



# BEST FOR LESS

You don't have to spend a fortune to look great. To prove the point we asked one of the Coast's keenest op shoppers to share her story and then hit some of her favourite outlets to see what she could find. **WORDS SARAH MORGAN**

I wholeheartedly blame my grandma for my love of op shops.

It's not my fault really; you can't blame a young lass when you connect op shopping with quality time with your stylish grandma and cream-laden Devonshire teas.

It all started before I went to school. As I was a very excitable (another term for talkative and a little bit of a handful) girl, my long-suffering parents would ship me off to my grandma's for visits (aka time out for them).

In the beginning, my grandma would bribe me by saying we would visit op shops and if I was good (and didn't wander off or mess up my dress, which she had painstakingly made from fabrics she collected on said shopping trips), I was rewarded with a sweet treat. I've always been a sucker for cake.

At the start, and while biding my time before an attack on the cake stand, I used to ignore the clothes and work out ways to remove the stupid girly ribbons from my unruly hair without my eagle-eyed grandma noticing. But then, over time, I began to explore the wonders of the charity shops we visited.

At first, I would wander behind my stylish grandma and just touch all the beautiful fabrics, but I soon began to pick up her tricks of the trade. Over time, her lessons on what fabrics to look for, how to look for good quality labels and find quality clothes that with a little nip and tuck there would make a

stunning and timeless piece, began to connect.

And then it happened. One day we went to our favourite charity store – I still remember it was near the train station in Toowoomba (two streets away from a wonderful cake kitchen where the owner used to slip me ginger cookies with my milkshake) – and lo and behold they had a sale. Fill a bag with anything from the store – for just \$2.

Grandma handed me my own shopping bag and, in doing so, gave me the plastic reins to my lifelong passion for op shops.

I never looked back, even when my friends at school teased me about my love of op shopping, while they all wore the SAME doc martins, surf shirts and denim skirts.

Even at university – a time when you are meant to be out there forging your own personality – I had some peers who would sit back with a look of disdain on their faces when I told them I got my vintage skirt and scarf from an op shop in Buderim.

But, just like other female pioneers, I forged ahead. I even decided to launch my own education campaign by taking friends (and later discerning fashionista customers as I liked to call them) on op shop tours in my battered baby poo-coloured Toyota Corolla, which itself should have been in a vintage shop.

Over the years, I have found some treasures, including a floor-length, 1970s vintage Chanel dress, a stunning Spanish-influenced red velvet

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