



Honest Abe Coin
...Almost Gone

THE IDLE AMERICAN

A Quarter for Your Thoughts?...

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Economists have suggested for years that we'd be better served if the U.S. Mint ceased turning out pennies--the nation's lowest denominational coin. Though some 140 billion pennies remain in circulation--many in jars, under sofa cushions, on sidewalks or playgrounds--their demise will be gradual.

With cost-cutting the order of the day, why should we mint coins that cost three cents each to make?

Hoarders--I am told--are combing through garage sales, seeking piggy banks--long considered depositories for pennies--anticipating their becoming collectors' items. A clue is that at such sales, prices for piggy banks now are negotiated upwards....

The penny--introduced in 1793--became "Lincolnesque" when "Honest Abe's" likeness was struck thereon in 1909, the 100th anniversary of his birth.

It's a sad prospect, really, but pennies don't buy much anymore. You'll need a pocketful to buy McDonald's coffee, and at Starbucks, take a wheelbarrow.

"Penny" will remain a cute girls' name, but it won't buy anyone else's thoughts that are now going for a quarter or more, and sometimes even priceless....

I--and likely a few million others--have stopped in our tracks for decades to claim grounded pennies. General disregard for their meager value--coupled with the exertion of bending over--have lessened the practice.

It's been several years since I've picked one up. Should I be tempted by a quarter, however, I may stick a wad of chewing gum on my cane for, uh "bendless retrieval."

If anyone is watching, I may use store-bought "stick-um."...

Pennies, long romanticized, have mobilized folks to embark on noble causes, promoting "one for all and all for one" projects.

Glenn Dromgoole, who spent more than 30 years in newspapering--mostly as editor of the *Abilene Reporter News*--is a recognized author, now having penned 35 books. This friend of almost 60 years wrote *The Power of a Penny* back in 1999.

His 35 books--several on best-seller lists--can't be put down once picked up, unlike mine, which can't be picked up when put down....

Years ago at an overnight East Texas speaking engagement, someone broke my car window, I assumed to access the case of books on the back seat.

He or she opened the case, took one copy and tossed it on the sidewalk near my motel room door.

Now that's a discerning reader right there....

One great "penny story" has been shared for decades in Snyder, TX, where a fidgety youngster attended church regularly.

Every Sunday, his mom refused to let him join the "march to the penny jar" at the altar.

That's where children--largely pre-schoolers--dropped pennies for missionaries on Sundays nearest their birthdays....

The youngster was barely three years old when he first noticed the practice. Several months away from his fourth birthday, he squirmed each Sunday to participate, his eligibility be hanged.

Finally, his fourth birthday Sunday arrived, and his mother set him free to take his four pennies to the altar.

Racing forward, he rang the rafters with an unlikely and "unchurchy" expression: "Hi yo, Silver, here I come!"....

Had Dromgoole come across the Snyder story when he wrote about pennies, I'm sure he would have "scooped" me. But this one time, I am first, as far as I know.

The Power of a Penny, by the way, is still available, prominently displayed at the Texas Star Trading Company in Abilene. Multiple copies sold last year, and it'll likely continue to be offered for years to come.

After all, Dromgoole and his wife, Carol, have run the business for 20 years and still accept coins--even buckets of pennies--as legal tender. If Glenn is minding the store, he'll offer a plethora of thoughts at no charge. Come to think of it, he may offer you a penny or two for yours....

Dr. Newbury, longtime university president, continues to speak and write. The Idle American, begun in 2003, is one of the longest-running syndicated columns. Contact: 817-447-3872. Email: newbury@speakerdoc.com. Website: www.speakerdoc.com.