

“How Would You Like that Penny, Sir?”

A persuasive piece of writing by Mr. Harrison

A shiny, copper coin rested in my pocket that Tuesday in September. It reminded me that life is supposed to be ridiculous sometimes.

I know a lot of people who allow the ridiculous things in life to ruin their day. As a relatively calm person, it's hard for me to understand why they do this, but I have watched and heard them in stores and restaurants: it starts out calm somewhere; then, something rather ridiculous happens, and some people choose to utterly explode, shattering the calm for everyone. I hope this short piece of writing reaches those people.

Recently, I closed a checking account in order to move some money into a better account at the same bank. On a Saturday, I used my savvy Internet skills to empty the old account of every cent and electronically move the money to the new account. The following Tuesday, I entered the bank—in person—to sign that I wanted the old account deleted. Some things in life still require an actual signature in front of a witness.

The witness—the bank employee sitting at her desk—brought my old account up on her screen. “I'm sorry, sir,” she said, “but this account isn't empty. It has a balance of one cent.” Somehow, in the three days that had passed since my online transfer of funds, the empty account had earned a penny in interest.

I explained I wasn't interested in the penny. They should keep it.

The bank lady explained that it couldn't work that way. In order to sign away the old account, I would have to officially withdraw the one cent that remained. It took twenty minutes to make the transaction work. I had to fill out a half-page withdrawal form, listing my address and phone number. Twenty minutes. I had to stand in line with other patrons who were depositing and cashing checks for significant amounts of money. Twenty minutes! When I was called to finally hand my form to a bank clerk, he asked to see my photo identification.

“Seriously?” I asked. I could have been one of those people who “explode” at that moment, but I chose to smile and shake my head a bit.

The clerk smiled back, as aware of the ridiculousness as I was. When he had clicked away on his computer and finalized the tiny little withdrawal, he asked, “And how would you like that penny today, sir?” As though I had really any options here.

This might have been a boiling point for some people in the world, the moment of no return, the second before they explode, forehead veins bulging, hands shaking and clenching. It wasn’t this for me because I was choosing to laugh at this situation. The experience was handing me a story to lug home and share with my wife. The story, I already knew, would make her smile that beautiful smile of hers that’s often the best part of my day. I would so much rather have that smile than the surprised looks from other people should I have chosen to make a scene here at the bank.

I smiled back at the clerk and, knowing I was adding to my own story, replied, “I’d like the shiniest penny in your drawer.” And I got it. It’s now taped in my writer’s notebook.

I worry about people who explode in public. Not only are they embarrassing themselves—my opinion—but they are shaving seconds off their own lives. I don’t have scientific proof on this, but it has to be healthier to laugh at life than it is to explode because of it.

The other day at the grocery store, as I independently scanned my own purchases, I watched a woman boil, then explode when her cashier told her they couldn’t give her a rain-check for a coupon. I wondered how much that coupon of hers was for. I wondered how many minutes she might have been shaving off her life by exploding here, and I wondered how much those minutes would be worth to her later on. Certainly they had more value than that coupon was worth. Certainly more than that penny in my writer’s notebook.

My students read this second draft before beginning their own second drafts in the computer lab; I, therefore, set the following typing rules with them:

Important notes for my student typists:

- Always **double space** your draft when typing. I would suggest you double-space the writing *after* you have typed the whole draft.
- **Font size** should be 11 or 12. No larger and certainly no smaller! Title can be size 14-16. I would suggest not changing/choosing your font until *after* you have typed the whole draft.
- Please choose a non-loopy, **normal-looking font**. Mr. Harrison prefers *Arial* or *Times New Roman*. Absolutely do not use a font that writes in all capital letters!

