

---

# 1



## Penny is Born



---

On a snowy day in January of 1943, a young woman named Rosie made a big mistake. Rosie worked at the Philadelphia Mint in Pennsylvania where coins are still made today. It was Rosie's job to operate a machine called a coin press that made blank pennies, and it was the first job she had ever had.

Like millions of women during the Second World War, Rosie stepped in to help fill the jobs left behind when the nation's men were sent overseas to fight. Not only was the United States short on men, it was short on certain metals used in the war, like copper. Rosie was not sure what

the soldiers were doing with the copper, but she knew they wanted every ounce of it they could find because they even wanted the copper that the Mint used to make the pennies. For that year - and that year only - all pennies were to be made instead from steel coated with a silvery metal called zinc. That was an order from the President of the United States.

The constant noise and heat of the machines inside the Mint made it hard for Rosie to concentrate on her job. Instead, her thoughts wandered to worrying about her big brother who was far from home fighting in the war. Not until Rosie's coin press struck the metal sheet and popped out the first batch of blank pennies, did she realize that the metal in her machine was copper, and not zinc.

That was the moment "Penny" was born; that very instant when the coin press popped out her small round shape from that long sheet of copper, like a cookie cutter shaping dough.

No one else noticed Rosie's mistake, and Rosie did not notice Penny in particular. Rosie

decided it was best to move ahead with her work rather than waste everyone's time trying to figure out what to do with a few 1943 pennies made from copper. After all, there were already millions of copper pennies out there; who would notice a few more? She removed the copper sheet from the machine and replaced it with a sheet of zinc-coated steel, crossed her fingers and hoped that she would not get caught.

Rosie sent the batch ahead to the next workstation where machines heated the blanks and then washed and dried them so that they were soft enough for the milling machine to pinch rims into their edges. In the final step, each blank was stamped with an identical design: the face of Abraham Lincoln on each penny's head, and seven letters spelling "One Cent" framed by two stalks of wheat called "ears" on each penny's tail.

Meanwhile, Penny's head buzzed from the stamping, but even so, that was the first time she heard herself think. "Who am I?" was her very

first thought, as a large human eye peered at her through a magnifying glass.

Rosie must have had some magic powers, because Penny and the other copper cents in her batch passed through inspection without notice. Workers counted the copper pennies along with hundreds of new steel pennies and put them into canvas bags. Then a pair of armed guards loaded the bags into the back of a Wells Fargo truck before driving away from the Mint.

