

Change Around: I leave my Money in the Strangest Places

By Trevor Robertson

Prologue

So the thing is I don't like small change. Pennies. I mean come on, they cost more to make than they are worth. You can't buy anything with them anymore. I even question the value of having nickels around. Actually, don't tell anyone, but my dislike for change goes so far that I have trouble with dimes. However, they just have a bit too much value for me to ignore. So then what do I do about my penny and nickel problem? Well, I can tell you I certainly don't keep them on me. Some of the things I've done with my change includes: given them to people I'm with, put them in the donation jars, and left them at fast food restaurants as "tips". But the story below is about some of the more interesting things I have done with my small change.

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The UNBC Library – the legacy

This is undoubtedly where things got interesting between my change and me. You know I can't remember how it *exactly* all started, sometimes I almost think we just start doing things. Either that or we do them for a reason and then forget why we started in the first place. This could be why some of us end up in situations that aren't right for us.

Anyway, on the second floor of the UNBC library, on the last row of stacks (where the Economics books are found) I began placing my money on a book or two in the Fall Semester of 2000. Or maybe it was Winter of 2001? Anyway, I found it to be a bit of an experiment, to see whether people noticed the money, and if so, if they would pick it up. I also wondered if it was certain denominations that finally made someone stop and take the money or instead did change have no class structure, would people pick it up regardless of value or appearance. I placed everything from pennies to the odd quarter there during my time.

Anyway, this is a high traffic area because this particular stack is along the way to the only washrooms and computer lab on that floor, so you would think the money would not last. But instead I found my change would sit there for many days and even up to many weeks. This only encouraged me further. As for the experiment, it was rather unscientific and I can't say it proved anything. To get clear results it certainly would require more effort and time- hmm do I hear a Master's Thesis??? Anyway, it was more for the fun and for a little laugh. And in this regard it definitely accomplished these small goals.

Well, now wait, I've gotten ahead of myself a bit here. This story goes much deeper. Yes indeed it does much much deeper. I got to thinking that this whole thing needed some more involvement, plus I wanted someone else to experience the joy and excitement that I did. In addition, I was possibly leaving town in the near future (thought came back two months later in the end) and I wanted this all to continue- for a legacy to develop. So I

told my friend Sean Paterson of my little dabbling. Of course there is certain risk in telling someone about this. They could say, oh sure they find it interesting, great idea, and that they will put the odd bit of change there too, yet all the while thinking they will actually just keep taking my money themselves, that I was an idiot, and that I should just hand the money directly to them since they were going to take it all anyway!

But in this case Sean was very true to the cause. In fact, he put much more effort and money into it than I ever did. I would see a line of ten pennies or more at times! This was always quite the site. Just picture it. This additional bit of money seemed to encourage the coins to disappear more often, but not as often as you'd think in a location with a bunch of hungry students. My theory was that most times the library staff putting books back would spot them and take them away. But then again, Economics books aren't exactly in high demand, so maybe it wasn't library staff. But if nothing else, in time the staff would begin to wonder what the hell was going on. Specifically the staff would wonder who the sick person who kept putting money on these books was.

(Some time passes...)

I've now been doing this for a couple of years, and with the odd gaps in my effort (which Sean thankfully filled in for), I continued to put money on the books. A more recent attempt was several pennies on some books by John Maynard Keynes. And how appropriate I thought, the man who really came up with and worked towards the "welfare state" and I am handing out money on his books. Unfortunately, like Keynes theories, the books seem to attract little interest these days. I really do feel for poor Maynard, dead as he may be. Aside from finding one of the pennies moved on to an adjacent section of the stack one day (which I promptly returned to its proper place- on one of Keynes's books of course) all three of the pennies I placed there in October 2002, were still there in early February 2003.

But now with my impending graduation from UNBC at the end of the year I began to concern myself with the legacy again. So, it was on February 10, 2003 that I spoke with John Athan, and told him of my efforts. He found it rather interesting and it gave him a good laugh. Thus some more joy was spread. But better still, he said he would continue to get enjoyment from seeing how the money does while I'm still there. Also he mentioned that he would continue the legacy when I am gone, and that he too will pass it on when he departs. How great would it be to return in 15 years and see someone still putting money on those books? And it would be even better to see my pennies, the copper deteriorating, still sitting waiting for someone to discover the joy of Keynes.

The Other Beginning

Around the same time I started leaving coins around the UNBC Library, I did the same thing at random locations in the city (Prince George). I would try to leave them on routes I often walked. For example, on my way back to work from the shopping centre where I usually got lunch. Many were in highly visible spots, so it was always a surprise to still see the coin there a day or two later. But I sit back and wonder where some of those coins

are now? Will I ever find them again? How are they doing? Did they find a good home? Are they happy? Are they following their dreams? In the future I must try to remember where more of them are, maybe even write down where they are, kind of like a treasure hunt for a rainy day, or a whacked out piggy bank. A low security piggy bank at that, but then again most are when siblings or spouses are around!

Instant Find

A nice sunny summer afternoon and I am waiting for the city bus, at a major bus stop on 15th avenue in Prince George. I had purchased a little ice cream cone just a minute before I got to the bus stop. I received a ton of change and of course I did not want to be bothered with the pennies on this hot summer day. Who would right!?

Anyway, standing around at the bus stop, a young slightly disabled gentleman began telling me how great of a day it was. He was happy- it was nice to see, not enough people smile I thought. I agreed with him, it *was* a beautiful day. Not enough people appreciate this kind of thing you know, these little things, that are true, honest and pure. Anyhow, during a break in the conversation I had the uncontrollable urge to get rid of my pennies. I'd had enough of them! So I placed all of them on top of the garbage bin at the bus stop, not thinking much more of it. I was just glad to be free of them. Well, low and behold just a few seconds later the young gentleman takes a few steps over, turns around, and spots the money. He of course says, "I just found money! See, this really is a great day!!!" Thus indeed, I really did make someone very happy. Of course, I had to laugh to myself since I'd just put the money there, but it was a good thing nonetheless.

Pedestrian Gold Mine

This one I find highly interesting as the money is right out in the wild. This is the story of a nickel that left home, that found its way in the world, and has survived for so long. What this is all about is a nickel I received as change from the Turbo gas station on the corner of 15th Avenue and Foothills Blvd. Having no place to donate the nickel at the gas station and really not wanting to have to deal with it at home, (I already have enough nickels randomly left in strange places in my apartment so that I can find them later or for the next tenant to find) I wanted to find a place, nay, *a home*, for this coin. So walking across the east side of 15th Avenue, the thought came to me that putting it down at the base of the traffic light on the meridian would be an excellent idea. Yes an excellent idea indeed. The spot was right by the edge off the crosswalk, so I thought it would be good as is it remote enough that the nickel would at least be free for a while. However the location was not so remote that the coin would not ever be spotted. There is no joy in placing a coin where it will never ever be found.

But to my great surprise, months later it was still there! True, its home is a bit out of the way, but one would not expect it to still be there after this much time. Last I was able to spot it (before the snow came down) the nickel was still in its resting place, enjoying the fresh air. Now I am rather anxious to see if will be there when the snow melts. It would be great if it made it through the winter- the ice, the snow and snowplows. Hopefully it

will be in its place, since it always brought a spot of joy whenever I went past and saw it was still there. I had alerted John Athan to this as well when we had our “library pennies chat”, so he is waiting anxiously now too. The prospect of spring just got all that much better and exciting!

UPDATE: The nickel is still there! Late February, and a lot of snow had melted, so I took a look and it is still free and soaking up the sun. It is definitely a weathered coin now (it is slowly becoming one with nature), but it is still in its original place, and maybe will be for years to come...

Oops I forgot... no wait!

Well the snow was falling, it was a perfect December afternoon, and I was not about to miss out on it. I decided I'd walk to the shopping centre to pick up a few groceries. The key to why I wanted to make the trip though was that my girlfriend was working the Salvation Army donation box there and I wanted to drop a nickel in as joke. Anyway, after spending several minutes getting all geared up for the weather, I went on my way. The walk would take about 30 minutes. But only a few minutes out of my apartment I realized that I'd forgotten the nickel. Oh no, what should I do now? I don't want to go back now, but I don't want to make this whole trip and yet not be able to complete the joke. A-ha! I realized what I would do. There should be one of my nickels at the intersection of 15th and Foothill and that is right on my way! Perfect!

I couldn't believe it. This was actually working out. My public piggy bank actually was about to work in my favour. Now, I should stop to update you on this nickel since it has been some time. Mr. Athan pointed out to me one day in the spring that in fact the nickel had gone missing. After much too long of forgetting to replace it, I did get around to it just as summer was breaking through. It may have gone missing again a few times, but it was summer and there were lots more people walking around and places that nickels certainly want to see while the weather is nice.

Anyway, getting closer to the present I knew that over the past few months I'd seen the last nickel I'd placed there several times. And over the past month we'd had a fair bit of cold weather and some snow to cover it up, so I thought certainly it would still be there.

Now back to my walk, with the solution in mind, I went happily on my way and did not have to turn back. I got to the intersection a few minutes later and waited for the crosswalk light. Once the light was on my side, I crossed to the meridian to look for my nickel. Just before I got there a car pulled up in the left turn lane, thus was right beside the meridian. As I got to the meridian I saw the traffic signal base had a dusting of snow on it so I bent down and brush off the snow and there it was...my nickel! Joy filled my heart! It was there waiting for me to come back for it.

However, I have to say the nickel apparently was comfortable there and was not willing to go with me at first. *How rude* I thought. But it was because the coin was frozen to the base of the traffic light. I started to try and break it free, but decided that I'll just try a bit

longer and if I can't move it then so be it, it was meant to stay there. Needless to say when I looked up at the man in the car waiting for turning light, he had a very puzzled look on his face as he tried to figure out what the hell I was up to. A few more seconds of prying and it came free! I scooped it up and went merrily on my way and walked in front of the car still waiting for the light to change.

Now I must say I was surprised by the fact that the underside of the coin was in fact in much worse shape than the face. It was a 1999 coin, and the face looked almost like new, especially as opposed to the underside that was now barely recognizable. I suppose life in a way is like this, the side we usually show to others often looks great, whereas that which is hidden inside of us, might be dieing and fading faster than it should. Nevertheless, I think this coin more so should remind us of the freedom and happiness that can be found anytime, anywhere, from the simple things.

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Epilogue

So now I am poor, living in a box, and I am beginning to regret the money I have left around. How foolish I was back then! What would all this money amount to today? Maybe I could at least buy a bowl of soup? I'm so hungry. I'm so unbelievably hungry.

Alas, it is no matter, I find warmth and comfort on this cold day from the fact, I have brought people joy, maybe even made the world a happier place. I have spread the little wealth I was fortunate to once have. I can't ask for more than that. Well, except for when you see me, please throw me your spare change, for you never know, it may have been mine at some point!

Thanks To:

Sean Paterson – for being part of the legacy, and for your enthusiasm about it. Wow, you certainly put a lot of money down for the cause. You put money down when I was not keeping up with the cause, thus this story would truly not exist without your dedication.

John Athan – for being part of the legacy, always sharing a good laugh- indeed why not laugh and enjoy what you can. My favourite of course was when it was +200 degrees Celsius in Calgary. A scorcher indeed, and definitely a time when you want to think about moving up from SPF 15 to SPF 30. Or am I too cautious? But thanks most of all for pointing out these stories should be written down.

Melissa Bond – well for one thing, helping, no wait, it was more than helping- completely packing everything up for me in three hours. Amazing. I didn't think this was even close to possible, but you did it. I am forever in your debt. (Ba-ba-banana) Overall,

thank you for supporting me at those key times like that and for all the little things you've done for me: from dinners, to rides, to conversations that gave me ideas. In other words, thanks for being my best friend for the past two years. Without your help and you, this story would probably have never made it to the public.