

One person's junk]

By Brian Lockhart

When I was a kid, maybe seven years old, I received a rather fun toy at Christmas one year.

It was a battery-operated robot that walked, spoke, and spit out little puffs of smoke. It had some kind of flashy robot name, which I can't remember, and was probably a bi-product of the many sci-fi movies or TV shows of the era that had a robot.

Cost at the time was probably \$5 to \$7.

A few years ago, while flipping through the channels, I stopped at show that was featuring collectibles. The host was showing everything from baseball cards to Beanie Babies and describing the current bidding prices for these apparently rare items that collectors pay big bucks for.

And then, there it was - my smoke puffing robot. The host flipped the switch and the robot started walking around the table.

Current collectible price - \$3,000.

Who knows what happened to that robot? I asked my mother, and she played dumb, although I suspect somewhere along the line when cleaning out the house, she donated it or gave it to someone else who had young kids. Mothers tend to do that when they realize their kid hasn't played with something for years and has forgotten all about it.

Then it occurred to me - didn't I have a collection of baseball and hockey cards at one time? Maybe I had a valuable rookie card in that collection.

Nope, that collection is lost to history.

I understand why people collect things. For them, it is just something they like and enjoy, and it brings a sense of happiness to have them.

I know someone who collects unicorns. I also have a friend who collects frogs. One corner of her house is dedicated to porcelain, glass, and metal frogs from around the world.

The thing about a collection is it is very personal. You may really love your collection of shot-glasses from famous bars you knocked one back in, or that matchbook collection you put together from hotels you stayed at when you were a travelling shoelace salesman, but they mean nothing to anyone else.

When a person passes away, and the family, usually the children, are tasked with cleaning out a person's residence, those cherished collections usually pose a problem.

That collection of Spode Collectible Plates that adorned the wall of Aunt Mabel's dining room, may have meant the world to her, but for those cleaning the place out, they have little or no sentimental value.

Most likely they will be put in a box and stored in an attic, or sold off at a garage sale.

It is the garage sale, that proves that one person's junk, is another person's treasure.

I don't attend garage sales, but something caught my eyes years ago when I was passing by one.

I bought a 1962 Silvertone guitar for \$20. It was a Gibson Les Paul knock off ? black with a white pick guard. The woman selling it referred to it as ?that old guitar that's been laying around the basement.?

She thought getting \$20 for it was a good deal for her ? and it was at the time.

Silvertone guitars were mass produced in the late 50's and early 60's. They were inexpensive and ordered through the Sears Roebuck catalogue.

For some reason there has been a resurgence in interest in this brand ? I guess because they are no longer produced. I went on a few websites and found the model guitar I have is now selling for up to \$1,200. I think that's the only time I bought something that actually went up in value.

It hangs on the wall beside some other instruments as more of a décor piece, and I suspect some day it will also put back out at a garage sale.

What I don't understand is paying a big price for a collectible. When I see a new record being set for a painting at some auction, I am baffled as to why a rich guy would want to spend \$40 million on a Van Gogh, even if he could afford it. For that kind of money, wouldn't it be a lot more fun to buy a boat?

The value of many objects is simply what someone else is willing to pay to have it. I have no idea why someone would pay \$3,000 for a toy robot.

I don't have the robot anymore, but somewhere out there, a grown man is proudly displaying that robot as part of collection of vintage toys.