on circa19xx.com. It was my favorite post of all time, so I've decided to revisit it here.

~ Jennifer Passariello, Circa 19xx

A Life in Antiques: One Dealer's Story

The original post with several pictures of Wayne and his antiques:

<https://circa19xx.com/a-life-in-antiques-one-dealers-story/>.

A video with some of my finds from Wayne's booth:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwkXS7yOqT4&feature=emb_title

On a soggy day in 1968 a small crowd gathered in the rural village of Winston, Missouri to survey a collection of old relics up for auction. Had someone snapped a picture that day, the lean young face of Wayne Wormsley would have been captured on film, a small, featureless oval behind a sea of other faces. He had stepped to the back of the crowd, stomping his feet and shimmying the rain off the arms of his slicker. His first item of business was to secure an inconspicuous position with a clear view of the drama that would play out when the bidding began. He pulled his open slicker together at the neck to ward off a chill in the air as he looked around for his

cousin. They had lost each other in the mad dash from the car to the pavilion in an effort to outrun the steady rain that had been falling all morning. Standing there alone, Wayne assumed the role of Stranger in a Strange Land. It was Wayne's first auction, and really more his cousin's scene than his. Still, the spectacle of buying and selling promised a welcome diversion from the gloom of the day, so he stood and waited, and then snapped to attention when the auctioneer finally appeared on a riser before the crowd. Let the games begin.

Carved wooden objects and other items from the 1800s were on the program that day, and—somewhat to Wayne's surprise—he found that both the era and its artifacts appealed to him a great deal. Perhaps a more formative discovery for Wayne, however, was the psychology employed in the transactions between buyers and sellers. “People-watching” at auction, in fact, became a profitable past time for Wayne, yielding an education he would leverage throughout his life, particularly years later, when he himself became an antiques dealer. Early in that first auction in 1968 Wayne observed one wily man single-handedly shape the game in his own favor by psyching out the crowd. His strategy was to purchase a few of the first items at any price, setting up the illusion that, to him, money was no object. Then, as other, more valuable items came up for bid, few competitors bothered to enter the fray. That man walked away with treasures at excellent prices. Other characters at that auction intrigued Wayne as well. He saw a woman buying RS (Reinhold Schlegelmilch) Prussia painted porcelain bowls for \$35 a piece, which seemed an exorbitant price at the time. He discovered later, however, that those bowls held even greater value when sold in shops, and profit could be made in reselling them.

Wayne didn't buy anything at that first auction, but his attraction to nineteenth century goods had already begun to take hold, and soon other auctions would follow. The first antique he actually purchased was an old wooden hall tree with a lift-up seat and a beveled mirror. When he and his wife were first married and wanted to furnish their empty home, Wayne found he could get some lovely things at auction for modest prices. His career aspirations ultimately took him to Hallmark Cards in Kansas City, where he worked as a product planner for many years. But all the while he lived something of a double life, visiting auctions and spending up to \$100 per month acquiring furnishings for their home, and then selling surplus inventory in occasional garage sales. It wasn't until 1983 that he officially entered the antiques business on a part-time basis, acquiring his tax ID number and doing local antiques shows. Now, long retired from Hallmark, Wayne has built a thriving second career as an antiques dealer—an occupation that requires Wayne to take buying trips several times a year. Home base, however, is Platte City, Missouri's W.D. Pickers Antique Mall, where Wayne has one of the most fascinating inventories of nineteenth century items to be found in this area.

W.D. Pickers (a.k.a. “Pickers”) is one of those very special places where you can easily lose yourself in dreams and reverie as you walk the aisles and explore vast collections of hundred-year-old goods. I drive by Pickers nearly every day on my commute between Kansas City and St. Joseph, and the billboard marking the exit to it from north I-29 exerts a gravitational pull on my car that I must conscientiously resist in favor of business meetings and work

obligations. I'd much rather spend my day at Pickers, though, and, over the years, I have spent a considerable amount of time there. I didn't know it until recently, but I've been Wayne's customer for a long time, and his beautiful antiques dot the landscape of my home: one of his framed needlepoint pictures hangs in a guest room; one of his exquisite plates serves as the backdrop for a little vignette I've arranged on a shelf in a bathroom. And then, of course, there are the cards. Without knowing it, Wayne has been one of my favorite sources for trade cards; the most prized cards in my collection came from his booth. The cards, as a matter of fact, are what ultimately brought us together.

On the last day of work before the Christmas holiday, I slipped away from the office a bit early and made a beeline to Pickers. I knew they were open until 6:00 p.m., so I would have at least a couple of hours to walk the store and see what was new. As it turned out, I was there nearly two hours, but I barely got past the very first booth I came to. Just steps inside the door I saw several plastic bins in which scores of antique post and trade cards were neatly filed by category: Soap; Cologne; Dry Goods and so on. It stopped me in my tracks. I dropped my purse to the floor and settled in. I was going to be there for a while.

It wasn't long before a distinguished gentleman came up to me to say hello and ask me if I was looking for something in particular. "Just pretty things," I said, my fingers still working the cards, scanning them one by one for colors and images that appealed to me. "Let me get you a seat," he said, and disappeared around a corner. He returned moments later with an old chair. I got comfortable and entered my Zone. Time either passed or stayed still (who could tell?) while I gradually made a little pile of cards I couldn't leave behind. The man checked back now and then to see how I was doing, and just as I had flipped the last card in the bin, he told me something that just couldn't possibly have been true: "You know, I have a lot more of this stuff." He turned and unlocked a glass case behind me where smalls and treasures of particular value were displayed. He pointed out a tidy little stack of near-perfect cards, including one I had never seen before: a pristine card with a Victorian woman on it that was perforated to form puzzle pieces. I stared at that card a long while. It was rare and beautiful and completely outside my price range. Oh, but it was pretty. "Well, and I have even more stuff down here," he said, leading the way toward the far wall, where thousands of old photos were packed in bins down a long table. He showed me more and then more again. I oohed and awed. He told me of his passion for things from the 1800s, and I marveled at the depth and breadth of his collection.

On impulse I dug deep in my purse for my business card. "My name is Jennifer Passariello," I began, and handed the card to him. "I write this little blog, and I'd love to do a profile on you. Would you be open to letting me interview you?"

"I'm Wayne," he said. "and sure, you can interview me."

Wayne and I reconnected at Pickers a couple of weeks later on a bleak and blustery Monday morning. Our conversation was long and fascinating. What follows is an excerpt. He has nearly a lifetime of experience in antiques, so I wanted to learn more about the business side of that world.

Jennifer: I know you have a particular interest in the nineteenth century. But what shapes your buying decisions most: what you like, or what you think will sell?

Wayne: Both. When I go to an auction, I ask myself some questions. Is there anything interesting here? Are there items for sale here that I've had success with before? Do I think there is a number of people out there who are looking for this? Is the price reasonable?

Jennifer: 'Price' seems a very tricky part of this business.

Wayne: I refer to price guides, but those are only guides. I find that the guides are often priced too high. You have to balance that with experience.

Jennifer: What impact has eBay had on pricing? eBay prices always seem exceptionally high to me.

Wayne: eBay has been good for business because it exposes people to things they may not have known about or knew could be had. It generates interest. But it's also driven prices down. Things that once seemed rare are less so now, when you can search eBay and find sources all over the country. Naturally, rarity, or the perception of rarity, affects price.

Jennifer: I never thought about that, but it's true. When I'm looking for something very specific, I know my chances of finding it on eBay are better than in a shop. There's nothing, though, quite the same as shopping a brick and mortar antique shop—especially one like Pickers that sells bona fide antiques.

Wayne: Over the years I've heard dealers express concern about eBay as a threat to the business. But the way I look at it, the sellers on eBay—and other dealers, for that matter—have to buy their merchandise somewhere. I try to price my things reasonably so other dealers can buy them.

Jennifer: That's a good point. Incidentally, how do you define 'antique'?

Wayne: A hundred years old. Most of my things are from the 1800s. I do have some things from the early part of the twentieth century, but those things don't really appeal to me. The things that come from my era—the 1940s when I was a young boy—don't appeal to me at all.

Jennifer: Does your wife share your interest in antiques?

Wayne: She likes to decorate with antiques. She doesn't go on buying trips with me, but when I see things at auction I know she'd like, I'll pick them up. For example, I bought an old [needlepoint] sampler at an auction yesterday in Salina, Kansas. My wife has acquired several of these samplers. We have some other collections, too, such as a pretty sizable collection of old toys that are on display in our living room. But when my wife hasn't used something for a while, she'll say, why don't you try to sell it?

Jennifer: Is there anything you wouldn't want to part with?

Wayne: No. (Laughing) Everything's for sale.

Jennifer: A question I tend to get from people shopping for antiques is whether it's OK to negotiate with a dealer for a lower price. How does this work?

Wayne: Every dealer does this differently. If they've priced an item over a particular price point, if you ask, you can get 10% off if you pay by cash or check at Pickers. If you pay with a credit card, the dealer is charged a fee, so a cash sale offers more room for negotiation. Most dealers don't mind people making an offer. It's all in the way the offer is made. If they have a bad attitude, or if they make an unreasonable offer, that's what dealers don't like. If the customer is nice and makes an honest and fair offer, dealers don't usually mind. What the dealer has to take into consideration is overhead and the expense that has already gone into the item. Pickers also has a sale three times a year that most dealers participate in. Discounts range from 10% to 20%.

Jennifer: Where do you source your antiques?

Wayne: Markets and auctions around the country. Because I specialize in things from the 1800s, I like to go to markets in the east part of the country. That's where the most people lived prior to 1900.

Jennifer: Markets such as Brimfield?

Wayne: Yes, Brimfield is one. I go there every year.

Jennifer: (Squealing) I'm dying to go there.

Wayne: Brimfield advertises 5,000 dealers over a period of a week. You can see a lot of good or moderately good stuff there. But there's also stuff there I don't like, like industrial stuff. But there are antique malls there, too. On my way back home I'll make a stop in Adamstown, Pennsylvania, where there are several antique malls in town as well as two outdoor markets on Sunday mornings. Well, and I do several shows in Illinois. Antiquing is a relationships business, and you have to cultivate relationships with other dealers and customers. In that way, antiques is just like any business, really.

Jennifer: What advice would you offer to someone interested in getting into the business?

Wayne: You have to love antiques. You can't just look at them as a commodity. I know a dealer in Pennsylvania who's been really successful. His son wanted to make money like his dad, and gave the business a try. It didn't work out, though. The dealer said that his son just didn't have an eye for it, nor did he have a genuine love for it. You have to love it, because it takes a lot of effort, time, and money to do it right.

Jennifer: What else?

Wayne: You really need to have a second income. It's difficult to make a profit. Just finding the merchandise is a time-consuming and expensive proposition. You have to drive to auctions, which sometimes includes stays at hotels, and then there are other expenses. Then, of course, you have to pay rent and fees at shows or at malls. There's a lot that goes into it.

Jennifer: You have so many fantastic things in your collection. How often do you add new things to your inventory?

Wayne: Every week. Almost every day I work here at Pickers, I bring in something new.

Jennifer: Ah, I wish I didn't know that. I'll spend all of my retirement money in here.

Wayne: (Laughing) That's OK! We wouldn't mind that at all.

When I made that stop at Pickers before Christmas on my way home from work, I couldn't have predicted that I was stepping out of my car and into the biography of an antiques dealer who built a fascinating life out of the hobby I love. I couldn't have known that when Wayne brought me a chair and I plopped myself in front of his cards that a chain reaction had started that would ultimately lead me to write my favorite blog post to date.

The “Seven Habits of Successful Antiques Dealers” from iwantcollectibles.com

It isn't easy to make money selling antiques. Most people who try, aren't successful. People dip their toe into the antiques market for a number of reasons. Perhaps one of the most common is the desire to get rid of things that have either been inherited or collected over the years. Once that original inventory is gone, the seller may withdraw from the antiques business never to return. Then there are those who have romantic notions of running a dreamy little shop crammed full of treasures. They imagine a shop frequented by regular customers who purchase items big and small, then stay to chat, happy to linger in a sweet, nostalgic little space. Of course, real life often falls short the dream. Selling antiques or flea market items is a business, and as in any business, proprietors experience both highs and lows. By many accounts, it's a fun business, with opportunities to enter into a vast community comprised of both buyers and sellers who share common interests. The thrill of discovery is a boon of buying trips—and sometimes a special find can yield a healthy profit. People *do* make money selling antiques, hard as it may be, and those who are successful, according to Terry Gibbs, on his website, iwantcollectibles.com, tend to develop seven particular habits.

Terry is an expert on selling antiques in malls, flea markets, and on eBay, having sold toys and classic train sets for many years. He now teaches other antique and flea market vendors how to be successful in their own businesses. His offers classes and self-study packages on a variety of topics pertaining to antiques, but he has a number of articles available on his site for free. One of them outlines the “Seven Habits of Successful Antiques Dealers.”

1. **Habit 1: Successful dealers specialize.** They choose a relatively narrow range of antiques—by era, object category, manufacturer, etc., to study and feature. This specialized knowledge is helpful when negotiating prices (you know what items are worth), but also when projecting what is likely to sell and what isn't. Specializing in particular items also makes it easy to display items in a pleasing manner. If a dealer becomes known for a particular type of items, that reputation becomes part of the dealer's brand.

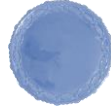
2. **Habit 2: Successful dealers establish numerous buying channels to ensure a steady stream of new merchandise at good prices.** Dealers source their merchandise from a shows, estate sales, garage sales, thrift stores, online venues, and Craig’s List ads and other ads. The really successful dealers also cultivate relationships within a network of other dealers who can provide leads on items or can sell items to each other before those items are offered to the general public.
3. **Habit 3: Successful dealers build relationships with buyers and sellers.** They are naturally outgoing and enjoy visiting—and negotiating with—other people.
4. **Habit 4: Successful dealers choose to sells items they themselves enjoy.** When dealers sell things that they themselves love, it’s easier for them to describe their items in a way that stokes the interest of buyers.
5. **Habit 5: Successful dealers know the difference between *collecting* and *investing*.** Good dealers move merchandise quickly; they don’t simply let items collect because they’re priced too high or because they can’t find a buyer in one particular venue. It’s important to sell through two or more outlets—one of which should be eBay. Gibbs said he typically sells the “good stuff” on eBay shortly after he lists them; everything else goes to shows until they’re sold.
6. **Habit 6: Successful dealers maintain positive attitudes.** On his website, Gibbs says this: "As dealers we tend to spend more time thinking and talking about the great deals we've done. When we make mistakes like buying something for too much, or selling something for less than it's worth, or - this is my most common mistake - letting something good get away because we were distracted or didn't know what it was, we learn and move on."
7. **Habit 7: Successful dealers learn new skills and adapt to changing markets and technologies.** They continually learn sales and negotiating techniques, new ways of selling online, new markets, etc.

The Top 5 Antiques and Flea Market Finds in the Midwest

There are some items that are perennial features of antiques shops in the Midwest. Here are the top 5:



Glass insulators
Range: Varies from \$8-\$400



Avon Cape Cod Dinner Plate
Range: Varies from \$10-\$25



R. Atkinson Fox Sunset Dreams
Range: \$35-\$80 Depending on Vibrancy



Art Nouveau Style Mirror (Reproduction)
Range: Varies from \$30-\$80



Hair Receiver
Range: Varies from \$5-\$25

Favorite Thing of the Week

This week's favorite thing is the flower frog—in particular vintage flower frogs. Huh? What's a flower frog? A flower frog is a device used to aid in flower arranging. Made of metal, glass, or porcelain, flower frogs have a grid or series of holes in which to place the stems of flowers. Sometimes the frog is an insert placed within a vase, other times the frog is a visible piece attached atop of vase or canister. My favorite frog is of this second type. It's a two-piece vase with a crystal base and a metal grid that sits atop it. I don't use my frog to arrange flowers, though; I use it to contain scented wax melts. The melts look pretty in the crystal, and because the grid is an open lid, the scent wafts through it.



Frogs were *the thing* in the 1920s and 1930s, but they actually date back to the late 1800s. The oldest U.S. patent for a flower frog is from 1875.