

Throwing Money Away

Our former upstairs neighbor moved out and threw money away. I'm not using the expression figuratively; I don't mean that she wasted funds by paying for a gym membership that she never used, or that she had costly bad habits like smoking or incurring late fees on videos. She literally took cold hard cash out to the curb and left it for the garbage men to pick up.

When the neighbor quit the premises, she left some odds and ends in our duplex's shared basement. I spent an hour or so breaking down her cardboard boxes, and tossing out what remained: Styrofoam packing material, broken flower pots, an old kettle, and so on. And then I came across a few items it seemed she might want - bank statements, some stuffed animals, and the mother lode, a cracked plastic Boston Bruins cup filled with change.

It was tempting, although ethically murky, to simply appropriate the cash. On the one hand, our neighbor had abandoned her stuff, leaving someone else to clean up her mess. On the other, she was coming back one last time to pick up a few things, and surely would have wanted the cup of money had she remembered it was there. I conferred with my wife and decided to leave a note.

The former neighbor stopped by on a Sunday afternoon while we were out. When we returned, the items I'd set aside for her were gone and there was a meager trail of nickels and dimes on the basement steps. I felt aggrieved; I was half hoping for a bottle of wine as thanks. At least she could have left a post-it saying, "Thank you *so* much!" or something, anything.

That night I hauled our garbage bins and her assorted junk out to the street for trash pick-up. And there it was curbside: the box containing the teddy bears, bank statements, and Bruins cup full of money. Our neighbor was *throwing money away*, leaving it to be hauled to the landfill. Money was garbage to her. I still can't get over it. I seized the Bruins cup, placed it in a plastic bag to prevent further coin leakage, and then spent an additional few minutes picking slimy coins off the wet sidewalk.

I read once that Bill Gates is so wealthy that it isn't even worth his while to bend down to pick up a ten-dollar bill -- he makes more than that in the few seconds such an effort would take him. Our former neighbor couldn't be that rich, but it does seem odd that she took the time to hoard the change and then just left it.

How is such an act--throwing money away--possible? I'd learned from tossing out her junk that she worked for a waste disposal company. Perhaps she hated her job and was subconsciously rebelling by treating money like garbage? Or, more simply, maybe she had enough on her plate with her move and didn't want to cart around a plastic cup that was leaking coins. Regardless, it sounds like one of those apocryphal tales someone in a poor country might tell about the US, "You know, in America, they are so wealthy that they will throw money out rather than bother carrying it with them!"

Three days after I retrieved the change-filled Bruins cup from the curb, I poured its contents into a coin machine at a nearby supermarket. It spat out a receipt for \$40.30. Our friend Aimee gives found money away. But this wasn't like finding 60 dollars sticking out of the ATM machine; had

I not been cleaning up someone else's mess, I never would have come across this treasure. I donated twenty and blew twenty on the kind of seasonal junk you are tempted to leave behind when you move.

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