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Recycling Repairs a Roof

My neighbor, Teri, doesn't drive. Her roof leaked, and she didn't have enough money to pay to have it fixed. I walked over to her house and decided getting onto her roof and fixing it was beyond my abilities. I also noticed several large plastic garbage bags full of empty aluminum pop cans. I said, "All these cans could help pay the local handyman to fix the roof."

Teri said, "If I could get them to the store."

I walked back to my house and got my car.

In Oregon, we pay a deposit on soda cans and bottles (Those who drink beer also pay deposits on containers for beer).

Picking up bottles and cans to earn money is an ancient practice. When I was a child and visited my grandparents in Corvallis, Oregon, I saw their routine. About every two weeks, they started up their old, black chevy sedan. Grandpa drove. Grandma walked the edge-of-town roads, picked up containers, and brought them to the car. Grandma didn't know how to drive and was happy with her part of their routine.

That was before back to the land was a popular yearning, and my grandparents were already back to the land, out past the edge of town, with a garden, an orchard, a cow, chickens, ducks, and geese. Grandpa helped with the animals when they needed him at the local stock yard, where they bought and sold cattle, pigs, and horses. My grandparents sold milk, eggs, and produce to neighbors.

Several people saved cans and bottles for my grandparents and added significantly to their day's earnings. Collecting the deposit on cans and bottles rounded out their small budget.

When Laura, Juniper, Amanda, and I lived in Whitney Valley, hunters came to the valley every fall and stayed in several cabins. One year, after hunting season ended, and all the hunters left, we spotted a stack of cardboard boxes at the Whitney Valley dump, where a "No Dumping" sign was posted. Usually, that sign was obeyed. Nobody had dumped there for years.

On one of our long walks to see what was going on in the valley late fall, we walked into the old dump and saw that the hunters had returned many empty beer cans to their cardboard cases and neatly stacked the cases in the dump. I said, "Alcohol should never be mixed with high-powered rifles and powerful pickups."

We walked back home, got our pickup, drove down, loaded all the cases of empty beer cans, and covered them with a tarp against possible rain. The next time we drove down the mountain to town, we took the cans to the store and collected the deposit. That gave us enough money to eat dinner out, to buy several items that were closer to "want" than to "need," and to fill the pickup's gas tank, and we cleared the Whitney Valley dump of new material that might attract other new garbage.

More recently, beside the house with a roof that leaked, Teri and I loaded all the empty soda cans into my car. I added the few that had accumulated in our back porch, and I drove Teri, empty pop cans, and me to the store. We fed empty cans into a machine that counted them and spit out a printed tally that Teri took into the store and exchanged for cash. Within a week, the handyman put a ladder against Teri's house, climbed up, and fixed the leaking roof.

Through subsequent rains, all the water stayed outside Teri's house. She was quite pleased about that, and I was pleased that the bottle deposit law continued working as it should and helped people of limited budgets take care of basic needs and a few luxuries while cleaning up roadsides, back porches, and storage sheds.