

One Thin Dime

By Pete Clark

Last Sunday evening, I watched a TV show that reminded me of an incident from fifty years ago. At that time, I worked as an Assistant Division Manager in a big box department store. One of my duties was to spend time supervising the cash register line and the Accommodations Desk. I accepted or declined checks, assisted with questionable refund requests and dealt with disputes about exchanged or returned items and any other problems that may have arisen.

Supervising the cashiers could be challenging at a busy time, and at other times a piece of cake. We had one cashier who tended to have a smart mouth and a lazy bent. I would ask her to do something or not do something, either way she would make a wise remark and do as she wished. I did not argue with her, nor did I lecture her. I would simply pick up the telephone at her register and begin to dial personnel. She would straighten up very quickly.

One busy afternoon, the cashier at register three turned on her distress signal. I went to the register to see what was needed there. A wild eyed, disheveled, older gentleman was speaking loudly in broken English and gesticulating with his hands, while waving a check in the cashier's face. A mostly empty bag laid on the counter.

Upon my arrival, I asked the cashier, "What's the problem, Linda?"

She answered, "He wants to pay with a check and doesn't have a Photo ID."

I looked at the cash register and noted the unusual balance of \$0.10. I asked the man for any piece of identification he may have had. He dug around in a pocket and produced a temporary immigrant's green card with no photo. He handed me the card and the check. I verified the signatures and the amount. I initialed the check and gave it to the cashier so her transaction could be completed.

A few days later, a man from the back office came to the front of the store, where I was working, and began lecturing me about accepting a bad check. I patiently listened to his tirade. Even though the front end was busy, he seemed to go on forever. When he finished, I asked to see the check. He gave it to me. It was the one for ten cents. I reached into my pocket, pulled out a coin and handed it to him, saying, "Here's your damned dime." I turned and walked to the last register in the line to handle a real problem.

Today I am a crazy old man, but I don't have the sound reasons for my wackiness that the man from so long ago had for his. When he handed me his credential and the check, I saw the tattooed number above his wrist and I knew what it signified. Looking back over the years, I am a bit surprised that I did not tell the man from the back office just what he could do with that precious dime.