

## See A Penny

*See a penny pick it up  
all the day you'll have good luck.  
See a penny let it lie;  
you'll be sorry by and by.*

I repeat that rhyme every time I spot a penny while walking around New York City. Some days my new found penny brings me a little luck, others not. But every one of those days are filled with a glimmer of hope.

On an early spring morning last April, in Tompkins Square Park, I saw a penny, picked it up and experienced one of the luckiest days of my life.

I was ordering an espresso at a nearby coffee shop, when I saw an elderly woman just inside the park, sitting on a bench, tossing breadcrumbs to the pigeons. The thing that caught my eye was that the breadcrumbs reflected the morning light.

I walked into the park and discovered that she hadn't been throwing breadcrumbs, but was secretly tossing pennies onto the sidewalk.

I picked one up, sat down on the bench and offered it to her for her thoughts.

She said she was looking at the faces of all the people, rushing by and was trying to imagine what the new day might bring to them.

And as they hurried to where their life was taking them, she wondered what they might be thinking: perhaps a long kept secret waiting for a sympathetic ear, maybe a forgotten item to add to their grocery list, or quietly longing for that relationship or that job or that one moment that would make their life whole.

And as they passed through the park, the lucky ones, would see a penny, pick it up and for a moment expect something magical.

"When you expect a miracle to happen," she said, "it does." She knew that if even one of the hundred pennies she secretly distributed around the park each day created even a single miracle for someone, then the world would be infinitely richer for it.

Albert Einstein once said: There are two ways to live your life. One as though nothing is a miracle. The other, as though everything is.

She was born in 1909, the same year Lincoln appeared on the penny. Her name was Myrtle Magnolia Meisenheimer. Her father, a German immigrant, named her after his two favorite trees in the park where she had grown up and lived across the street all of her life.

As a child, she and her father would picnic in the park on Sunday afternoons. He would tell her stories of a beautiful Indian princess who, long before it was a park, lived in a teepee right where they were eating lunch.

And to her delight, on their walk home, she would always find a penny with a beautiful Indian princess on the face.

She grew up, as did her collection of pennies, many with Lincoln on the face. She became so fascinated with the President that her father began calling her Miss Lincoln, which she immediately shortened to Link.

Link, married, had children and lived in the same house where she grew up on tenth street across from the park. On walks with her children, they would find pennies and add them to her vast collection.

In February 1943, the government began production of a steel penny so that copper could be used in the war effort. Although she was concerned about the war, Link was happy to add a new type of penny to her collection that had grown to thousands.

It was also the same time her husband James, a Colonel in the Army, shipped out for Europe. While James was away, Link filled her days working at the library next door and looking for pennies with her children on long walks in the park.

In the summer of 1944, while her children played nearby, two men in uniform joined Link on the same bench where we were sitting.

It was there she learned her husband James had become a hero at the beaches of Normandy.

Link spent the rest of that day alone, walking in the park she so dearly loved.

And she found no pennies.

The next day she returned and began leaving pennies in the park.

And it was on that day, she said, she became the luckiest person in the world.

Seeing people's eyes as they spotted a penny and sharing their hope, if even for just a moment, brought her joy.

She thought it criminal that there was talk about taking the penny out of circulation.

"How that would change the world," she said, "no more pennies from heaven."

Last month, at 94, Link died. Her daughter spoke at the funeral. The week she passed away, Link had distributed the last of her thousands of pennies around the park, a collection that took almost 60 years to give away.

In those sixty years, I wondered how many wishes had been granted, dreams fulfilled and miracles that might not otherwise, had happened.

Following the service at the cemetery, I secretly tossed a penny into Link's grave. I realized how lucky I was to have had that hour with her on the bench last spring, as were the several hundred other people who now attended her funeral.

Most, who like me, had seen a penny and picked it up.