

INSIDE AURORA: Centsless

By Scott Johnston

They say it's good fortune to find a penny.

If that's the case, then I'm the luckiest guy in the world.

It all started with the announcement earlier this year that due to the high cost to produce them, the Mint would stop distributing pennies, and start removing them from circulation. Businesses were encouraged to round all cash business transactions up or down to the nearest nickel.

I'm as nostalgic as the next person about this coppery piece of Canadian history, but I saw the logic of it all, and decided I might as well just get rid of all the ones we had.

So, I went into the change jar, and my wife's purse (with her permission, of course), and the little tray in the car that always seems to accumulate coins, and pooled all the pennies.

Over the next couple of weeks, I made sure to keep some with me, and each time I paid cash for something I managed to get rid of a few more coins.

Eventually, with one final purchase, I had none left.

Or so I thought.

Because shortly afterwards, I found a couple more under a sofa cushion. So, I spent them.

Then some turned up under the floor mats when we cleaned out the car. Those got dropped into a charity coin box at a local store. But, again, my penny-less situation was short-lived. No sooner were the ones from the car taken care of when more appeared in the pocket of a coat I hadn't worn in a while. Out they went.

It seemed that now that I didn't want them, they were everywhere, and this included on the ground.

For many years it had not really been worth the effort to pick up pennies lying in the street, although I could probably use the exercise. Despite the best efforts of Aurora's street cleaners, the coins were filthy. Not that the ones we keep in our pockets every day are exactly germ-free, either, but at least they have the illusion of being clean.

So even though I was suddenly seeing more and more of them just waiting to be picked up, I willed myself to walk on by. Once again I was copper-free, but once again, only briefly.

Because then I actually received some in change from a purchase.

I'm not sure from where. After running some errands, they just appeared in my pocket. I was surprised, as I didn't think any businesses were using them, anymore. But failing spontaneous generation or teleportation within my pocket ? which would be really handy in larger currency denominations - that was the only conclusion.

As for why this company still had a stash of pennies, perhaps it was finding them under its corporate sofa cushions, as well. In any case, I managed to get rid of them, too.

But despite my best efforts, they kept turning up; in a desk drawer, in a briefcase, in the car (again) ?there was even one in my toolbox.

In fact, it's become obvious that unknown to me over all these years, the bulk of the 35 billion or so pennies in circulation in Canada were actually in my possession.

If only I'd looked for them sooner, and kept better track of them, I might have been able to retire by now. But, at least I've learned my lesson; in preparation for their inevitable future removal from circulation, I've started stashing away any nickels I come across.

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