Time to **Haggle**

The bad economy has made price negotiation acceptable almost anywhere money changes hands — **even the supermarket.**

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BY DAVID WRIGHT

JEN BAKER FELL IN LOVE WITH a handbag that was way too expensive for her budget, so she did what many shoppers are finding out to be the best course of action — she fought over it.

For weeks she repeatedly visited a store and carefully watched as the price started at $150, then went down to $100, and finally to $75.

Then she pounced. Baker collared the manager and told him, "This handbag's been sitting around for ages, and it's got some scratches on the hardware — can you do any better than $75?"

It's a bold trend that may be foreign to many of us, but would have been very familiar to Americans of a couple of centuries ago.

"She got it for $50 — a real deal," consumer expert Sue Perry tells Newsmax. Driving a hard bargain, or haggling, is making a vigorous comeback in America.

"Haggling has really become the new normal of handling your money," says Perry, deputy editor of Consumer Reports' *Shop Smart* magazine. "And everything is fair game these days.

"There's no shame in it, and you never know what bargains you'll get if you don't ask."

Haggling over cars and houses has long been accepted, but the bad economy has expanded the art of the negotiated deal to just about anything, from jewelry, furniture, electronics, clothes, hospital and dental bills — to even your local supermarket.

"It's now possible to bargain for a lower price just about anywhere, any time," says Janet F. Williams, author of *You Don't Ask, You Don't Get*. "And it's easier than you think: often a discount is built into the sales process, and the salesclerk may be waiting for you to ask. But they won't tell you that."

PROUD HISTORY

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"In the early days of this country, haggling was the norm," says Robert Spector, a retail historian and author of *The Mom & Pop Store: How the Unsung Heroes of the American Economy Are Surviving and Thriving.* "In the 18th and early 19th centuries, people who had money would actually dress in shabby clothes when they went shopping to make it look as if they were poor and couldn't afford any more than the bargain prices they asked for. In fact, the concept of fixed pricing didn't take hold until the first big department store — The Marble Palace — opened in the 1850s

BOTTOM LINE Get a bargain through haggling at almost anywhere you shop — at the supermarket; the bakery; the appliance and electronic store; the sales outlet; and, of course, the automobile dealership.

on Chambers and Reade Street on Manhattan's East Side."

HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

"You should always bargain in a furniture store," says Rick Doble of SavvyDiscounts.com. "I was buying a couch recently, and I spent 10 minutes just walking around in the store trying this one and that one," he says. "Then when the salesman came over I told him, 'I like this couch, but at $600, it's a bit steep for my money. Can you go down a bit?' He immediately said, 'How about $500?' So I'd already got him to come down a hundred bucks without me saying much of anything. I was patient and friendly and eventually got the couch for $400.

"And there are different ways of driving a bargain. If you buy a new refrigerator and ask for $25 off, they'll probably say no. But if you ask for free delivery and installation, it's much easier for their accounting system and they'll most likely say, No problem. Now you've saved about 50 bucks — twice as much as you first asked for." You can even bargain in the supermarket, says Doble. Ask to see the manager. "Anything with an expiration date is a bargaining target. A friend of mine noticed that a batch of milk was about to expire. The manager gave her the lot for 10 cents on the dollar."

Perry confesses: "I fell into bargaining by dumb luck. I saw a coat I loved in a neighborhood store for $300. It was out of my budget, but I got up the nerve to try it on, and it looked great. As I walked out empty-handed, the store owner stopped me and said, 'I want to move that coat — how much would you give me for it?' I gulped and lowballed him. '$75?' I ventured. 'OK,' he said. That's when I realized the possibilities."

THE RIGHT TIME

The end of the month can be a good time to bargain, Perry advises. "Store owners are balancing their books then and a few more sales, even at discounted prices, are going to make their bottom line look better."

Look for the inventory tags on items like luggage or bedding. "Often they have date stamps that tell you how long the item has been in the store, and retailers are more willing to cut the price on merchandise that's been hanging around on the sales floor a long time," says Perry.

Author Williams suggests asking this question: "What would need to take place for me to get a better deal here?" She says, "You're opening the door, and it can work wonders." □

WEBSITE BARGAINS

You can use the Internet to get a better bargain, says Sue Perry, deputy editor of Consumer Reports' *Shop Smart* magazine.

"Sign up for sales alerts on the Internet," she says. "Put in the names of your favorite stores and items you're interested in — whether it's kids' clothes, a particular pair of shoes, or a king size bed. You'll get alerts on the best sales prices coming up and often they publish free shipping codes you can use."

You can sign up for sales alerts at these great sites: ShopItToMe.com, RetailMeNot.com, PriceGrabber.com, and FreeShipping.org. □

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