

Some years ago an 80-year-old Polish war veteran hit the headlines when the local council tried to force him out of his own house in London because it had become a health hazard. Mr Trebus, who'd had to leave his hometown in Poland after Germany invaded at the beginning of the Second World War, later served as a tank commander in the British army. There are also a large number of dead batteries which I've been meaning to take to the recycling centre and a number of leaflets – one about a local gym I still haven't joined, THREE about sponsoring a child in a developing country and several advertising a local takeaway which has now closed down. There are various odd screws, nails and pins (I'd have to buy new packs if I didn't keep them), a broken cup (I must buy some glue to stick it back together), and finally a large number of foreign coins, quite a few preceding the introduction of the euro (they might be collector's items one day, they might be valuable!). He would tour the local neighbourhood recovering things from L.O.O.D. bins that others had seen as mere rubbish. How many of you have a drawer like this in the kitchen: a drawer full of caution and fear, stuffed with good intentions (albeit unfilled); packed with optimism and meanness and, of course, all rubbish? By the time the council came to evict the old man, he had just a tiny space in his kitchen to live in, surrounded by stacks of old newspapers and children's toys. He then took this junk home and sorted it into piles of similar things: a room packed with vacuum cleaners, a corner for old doors, another for windows. Personally, I have boxes of old comics in the attic which I don't read, but can't get rid of. Who hasn't made some impulse purchase, which has then been left lying in some cupboard for years? He also managed to acquire practically every record Elvis Presley ever made. Increasingly complained about rat infestations. Yet he resisted eviction, accusing the local council of acting like dictators and arguing that everything he kept was useful. He was clearly over-the-top, but let's face it, there's a bit of Mr Trebus in most of us. How many collectors do you know? In my drawer, there are a number of instructions and guarantees for things I've bought over the years, just in case they break down or I forget how to use them. Perhaps it was the trauma of what he lost when he left Poland that caused his obsession. Who knows? – but after he settled in London, he began collecting

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