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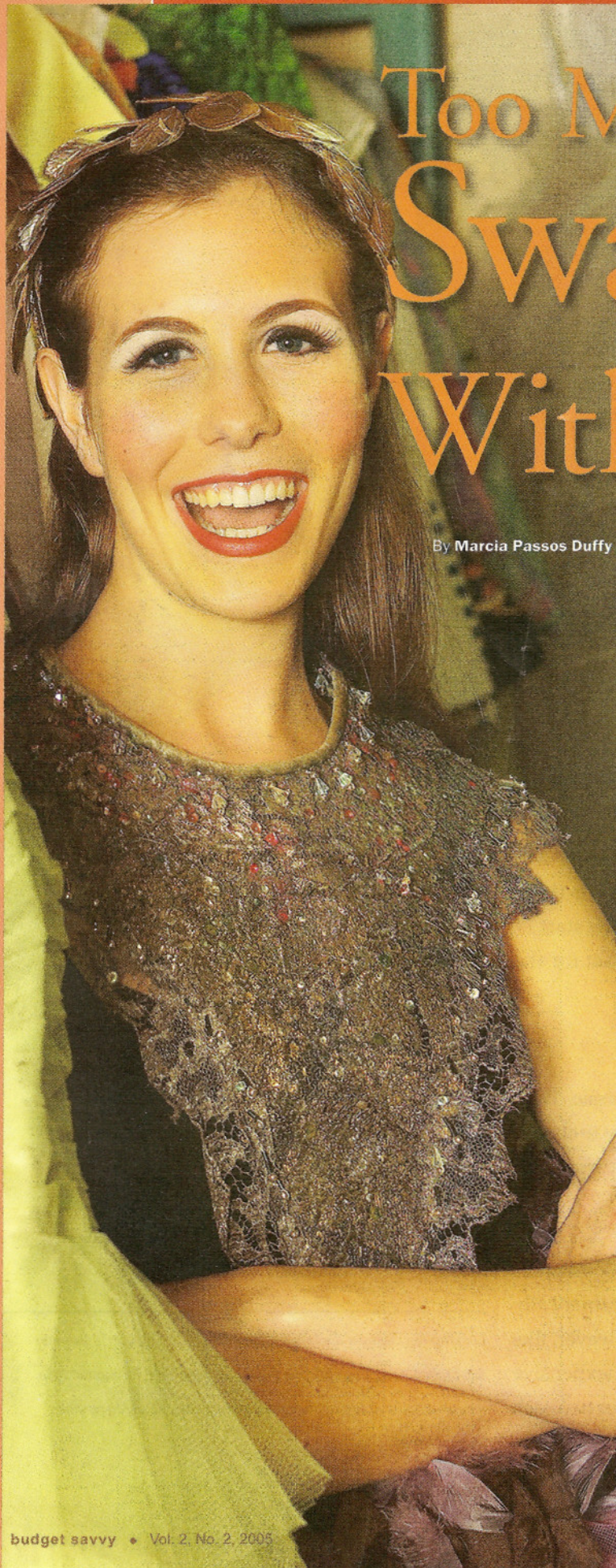
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Too Many Clothes? Swap 'Em With Friends!

By Marcia Passos Duffy

I bumped into a friend at the supermarket the other day. She eyed my sweater just a tad too enviously. "Love that color," she said. "Do you want to get rid of it?" I recoiled in mock horror. We both laughed and I politely told her to keep her paws off. It wasn't ready to be swapped – not just yet.

This friend -- along with about a half-dozen or more of us -- are clothing swappers. We meet every so often with our bags of unwanted clothing after a fall (or spring) cleaning frenzy to, well, swap clothing. My first clothes swap experience was two years ago when a friend (who probably realized we were about the same dress size) invited me to a clothes swap she organized at her house.

During my first clothing swap, I was more than a bit skeptical about what kind of clothes I could get, and, frankly, embarrassed over the hopeless threads I lugged along in a black garbage bag that nobody in their right mind could possibly want.

But what ensued was a cross between a slumber party and an open fitting room at Filene's Basement. Veteran clothes-swappers immediately told us to dump our goods on the bed and dig in. It was finder's

keepers – but you had to try it on first! One woman pulled out my awful maroon wool dress (that fit too snug and short on me). I sheepishly admitted I had brought it. The petite woman, who I only knew in passing, said she'd try it on. I grew suspicious; was she just trying to humor me? However, when she emerged from the bathroom it was like the dress was tailor-designed just for her. It was snug in all

also carries a special significance. While casually flinging a silk scarf around my neck, the owner of the article said it used to belong to her mother. I think of the history of that



the right places; the hem hit just above the knee where it should have. "I'll take it," she said and quietly folded it up into a growing pile she was gathering at her feet.

Hey, maybe this wasn't so bad after all, I thought. One woman threw a very loud flowered dress at me. "This is YOU," she said. Huh? Me, who wears muted greens, grays and black? It was not a dress I would ever try on, never mind wear. But, with prodding from the group, I did try it on and shyly modeled it. Claps, cheers from everyone. "Take it!" "Oh, it IS you!" I laughed and kept it. I mean, what did I have to lose? I've since worn it several times. A special notice to all my fellow swappers: I'm now tired of it and it will emerge again at our next clothes swap.

Which brings me to the point of a clothes swap: It's a win-win. I have come home with the most amazing clothing that I could not believe women would want to part with: a genuine pea coat, an Alpaca sweater, t-shirts & turtlenecks in every color and a purple dress I wore to a wedding. The clothing you gain

scarf whenever I wear it. In turn, I often see my clothing on friends. "Hey, that's mine!" I'll say jokingly. "But it looks better on you," I add, sincerely. It's nice to know where my clothes are. And it's nice to know where they came from.

In about two hours our clothes-swapping group will have picked over the last item. Regardless of our height or size or weight, everyone participating manages to bring home cherished items of clothing. And, for the clothing that we've given away it feels unbelievably good to find a new home with an owner. And we're not really saying goodbye to our old clothes – after all, most likely we'll see them again on our friends while grocery shopping! **bsm**

About the author:

Marcia Passos Duffy, now a veteran clothes-swapper, is a freelance writer and the publisher of *The Heart of New England* (www.TheHeartofNewEngland.com), a lifestyle magazine about the unique character of northern New England.

How to organize a successful clothes swap:

- Invite your friends & ask your friends to invite their friends.
- About 10-15 people is the goal – aim for all shapes & sizes.
- If you are hosting the swap at your house, make sure you have at least two full-length mirrors available.
- For those of us who are modest, make sure there are other rooms available to dress and undress. If this isn't possible, remind people they can wear a body suit or bathing suit underneath their clothing if they wish.
- Clothes swaps can be seasonal, but they don't have to be: The best clothes swaps have all seasons clothing.
- If two people want the same item, you can have fun with this by either a coin toss, or having each person model the item of clothing and have a vote (do this only if you're sure there won't be hard feelings).
- If you have second thoughts about an item you have up for grabs – speak up quickly. A simple "Hmm, I'm not so sure I'm ready to give that up yet," should suffice, before someone else gets too attached to the item.
- Bag up any left over clothing to take to your local Goodwill box.
- Be prepared – for a good time! You'll be surprised how much fun you'll have with a group of women trying on clothing!