

A penny saved is ... mostly worthless

Why do we have pennies, anyway? A penny today isn't worth the copper it's stamped on. In fact, a penny today won't buy what a dime would 50 years ago. Pennies are more of a nuisance than a benefit. They're worth so little that stores keep trays of them out for people to make change. Most of us won't stoop over to pick one up. But the government keeps making them, even though the Treasury figures it loses \$8 million a year on the little Lincolns. Why? Tradition, mostly. We all grew up using a monetary system that included pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters and half dollars. Somewhere along the line, the government sort of did away with the half dollar, and the quarter became our standard change. Though they aren't worth much anymore, we're used to having pennies.

There was a time when some stores made change in mills, coins worth a thousandth of a dollar or one-tenth of a cent. Most of these were private issue, not government coinage. But those days are way long gone.

If it costs the government \$8 million a year just to make them and spread them around, what does it cost banks and businesses to handle them? Billions. Billions of dollars spent to count, store, exchange and handle a monetary unit that's past its prime.

We should do away with pennies, but the latest polls show little support for that. Reportedly, only 23 percent of Americans would agree to do away with pennies. It'd be easy to design a system to work without them, but the government has had remarkably little luck in changing the coinage. It's tried twice to introduce dollar coins, but we won't use them.

The Treasury keeps pumping out expensive dollar bills when we'd all probably be better off using coins for \$1 and \$5 denominations. The government makes dollar coins, though, and people don't use them. We don't use pennies much, either, but we won't let them go. It's mostly because Americans figure that in any system where businesses get to round off transactions to the nearest five cents, it's the consumer who'll come out on the short end of the stick. And they're probably right.

Until someone figures out how to sell the switch, then, we're stuck with pennies. The penny even has a lobbying group, Americans for Common Cents, supported no doubt by people who sell coin-counting machines.

There's a bill in Congress now, the Legal Tender Modernization Act, which would do away with the penny. It should be passed. But don't hold your breath.

— Steve Haynes

NEWS ITEM Walmart vows co-operation with federal officials, following raids for illegal immigrants at their stores...



'Thanks Lord,' we needed that bath

Don't tell me prayer doesn't work. Not as I sit and listen to the rain pelting the windows and dripping off the eaves. Collective prayers all over the Midwest are being answered as the moisture soaks the soil. Let's just remember not to be critical if we don't think it's enough.

—ob—

The office where I work has a large foyer with a glass wall facing west.

One of the perks of working there is that employees can bring in their potted plants to keep them over the winter. Right now, it looks like a veritable greenhouse with geraniums spilling over their containers, ferns shooting everywhere and coleus adding another splash of color.

I brought in begonias and a plant I had on the front porch all summer. It came from a little start we brought back from El Paso when we were there early last spring. It is a succulent of some kind and makes the prettiest little purple flowers. I think it's a cousin to what we call "moss

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



rose." Jim has been bothered with a toothache lately, the kind that keeps him up nights. Aspirin and gum gels to mask the pain have become daily necessities. Getting him to go to the dentist is like ... well, you know, "pulling teeth." Which is probably the only solution left.

—ob—

For movie theaters in this part of the country to stay open takes a huge effort on the part of volunteers. With rising costs on every front, the only way a theater can operate is by not having a payroll. Our Jennifer is one of those volunteers and, of

course, when she needs help, she calls us. We are her standby ticket takers, popcorn poppers and lobby swabbies.

The other night, Jim and I reminisced about 25-cent admission and nickel popcorn, about watching the same movie three times in a row for the original admission and sitting with your date in the balcony.

Going back still further, my mother used to attend silent movies and Jim said that one of his aunts was the piano player at the local movie house. It's my understanding that back in the 1920s, theater stages did double duty, serving as a platform for variety shows and community performances. Probably before the day of non-retractable, delicate, high-priced screens.

—ob—

Bumper stickers can make you laugh or can make you think. Here's one: "If you can read this, thank a teacher. If you can read it in English, thank a soldier."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Dear Editor: I moved back to NW Kansas this year from living and working in Lincoln, Neb., for 32 years. I am a strong believer in doing business with the local business people as keeping the money in the community helps keep the community economically stable and promotes healthy growth.

Yes, there are some things I miss not having access to here in Norton, which I had in Lincoln, but by and large, most of the things I need or want can be purchased here.

One of the stores I do miss, however, is a place that sells books. I am a voracious reader and even though I do use libraries for much of my reading, I still prefer to purchase my own books for various reasons.

There are a number of books I have on a list that I am planning to purchase, but cannot do so here, as there is no store that carries them. Therefore, I will be forced to purchase and spend the money outside of the community.

I wonder if there are any of the businesses here, who would be interested in putting in a book section, or perhaps someone would like to start a small book store. I would be tempted, but I have neither the resources nor business sense to undertake that kind of venture.

I hope there are others like me who would like to see a business of this kind added to Norton. I know I would be a customer.

Sincerely,
H.J. Prout
Norton

Fall means house closing, potatoes

It was the last trip to the mountains. Time to close the house and bring home potatoes.

We have a house in the Colorado mountains. It was the home we built and where we raised our children before moving to western Kansas.

When it was time to move, we couldn't sell the place. We rented it for years and eventually decided to just keep it as a second home. When we needed the money, we couldn't sell it, and now that the kids are grown and mostly out of college, we're glad we have it.

But, there is a catch. While it is possible to live there all year around — we did that for many years — it isn't practical to keep it open in the wintertime.

One or the other of our two younger children spend the summer there. Our daughter is a teacher and our son a student. They have summers off. But once school starts, the place is vacant except for an occasional visit from us or our friends.

By the end of October, it is time to shut things down. The weather is starting to turn up there. The aspen have lost their leaves and it's freezing almost every night.

The house is heated with a wood stove, so it wouldn't be practical to keep the heat on all winter. Even with electricity or propane, when the temperature falls to 40 be-

Open Season Cynthia Haynes



low, things get pretty dicey. So we drain the pipes, turn off the electricity and take everything liquid out of the house and haul it back to Kansas to use or store for next year.

We also go potato shopping at a warehouse in the Valley.

The Valley is the San Luis Valley, the largest mountain park in Colorado. It is a big potato-growing area. The other big crop is barley. Coors grows much of its malting barley in the Valley.

But we were interested in the potatoes, the best in the world in our humble opinion. Every year we load sacks of potatoes for each office. This was fine when we had *The Oberlin Herald*, *The Saint Francis Herald* and the *Bird City Times*. However, the number of offices has grown to five and the number of bags of potatoes has reached hernia proportions.

Still, if the crew is going to work while we take four days off to "close the house,"

we'd better bring them treats. Potatoes are the thing.

We loaded 750 pounds of potatoes in three boxes and twelve 50-pound bags this trip. Since we were leaving on Saturday, we had to pick up the potatoes on Thursday.

Did I mention that it freezes most nights up there?

We got to lug 1250-pound bags and two boxes of potatoes into the house. (We had already given one box to some friends from Salida, Colo.)

Then on Saturday, we reloaded the potatoes along with the dog kennel (she likes traveling to Colorado), the cat (this one doesn't mind the trip), our suitcases and everything with liquid, from the dish washing soap to the AI sauce.

We were stacked to the ceiling. We squeezed in the truck and headed east for home.

The forecast was for rain, ice, snow and wind. We saw all of those but the ice was minimal and the snow was 500 feet above us on the mountainside.

When we got home, the forecast was for a low in the 30s, but the thermometer read 34 degrees. We dragged the potatoes into the kitchen.

Now all we have to do is reload those spuds and deliver them to the hungry hordes. I think I've had my exercise for this week.

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