

Stolen dimes can give you the niggles

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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“I always tell my grandson honest people is just like having money in the bank. Anybody can help you. Anybody can trust you. That’s it. There’s no other way around. That’s how the Indians were.”— Athabaskan elder Altona Brown of Ruby, Alaska, from *Native Wisdom for White Minds*

I was maybe 6 or 7, when I packed up my Barbie doll and case and walked to my friend’s house.

As many of you know, I never liked dolls but the action figures of the day—especially my Johnny West doll and horse—were a little more interesting.

While playing at her house, I discovered a dime in her Barbie case that I wanted real bad.

When she wasn’t looking, I slipped it into my Barbie case all the while thinking what I could buy with that dime. Ten pieces of candy from the neighborhood store or maybe one of those paddles with a rubber ball attached by elastic string.

What I wasn’t prepared for was that feeling that worms its way into your gut and niggles at you until you do something—or don’t.

I’m sure I didn’t know what conscience was at the time but I learned what it felt like all through the rest of that day and night.

The next day, the thief sneaked the dime back into her friend’s Barbie case and the niggle went away.

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But the coward never confessed until now.

The closed-door deals in Washington, D.C. on health care—brought to the forefront by a promised vote to move forward on the issue in exchange for exempting Nebraska from Medicaid expansion costs—brings back that memory of childhood anxiety caused by stealing a dime.

As adults, we sometimes become so distanced from our feelings, we lose our ability to discern especially in a controlling and competitive culture where we fear if we don't take something, someone else will get it.

And the notion, offered by a high-ranking U.S. senator, that the tit-for-tat deal represents what legislating is all about undermines the trust many of us have in our elected representatives.

We are harmed the most when we are dishonest and collectively that practice places us and our society in dangerous waters.

Peeling away the layers that keep niggles at bay must happen first.

Only then are owning up to stolen dimes and under-the-table deals possible.

And finally a chance for positive change.