

DAD GOES SHOPPING

By Barbara Correa, Staff Writer

Article Last Updated: 11/29/2007 08:58:38 PM PST

Men and shopping don't always mix. But for fearless fathers with a knack for browsing, the holidays present an opportunity to get the gift-buying done while spending some quality time with the kids.

Randy Tat is a highly committed flea-market shopper. He's been making the rounds for years, finding gifts at the Pasadena Rose Bowl, Long Beach Antique Market and Fairfax High School Trading Post.

When Tat had children, he strollered them along to the marts, and they've grown up hunting for unique bargains with Dad.

"I'm obsessed with the deal," said Tat, an artist who runs a production company and does interior design on the side. "I'm obsessed with shopping. Every time we pass a market, my kids are like, 'No Daddy, don't stop.'"

Yet, years of tagging along with Dad have taught the kids how to spot a deal.

"He gives me \$5, and I buy toys," said Ella, 9, who was shopping with her father at the biweekly flea market at Venice High School.

After sifting through some gaudy vintage jewelry, she spotted some glass spheres engraved with Elvis and Disney characters. Then she hit up her Dad for a glazed doughnut and hot chocolate from the food vendor.

Something old, something new

Tat, who lives in L.A.'s Fairfax District, is always on the lookout for articles to create artistic pieces or enhance his home decor. But his shopping addiction also means that he picks up Christmas and Hanukkah presents all year round, avoiding the stress of last-minute shopping.

"I have a 2-year-old nephew I started buying vintage puppets for when he was born," Tat said. "Now he has 50."

For adults, he combines used stuff with new.

"I find great deals on vintage antiques at flea markets, and then there's the whole Marshalls-TJ Maxx-Ross racket. So if were buying gifts for family, I might have a great vintage collectible piece combined with a set of candle holders that are new."

This year, he plans to give his brother some vintage posters. His sister-in-law loves vintage jewelry, and he's already found a great charm bracelet for her.

For nieces, nephews, and his own kids, he buys vintage curios, wind up toys and circus posters.

"My boss has everything. I found her this great '60s necklace and she loved it. I think I spent \$25 on it."

Man on a mission

Mothers still account for 85 percent of all household spending, says BSM Media, which focuses on marketing to moms. But men can still be great shoppers, especially given their ability to hone in on a target.

Todd Feldman, father of a 3-month-old son, took over the holiday shopping this year at his wife's suggestion. The real estate developer went online and quickly amassed outfits for a gaggle of young nieces and nephews.

"Buying clothing, you don't have to think as much," said Feldman, who hit a Web site operated by a client of his wife's public relations agency.

Feldman said he may branch out and go to LillianVernon.com to buy personalized gifts for adults, like a welcome plaque engraved with the family name.

The fewer stops he has to make, he said, the better.

Guys are much more specific and goal-oriented in their shopping strategy, said Jonathan Baker, owner of Skin Spa in Encino. He said he shops for only one thing: clothing for his baby daughter.

"I take some of it away from my wife so I can participate," he said. "For me, I have a goal, and if I see something I buy."

Even Randy Tat, who loves to shop, says fathers and mothers have different styles. For instance, he always thinks about what he's looking for before starting his tour of flea-market booths, while his wife looks at everything.

"I have my strategy. I have a path and I'm quick," he says. "She may be tagging behind me, and she'll find something I've already walked by."

barbara.correa@dailynews.com 818-713-3662