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*Pennies, pennies.
photos by Chris Johnson*

Find a Penny, Pick It Up...

By Bob Warren

WHEN YOU SEE A PENNY ON THE GROUND, do you pick it up or pass it up? Some may pass it up, seeing pennies as only a nuisance, but those who lived when a penny would buy a good piece of candy or bubble gum are likely to pick it up.

Pennies can be critical. Ask Frisco native, Sam Roach, who, as a child was dismayed to find the “picture show’s” admission price had gone from ten to eleven cents. He got in only after running to the drug store to borrow a penny from his uncle. Or, ask our daughter, Kay, who, at age seven lost her nickel in a soft drink machine, because the price had gone up to six cents.

Some twenty-three years ago, we asked Philip, our six year-old grandson, to walk to Moseley’s grocery to get a loaf of bread. His reward would be some candy for himself, so he eagerly

took two dollars and ran to the store. Before long he returned with the bread and candy – but no change. My wife, Ann, looked at the receipt and asked Philip where the change was. He said, “Oh, it was nothing but some nickels, dimes and pennies, so I threw them away. They wouldn’t buy anything anyway.”

Now, that was a little hard for an old, depression-era grandma to swallow, but she bit her tongue and looked at me as if to say, “You handle it.”

I quickly pulled Philip to my side and proceeded to tell him the facts of life – about economics. Using my best grandfatherly voice, I said, “Son, I know it’s hard for you to realize that small coins are worth something. But, if you stack them high enough, even pennies can add up to dollars. I once read that found pennies come from Heaven. Angels throw them down to us, so we should always pick them up.”

Then, I proceeded to tell him some

stories old folks like to tell – about when a dollar was really a dollar – how that was a good day’s wage for a grown man sweating in a field or factory, and how even a nickel would buy your choice of a hamburger, coke or double dip ice cream cone.

That got his attention, so I went on to tell how his great grandfather Bolin, a sharecropper at the time, used to butcher his own calves and “peddle” the meat to his neighbors. He, like other farmers of that day, grew much of his own food and had enough to eat, but not much money. So, selling some of the homegrown meat was a good way to earn money for other needs.

Philip asked, “What do you mean by ‘other needs’ – things like toys and new sneakers?” I explained that needs were things like sugar, flour, clothes and shoes, that toys came at Christmas, usually one per child, and that sneakers – called tennis shoes – were hardly affordable at a dollar per pair. Shoes were worn until they had big holes in the soles, and then were repaired with a ten-cent kit consisting of two rubber soles and a tube of glue. Outgrown shoes and clothes were usually handed down to a younger sibling so that the poor, younger children in a large family rarely owned anything new.

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“How else did those poor people save money?” asked Philip.

“Well,” I answered, “My mother

made soap in a wash pot, using hog lard and lye. The soap wasn't pretty, and it smelled bad, but it got things clean." Continuing with the hygiene theme, I said, "My Dad told about making his own toothbrush by cutting a hackberry twig, chewing the end and rubbing it on his teeth."

Philip wondered, "What did he use for toothpaste?"

"He didn't use any at that time," I replied, "So he, like many others, had very poor teeth. But Mother made our toothpaste by mixing salt and soda. It probably saved us some money, but the stuff tasted terrible."

Getting into the money saving spirit, Philip quipped, "My teacher says recycling paper and plastic saves trees and energy. Did people recycle back in the old days?"

"No," I mused, "We burned our trash in a burn barrel, and plastic hadn't been invented, but we recycle everything today." Pointing to the kitchen, I said, "Look what Ann is doing. She's recycling

zip-lock plastic bags. She washes, dries and reuses them until they spring a leak – probably saves us a couple of dollars per year – if you don't count the cost of water. Saw her washing paper towels yesterday. How's that for recycling?"

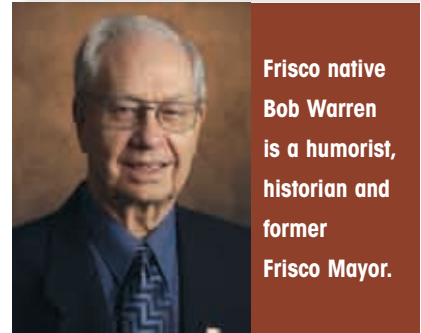
Duly impressed with his economics lesson, Philip asked, "Grandad, will you help me look for the money I threw away?"

"Sure," I said, fishing a penny from my pocket, "But before we go, I want you to look at this coin. Can you read those words just above Lincoln's head?"

"In God – we – trust?" he read haltingly.

"Good," I smiled. "Someone told me to look at every penny I find, and to read those words. It just might be God's way of starting a conversation with you!"

"Now, let's go see how many pennies we can find. Remember, they all add up to make dollars. That's the way it was in the early days, and it's still that way today!"



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