

must point out that my wife is a classic fast-paced, high-maintenance, industrial shopper. If possible, I am certain that buying the perfect pair of socks would be a two-week, five-store process where she could ask salespeople countless questions about the weave, styling and durability of said socks, and they would be happy and eager to answer any and all questions.

The woman is thorough. She'll go online. She'll go to the library. She'll talk to anyone and everyone who has a wisp of information about the product she's thinking of buying.

On this project, she started out asking my daughter's piano teacher what we should buy. Great idea!

The teacher, a wonderful, classically trained instructor from Russia, said without hesitation, "Buy an acoustic piano" because the keys on digital pianos don't have the same feel as an acoustic. She didn't specify new or used, assuming that would be up to our wants, needs and budget.

By now, anyone reading this who manufactures or retails digital pianos is shaking their head and saying, "Not again." Of course, most quality digital pianos have terrific keyboard action that compares favorably to their acoustic cousins.

But this proves once again that manufacturers and retailers of digital pianos still have a great deal of work to do in educating the educators. In most cases, the teachers have the ultimate influence over what the parent buys.

I explained to my wife why this perfectly capable, professionally trained piano teacher was wrong, and suggested that we keep an open mind.

Of course, my wife didn't believe me. So, she went to another expert—my mother-in-law.

Ask Mom

My wife's mother knows a thing or two about pianos. She studied classical music in her youth, taught both of her daughters to play and continues to play her Steinway grand today.

On the issue of what to buy, my mother-in-law said "an acoustic piano" of course because the digitals couldn't possibly have the same touch and feel as an acoustic. Even my daughter got into the act. "Daddy, I want a real piano," she said.

My mother-in-law then said that her friend was selling a piano, or that she might know of some others for sale in the neighborhood. How? I don't know, but she seems to have a resource or two in the neighborhood for anything in the free world that you might want to buy. She's a lovely woman, but no friend of the music retailer, I can tell you.

She also suggested that we check out classified ads and garage sales. My lovely bride was two steps ahead of her.

My wife had been combing both resources for months. She'd find something in, say, the \$50-to-\$150 range, then tell me, "Here's one! Let's go look at it tonight!"

I tried to explain to her that the editorial director of a nationally distributed trade magazine covering the musical products field could not have a \$100 garage-sale piano in his home.

But she kept hammering the theme until I finally relented. We went to look at a \$75 used piano.

My God, It's Pink!

We arrived at the home of a kind gentleman in his mid-50s. His grown daughters had studied on the piano he was about to show us.

They had also turned it into an art project. The damned thing was painted pink! Not even a lacquered pink! They bought a gallon of pink house paint and slapped on a coat. One coat. Not even two to cover the whole thing.

Needless to say, my daughter loved it.

We hit the keys. While this was billed as an acoustic piano, it must have had some sort of built-in electronics because there was a seven-second delay between the time you hit a note and a sound actually reverberating. The keyboard actually slid

in and out, but this wasn't an original feature. Somebody removed the screws.

But my wife and daughter wanted to buy it. We walked outside to discuss this and I said, "Absolutely! We can buy it just as soon as you can PRY THE CHECKBOOK FROM MY COLD, DEAD HANDS!"

Shop 'Til You Drop

So, my wife then ventured into retail land. She stopped at a local piano store to purchase a new lesson book for my daughter and shopped for some new, upright pianos.

She came home ghost-white and began eating licorice like it was aspirin.

She had developed a severe case of sticker-shock syndrome.

Needless to say, the price of a new piano was just a wee bit above the \$50-to-\$150 range she had been looking at.

This was a temporary setback. My wife knew this was like being thrown from a horse. She had to get back into the saddle and piano shop again.

For the next several weeks, she continued to comb the newspaper for sales and the Holy Grail of garage sale pianos. She also stopped at a few local retail stores, looking at used pianos, and even stepped over to check out digital keyboards. To those sales professionals who answered her battery of questions, thank you and I'm sorry that each and every one of you couldn't get the sale.

In the meantime, my mother-in-law said a friend of hers was selling a Wurlitzer spinet piano for around \$500.

"I don't want a spinet," I said. "What color is it?"

"Cherry, I think."

"Ugh."

"Beggars can't be choosers," said my wife. "You're just being shallow."

It took her 16 years of marriage to figure that out?

The Stretch Drive, I Think

Throughout the process, I had an