

# **Opportunity lost, my encounter with the 1955 “double shift” cent**

**By John H. MacMillan**



**Dear John:**

**As the Houston Coin club was founded in 1955, the “double die” year, I thought the membership might like to hear the true story of my encounter with a 55 double die. In 1955 I was an 11 year old boy that had already been introduced to coin collecting by my grandfather, who gave me old Indian pennies or severely worn large cents on our annual visit from eastern Massachusetts to Illinois. As you know eastern Mass was one of the areas where 55 double dies were introduced. I had my Whitman penny board, which all collectors had at the time, which I filled with my father’s change. To get new “pennies” I would break open the cellophane on his packs of Camel cigarettes. In 1955 a pack was 22 cents and so when a quarter was dropped into the machine, the pack came out with 3 “pennies” inside the cellophane. One day on breaking the pack I noticed that one of the three pennies was “fuzzy”. This amazing error was and is obvious to any man in the street, and requires no magnifying glass. An awesome “box office” coin if there ever was one. My father was a leather worker who had no knowledge of coin errors, so he said I should put one of the “perfect” cents in my album, which I dutifully did, as all 50’s boys obeyed their “old man”. The blazing full red 55 double die was spent, as were nearly all of this issue, as no publicity occurred on these at first, and interest was tepid for a couple of years after their release. Of course had I kept it and were able to preserve it as seen then it would be**

worth a cool 15 grand or more. By 1960 I was far more coin savvy, and bitterly remembered my earlier lost opportunity. In 1960 the cigarette pack was up to 23 cents (inflation!) so on examination as usual I found two 1960 “small date” cents, which due to widespread publicity in the media, I saved. Unfortunately these are now worth 10 bucks, as opposed to 15 grand! Such are the hard learning experiences of a young collector. Tell any young collectors you meet, if you find anything “weird” or different in change, no matter how seemingly insignificant, save it!

As an added twist, I ended up moving to the Philadelphia area in 1972 and marrying a Philly girl. She vividly remembers hurricane Diane socking Philadelphia in 1955. The resulting cent shortage resulted in the mint officials releasing these coins, already mixed with regular cents. Who would notice anyway?

Since my collecting interests diverged from Lincoln cents, and the price of the 55 double die skyrocketed, my hole in a later Whitman cent board that included this issue remains unfilled. Someday I will fill it, but never with a MS-65 full red!