

On Dumpster Diving

Lars Figliener

I began Dumpster diving about a year before I became homeless. I prefer the word *scavenging* and use the word *scrounging* when I mean to be obscure. I have heard people, evidently meaning to be polite, use the word *foraging*, but I prefer to reserve that word for gathering nuts and berries and such, which I do also according to the season and the opportunity. *Dumpster diving* seems to me to be a little too cute and, in my case, inaccurate because I lack the athletic ability to lower myself into the Dumpsters as the true divers do, much to their increased profit. I like the frankness of the word *scavenging*, which I can hardly think

of without picturing a big black snail on an aquarium wall. I live from the refuse of others. I am a scavenger. I think it a sound and honorable niche, although if I could I would naturally prefer to live the comfortable consumer life, perhaps—and only perhaps—as a slightly less wasteful consumer, owing to what I have learned as a scavenger. While Lizbeth and I were still living in the shack on Avenue B as my savings ran out, I put almost all of my sporadic income into rent. The necessities of daily life I began to extract from Dumpsters. Yes, we ate from them. Except for jeans, all my clothes came from Dumpsters. Boom boxes,

Previewing the Reading

1. What is Dumpster diving?
2. Give some examples of items the author collects from Dumpsters.

following questions.

Preview the reading using the guidelines on pages 28–29, and then answer the

Reading Tip

Figliener's essay is written in the first person. Notice how this point of view gives added depth and intimacy to the topic. Also, pay attention to the author's tone and his attitude toward Dumpster diving.

Lars Figliener began losing his job at a mental hospital. *Travels with Lizbeth* (1993), a book about the homelessness he experienced after fiction piece originally published in the *Threepenny Review*. His works include city of Texas at Austin. The following selection is an abridged version of a novel from the University of Texas at Austin. The following selection is an abridged version of a novel from the University of Texas at Austin. The following selection is an abridged version of a novel from the University of Texas at Austin.