

The  
Dumpster Diver's  
Guide to the Galaxy

What You Have to Say About Garbage Digging

Last updated September 10, 1998

I built this page as a place for all the wonderful garbage digging advice and garbage anecdotes that you the readers have sent me. Here goes:

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From PsyCHO puNk, September 4, 1998:

I like garbage, i found some kool toys in this dumpster before and a record player and some kick ass electronic crap that has switches buttons lights n stuff.

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From Joseph , August 31, 1998:

When I was a kid, instead of making friends and playing with other kids, my favorite thing to do was following the garbage truck.

I often would do this on the way to school. Our garbage day was Friday, and this was pushed back to Saturday when Monday was a Holiday Those were my favorite days of the year, because I could spend a whole morning watching the garbage truck, rather than just on a measly walk to school (that's assuming the garbage truck was running early!)

I loved to watch stuff get cruched. Yeah that's it! Even today, if I see a garbage truck about to pick up a load of highly crunchable junk (you know, sofas, chairs, TVs that sort of thing) I'll stop and wait!

I would study garbage truck packing mechanisms, seeing how they operate. I've noticed different designs (one panel and two panel mechanisms) and how the panels work. I've even noticed that the panels work differently on Japanese garbage trucks when I was in Japan! And when I was in France (this is now 15 years ago), I noticed on one truck, the packing mechanism was a grilled fork which was constantly in motion, unlike the usual case where the motion is started by a lever. I wonder when the standard rear-loading packing mechanism was invented and by whom. Before that, I imagine they simply loaded the garbage on a wagon or truck. I tried doing a search on the Internet for the history on garbage trucks but with no luck.

I used to save all kinds of junk (which my mother routinely threw out!) and years ago I did rescue items I thought were of value (I used to have a paper route when I was in high school, and excellent profession for trash hunting, because you do your work in the early morning, so you have first crack at everything before the garbage truck comes. One of my routes was in a mid-to-low income housing area, which tended to have tons of garbage! It was also a fun place to watch the garbage truck do its work!

Some of my finds in those early days were:

- 1) A working b/w TV (exactly the same model as the one my dad was hanging onto, except BETTER!)
- 2) A small stamp collection
- 3) Lots of books
- 4) Lots of other stuff I can't remember.

When I was living in a Student Co-Operative, I sure noticed the stuff people threw out. Appalled at such waste, I set up a donation bin for people to put things into, which I would then take down to goodwill. I was amazed how fast it filled up!

I don't save too much these days, because I tend to move around a lot. For me it is easier to get rid of a lot of stuff on moving day, rather than pay the movers to haul it. I usually make donations to Goodwill.

From Jim

August 26, 1998:

i find it awfully interesting that tv advertises recycle recycle recycle only when the business man profits by suckering people to "donate their glass, plastic, trash, also your goodwills and starvation armies like to say your presspissing, and i tell those low lifes 1 you dont own the property, it is owned by the community, and you leach off the communitys good will, and on top of that your a sleazy maggott infested vulture vomit low life to call the rich mans rabid watch dogs, to take away the freedom of people only wanting make use of what your not for profit 501 c-3 would rather destroy , and i also add in a world court trial you would be the ones to jailed. i have been known to stand my ground and not even be the slightest bit intimidated by the bubble gum machines, cause i would upon being stopped, i would recite a bunch of law citationm, then proceed to bombard them with a bunch of questions, so fast and furious they get the point i carry a broom and a dust pan, aint found a lawyer yet who i cant give em a run for their money, and i do this in a controwled manner, i have been known to recite many ordinance violations, and boy do they hate it when i preserve virtually undiniable proof of our conversation, ive also asked them if they would like me to be citizen of the year and report every law violation i see even if its someone dropping a cigarette butt, they very quickly fugure by my lighting fast questions, my citing "the laws they aint enforcing" and when i point out i aint doing anything against anybodys will , i actually had 1 cop tell a salvivating rookie you dont mess with him, you dont know who youre messibng with, hows that for a complement, i aint against cops or government i just want fair cops and government, feel free to coment on the below article,

1- only liars cheats and theives hate tape or video recording, which is the cheapest easiest way for the little individual to protect themselves us code title 18 2511-2d unconditional tape or video recording= honest fair government tell me what tyou think feel free to disagree with me but first tell me you are willing to sign a waver that for the rest of your life, you will willingly concent to being ripped off, and will invite any body to plunder your freely given bank account numbers, social security number, you will invite strangers to bodily threaten you, set you up scam you, borrow your possessions promise to return them and they never will

have to, you will put large 4x8 signs on all facing boundry lines at least 4 saying i believe all public servents have the right to do as they dam well please, to threaten people with jail, for only wanting to have undiniable proof how indivivuals are lied to, threatned, when they dont have no connection\$, and i will freely concent to being royally raped of my rights as a american to protect me and other americans

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From mrdrrthgovt, August 13, 1998:

if u like skatin go to skateboard places they throw away go bolt and strached decks

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From Anonymous, August 12, 1998:

About a hundred years ago, when I was a young married soldier, stationed in a fairly high-cost living area of the U.S., I was faced with the problem of having to mow my government-owned lawn. Now, on the surface, it wasn't a big problem, other than the fact that I didn't own a lawn mower! Low and behold, one day I witnessed a neighbor placing a gas-operated lawn mower into the neighborhood dumpster. I waited for him to depart the area and approached the dumpster. I quickly removed the mower and brought it home. \$10.00 to a local small engine repairman, about an hour of walking, and a tiny amount of sweat later, my lawn was immaculately manicured! I kept that mower for about 12 years before finally "deepsixing" it!

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From Paul August 11, 1998:

Cool page! I'm just getting into diving, and my wife (an up-tight corporate type) is getting into it too! Just checking out other's experiences.

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From Anne, August 16, 1998:

Hi: Kindly help me.

I've been trying to find somebody to help me for quite awhile. I'm trying to "hire" somebody to go to our local dump to try to find a sentimental item that has been in my family for years. My brother's careless wife threw it away. This is a high quality vanadium knife. It is part of a set that we've had for years. I contacted the manufacturer who assures me that the knife is most likely in very good condition. Please help me. I need guidance. I'm new at dumpster diving.

Sincerely,

ANNE 16 August 1998

If you live near the Yucaipa, CA or Redlands, CA and can help Anne find her knife, please send her an e-mail. -Marduk

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From Daniel

August 10, 1998:

I just surfed on your page and it's cool. I used to be a squatter and dumpster dived for a living. I still do it occasionally because there's always good stuff someone is throwing away. For example, when I was laboring for construction sites they used to throw away perfectly good door frames, lumber, bx cable, etc. A while ago trash pickers started finding guns and knives in the garbage cans around the Bronx county courthouse. It seems the crooks going to court stashed their weapons because of the metal detectors. Pretty funny- ha? Keep up the good work. L8R.

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From Michael

July 24, 1998:

There is so much waste in America. People seem to have money to throw away. They don't like the idea of throwing away money so they buy things, use them a little, and then throw them away before they have been fully used, before they have reached old age. The U.S.A. has a capitalistic economic system. Capitalism is touted as being "efficient". But then why is there so much waste of usable items? If Capitalism were really efficient then there wouldn't be scavengeable things in dumpsters. The system would use things until they are useless. If Capitalism were really efficient then there wouldn't be any garbage at all! Are there dumpsters in the wild? Animals eat, sleep, clean themselves, etc. like people, but they can do it without producing garbage. Or at least nature finds a use for whatever they may throw away. Really everything is re-cycleable. Everything is made ultimately of electrons, protons, and neutrons, right? So all things are equal before God. But we make judgements about what is good or bad. We call some things useable and some things "garbage". By useable we usually really mean "sellable". We serve mammon and not God. So we can't recognise the value of things before God. All things have a place in God's plan and purpose. "There is a time to every purpose under heaven". But because we focus our attention on money and profit, because we want to take more than we give, we are blind to God's plan for this material world. Because we are impatient to accumulate ever more wealth without regard to the consequences, we can't see the value in ALL things. All things have value. God created all things. They all must have their rightful place in God's creation. If we would be patient we could see that value. If we could understand that we ALREADY HAVE the thing that is of the greatest value: the life in us that is God, the soul that we are, that is eternal and immortal, then we would be able to see the world of material things from the proper perspective. So we wouldn't be so wasteful. We would all take the time necessary to use things to their limit, to their complete value. Then of course there would be no dumpster-diving. But we would rather not do that anyway if we didn't have to right? We think we have to save money, right? But isn't God the greatest pleasure? Greater than saving money?

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From Russell

July 23, 1998:

I love it :) I found two perfectly good Compaq 386's with monitors/keyboards and the such behind a local computer store. They made great gifts to family members who didn't have a computer :)

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From Jennifer, July 19, 1998:

The old saying goes, "One man's garbage is another man's treasure" is quite true!

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From M. in Florida, July 19, 1998:

Would you believe that my husband will get all the way into a dumpster for less than \$5!

--It's not all bad though... we live in a college town (Univ. of Florida) and my husband will take an entire week off of work to dumpster dive when the college kids are moving out and in (AUG). During this week he usually averages \$2000.-3000. in stuff. We garage sale and pawn shop it all of the following weekend. We have money to go on vacation and the extra money's really nice.

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From Anonymous, July 14, 1998:

I have nothing against people looking for things they might want or need in the garbage, BUT please tell them not to leave the unwanted stuff on the ground. I live by a dumpster and it is very annoying to see this not to mention embarrassing when company comes. THANK YOU!!!!

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From Annabelle, July 13, 1998:

Me and my friend Barry used to climb in the big dumpsters and search through from top to bottom. We had a great system of doing corners and piling everthing up on the other side. Found some incredible stuff! Also used to raid the bakery's trash for mis-sliced bread loaves. In bags, perfectly good, just mis-sliced... I never understood why they didn't donate all that to the local homeless shelter!

Take care,  
Annabelle

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From George                      July 12, 1998:

I like to dig in the real old dumps for old bottles insulators etc these are usually uncovered when constuction co dig up older areas of a city for new buildings or the like some of these old dumps date back wellover a hundred years !

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From Susan                      July 11, 1998:

What's it like to live on a garbage dump? Where in the world do people do this? I'd love to know more...

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From Jon, July 6, 1998:

I think it's a really good idea to go digging through people's trash even if it sounds weird it's perfectly legal and saves alot

of people time and money. I'm sure my mom would disagree but I plan to do alot of dumpster diving with any and all of my friends who will participate.

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From Jeremy July 4, 1998:

I think that more people should think the way you do. I think the same in many ways. I wish that the us was more in to recycling.

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From Paul June 21, 1998:

By now you must have heard about the high tech dumpster divers featured in Wired a few months back. It's 2 guys putting together systems from garbage. Keep it up. One thing you didn't mention is that intelligence must really be the biggest factor in this. (Of coure you have your social pariah factor, too.) I assume you would have to know exactly what it is you find. ps You might to check your site for spelling...

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From Cory June 19, 1998:

I have been dumpster diving for about a year. I mainly dumpster dive behind the movie rental places, they are a great source of movie posters, cardboard stands , and sometimes movies with slight problems. And best of all, it is all free. I love dumpster diving!!!!

Cory Bruce

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From Emory June 17, 1998:

I'm a retired navy guy and I've been a dumpster diver for years. I've always found some good pickings around the residential areas around the bases that I have been stationed at. Navy people often transfer on the average of every three years and a lot of them get rid of a lot of stuff instead of lugging it around from place to place. I've collected everything from riding mowers to computers. I just recently found four IBM PS2 Value Point computers. They were missing the memory and hard drives but otherwise they worked fine. I like to go on dumpster runs and trash runs because it gives me a sense of adventure that comes from treasure hunting. I also believe that it is a public service to recycle items that would only be a waste cluttering up a dump or land fill. Well I'm going to step down off of my soap box for now and I wish anyone that reads this Good Hunting and Good Luck.

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From Angela

Marduk,  
I'm an undergraduate at a small private college in east Tennessee and my room is full of cool "garbage". It started off with just a few unwanted items and then grew and grew untill my room became a piece of art. I have christmas tree likes strung across the top portion of my wall wich adds a great deal of warmth. My curtains which are a beautiful Lauren Ashley design where thrown out by one

of the neighbors (who redecorates every room in her house about every six months or so), but anyways the list of goodies just goes on and on. My parents like yourself live in a new residential area and that is where I get all of my goodies. At first I felt kind of ridiculous and my father strongly disapproved, but then it became a very invigorating and exciting pastime for me. When my father saw how neat and stylish my room was he congratulated me on my decor. I really enjoyed your website. Thanks for all the hints.---

happy hunting,  
angela wright

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From Debbie

Oh I Love to find garbage, actually to me its not garbage its treasures that I resell or keep, found some great stuff in those cans,, and I am addicted to it (((GRIN))) I have found a sectional rug, electronic games, clothes, pots, pans toys, multi cd player, vcrs, desk, shelves.

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From William June 6, 1998:

Hi mark

thanks for posting my info. Yes i have found many nice things in my line of work, (on site dumpster repair and painting ) . I agree wth many of your fans about checking around the apartment complexes close to colleges. I have found Danish mahogany coffe tables, polo suit cases, computer gear clothes and even money! \$20. one time \$100. another time. my suggestion for the prime hunting time, is right before school lets out , cause what they can't carry with them goes in the dumpster. I highly recomend the UNC-law school area in durham NC.

Mark, i had a cousin in richmond va, that had a regular route he followed, and he collected enought (dumpster gold )and sold it to earn \$15,000. one year. He and his wife took the proceeds and had a fab vacation in the islands. this story is true.

If half of the recoverable items could be salvaged, their is no telling the benifit we would all reap, less landfills less depletion of natural resourses ect . if one were to come up with away to organize the culling of salvagable thing from refuse collection one could have a gold mind on his or her hands . If you or any of your readers has any thoughts I would very much like to hear them.

call fax or e-mail me sincerly Willy stapp/the ole dumpster dog.  
18047241717 phone/ 18047242730 fax/ ccr4u@gamewood.net  
Bye Bye

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From Raoul, June 2, 1998:

Garbage rocks the world.....

I found a few cell phones the other day....hehehehehehehe

profits galore.....

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From bev, June 2, 1998:

Who needs drugs. Dumpster diving is the best high in the world. I have a blast digging and bringing home the treasures I find. Once or twice a month I have a yard sale and make \$\$\$\$\$ just from things I find in the trash. I also love to redo old trashed furniture. Does anyone know of a website that offers ideas or suggestions for the outdated end tables and metal kitchen chairs that seem to be in such abundance. My husband even fixed a long handled broom stick with a huge hook on the end to make it easier to DIG! I love this career. I gave up a 40,000 a year job to pursue this "addicti I have never been happier in my life. Forget the cold corporate world. Give me the trashy treasured life any day! ITS COOL!!!

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From jesse, June 1, 1998:

It's a shame Americans waste so much you dont see it in other countries. I try to save what I can but being in the army I dont have the room for much. I still find valuable stuff I wish people didnt look down on me because of my wonderful hobby I finally discovered the internet I had no idea so many others shared my intrest in this fascinating hobby.

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From William June 1, 1998:

My name is william stapp. I have been diving for nine years. In fact i make a very good living with my relationship with dumpsters. I started a company called commonwealth container repair. We specialize in dumpster refurbishment. You can not believe the dumpster gold, (as i call it) I have found. Anyway for anyone interested, I can teach people how to make money with dumpsters. Please post this and keep on diving.

thanks Willy stapp  
president. CCR.

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From Ammon May 21, 1998:

Hellow i am 14 i dig in dumpsters over time i have gotten many good things from dumpsters i wont go in to great detail but some of the things are a n64 from block buster video a printer, electronic organizers, tv cables, phones, and lots of other things in the quido shack dump i have found lots and lots of food and candy f. her stors there is a lot more but i will only name 1 more thing i was looking behind a mall and came across a farly big ARCADE GAME it was one of crane games you put candy in so later that night we drove to the mall with some of my frendz and loaded it up and put it in my room we hade to do some fixing to get it to work but now i fill it with candy i get frome the dumps well this has been very interesting but my time is over. Oh yeah, please Email me and tell me what you have gotten from the dumps. My Email address is apwilliamson@usa.net

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From Roddy, May 10, 1998:

Some of the best places to get soda and beer cans are carwash dumpsters. Saturday and Sunday mornings yield the best results.

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From Diver Dave, May 7, 1998:

Garbage is cool. The "rich folk" throw away stuff cuz they don't match the paint. Dive the upper class.

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From Bill May 6, 1998:

You have some great stuff here. It has been several years since I last when garbage digging, but I appreciate your points. There is one point that you missed and should certainly be mentioned, especially when speaking to those who have not yet started digging.

We always tried to clean up after ourselves. We were once digging when we ran across another fellow digging. He was throwing trash all over the place. This is unethical and should be discouraged, since that sort of action ruins it for us all. Soon after that occurrence the place of business put a fence around it dumpster and kept it locked, and when we came around the security guards ran us off.

I have to tell you about the "mother lode" I once discovered. I was driving by a welding supply warehouse and noticed a pile of welding lead on several pallets, sitting next to the dumpster. Not wishing to get in trouble I went in and asked if it was alright for me to cart the stuff off. They said to help my self. I loaded my truck 3 times with copper welding lead, then spend the next month stripping insulation. I made about \$3000 selling the copper as scrap. When people would look down their noses at me for digging, I would just remember hitting the mother lode and just smile and agree that perhaps that is something they were just to good to do.

Another place that is good, or use to be, is newspaper distributors. Ask them if you can have their discards, and take them to sell at the paper recycling place. Usually they are happy to just be rid of the papers.

Happy digging,

Bill

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From Mary

I discovered dumpster diving in Ft. Worth Texas and got hooked. However because I am married to a Military man we have recently been transfered to Scott Air Force Base in Ill. I have learned from the locals here that Dumpster Diving and collecting things from the residential trash is against the law. A fine of 200.00 if caught. Have you ever run into this problem before. I was wondering if anyone had been arrested for such an act.

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From Carrie, May 3, 1998:

I have always been a collector of many things. I have found many great things that I have a passion for. I am drawn to old things and dumpster diving for me is a lot of fun. I have found a beautiful skeleton key, old wooden ball, crucifix, two great ottomans, which I will be getting slipcovered, Alice in Wonderland Figurine, which is old. And many more. I am interested in setting up my page dedicated to garbage finds, and would like to have permission to use your link. Right now, it is under construction, but hopefully will have it finished soon. My town is having clean up week, so my husband and I are getting ready to go out tonight we've been waiting all year. The great thing about it is that it is free, I like to decorate in a tasteful way and use many of my finds. Hope to talk to you later and Happy Hunting!

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From Anonymous, April 30, 1998:

I enjoyed your page, I'm not sure where your from but I'm in Sydney Australia and we have a great system that the local city councils have a throw out week once a year. What actually happens is that every body put out their garbage onto the footpath and then at the end of the week the council trucks pick it up to take to the local tip.

I might add the some of the carbage consists of funiture, electrical stuff, tree cuttings and garden clippings (great to mulch down and use in the garden). I'll keep in touch.

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From Anonymous, March 28, 1998:

garbage is the greatest thing in the world.

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From redxiii99, March 27, 1998:

Hey, what up? I never really bothered with garbage diggin but I admit I am a major packrat. One friend of mine calls me a walkin tool box. I used to have a cool pair of mini pliers but they broke. I'm always brinin shit home like sticks, rocks, rope, metal, glass, and anythin that looks cool and/or useful. If you haven't tried it already, might i suggest hangin around the back of home depot if there's one in your area. I'm sure they throw out all kinds of shit. Well I'm gonna go. Keep on diggin!

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From techpirate, April 17, 1998:

I work for a construction company that builds new residential housing and my finds have ranged from new, full lengths of lumber to new appliances with minor defects. It amazes me how wasteful these builders are yet I am grateful that I have access to all this stuff. I've completed many projects on my home using all free material.

I suggest that people should makes friends with someone in the building trades for access to these goldmines. More than likely, if you ask to rummage through their industrial dumpsters or work sites

after working hours they'll be more than happy to get rid of all that "scrap".

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From Anonymous, April 3, 1998:

I warmed up to Dumpster Diving after moving to a rural area. I found that my job skills were not marketable away from the city and so found myself bidding on (successfully!) the position of Landfill Supervisor. This job entailed travelling around the county to two different landfills a day. There were a total of 5 landfills involved, all small and isolated. My job consisted of opening the gate and sitting there for four hours until it was time to close the gate again. So, boredom as much as anything provided me with the inspiration to start digging. I have found Barbies and barbie clothes, a desk, MANY returnable bottles, a working chainsaw as well as several that came in handy for parts, pots, Pans

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From Robert April 1, 1998:

I live in a small city, Stillwater, ok. where there is a lot of business' and alot of music or sound stores and they are great for digging in.

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From Diving Don, April 1, 1998

I've been diving now for about 24 years and had only one close call. I was in a dumpster behind a TV repair shop when the garbage truck came and picked the dumpster and emptied it in the truck. He started to compact the load while I shouted my fool head off. Somebody heard me hollering and I was able to get with just a few scratches. It was a while before I climbed in a dumpster again. Now I only go out after the businesses are closed. I had one other scare a couple years ago, I was in a dumpster at a trailer park when I found a 12 year old boy hiding in a trashbag with the top tied up. He said he enjoyed being in there. I told him about my close call but it didn't seem to faze him. I also concerned about him suffocating but he had small holes in the bag so he could breath. Other than that I've probably collected several thousands of dollars worth of stuff I didn't have to buy and it didn't go to a landfill to take up more space.

Is that an April Fools' story? Hard to say, but it's a good story nonetheless. - Mark

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From Paul March 31, 1998:

RECYCLING RESEARCH AND SOUTH LONDON RECYCLING STORE AT  
london-recycling.demon.co.uk  
community recycling network at crn@gn.apc.org

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From Anonymous, March 27, 1998:

trash is also extremely useful in making found objects art. by incorporating the found object (it's not trash!) into other media, some of the most beautiful art can be created!