

(My \$8 Story) Collecting Aluminum Cans for Cash and Fun

By [Philip Taylor](#) · Some links below are from sponsors. It's [how we make money](#).

When I was a kid, growing up in rural Louisiana, one of ways I would [make extra money](#) was to spend a day or two collecting aluminum cans, and redeeming them for cash.

When you were a kid did you ever find yourself collecting and recycling aluminum cans?

I think for a time, when times were tight, my whole family would join in to bring in some extra cash.

I'd take off on my bike with a friend, or sometimes Mom would drive us around. We'd spend an afternoon collecting as much as we could from just about everywhere.

I cringe thinking about where we might have obtained these cans. I guess most of it was on the road side though. There's quite a bit of aluminum can litter out there.

Next time we would head into “the city” we would swing by the aluminum can redemption center. Thinking back on this place, it was probably just a middle man. He would buy from us and take them to the actual recycling center.

The Questionable Can Collecting Middle-Man

I have a random memory concerning the guy at the place where we would drop off the cans...

After weighing all our bags of cans, the man would always say, “40 lbs...\$8 dollars”. It seemed every time we dropped off a load of cans, the story was the same: “40 lbs...\$8 dollars.” Really?!?

It actually turned into a joke amongst my family and friends. Whenever someone questioned how much something weighed, we would all reply, “40 lbs...\$8 dollars.”

It always seemed like the guy was just giving us what he wanted versus what the cans were actually worth in weight. I guess that's kind of a sad story really. Kids work hard to earn an extra buck or two, and they get taken by the shady can counter guy.

Eventually I wised up and spent my time on more cost effective money earning efforts, like cutting lawns and washing cars.

Price for Aluminum Cans

These days, cans are fetching 50% more than the price I got as a kid. As of this post, the price for cans is around .33 a pound. Source: ScrapMetalPricesAndAuctions.com

Other Aluminum Can Collectors and Recycling Stories

Trent from [The Simple Dollar](#) collected cans as a kid. He tells a sad, but captivating story about [his can collecting experience](#) and how it affected his attitude towards money and savings. This is a great read.

Then there's the true story of Maisie Devore, an eighty-something Kansas woman, who spent one day every month [collecting cans for thirty years \(video\)](#) to raise money for a community swimming pool. She was able to save \$73,000 over the three decades and now the community is enjoying their pool. She still collects cans to help pay for pool maintenance.

Here's a story from a reader (Bernadette):

“One thing I did when I was younger that still seems like a huge accomplishment came about as a result of a challenge in our religion class. It was based on the parable of the talents. Our teacher gave each student \$.25 and

told us to make something of our talent. Some asked their parents for more money.

Some did nothing, but based on my father's suggestion I took our wagon out and went door to door asking people if I could buy their returnable bottles and cans for a penny. Then I took them back to the store for the full refund. At that time the store would give you two cents for a return bottle so I doubled my money and people had the convenience of at home pick up of bottles instead of having to drag them in themselves.

Well I bought and sold enough bottles to make over \$12.00 which is quite a bit considering I started with only a quarter. The only reason I had to quit was my mom was getting tired of advancing me funds from the grocery money to finance more purchases of bottles against future earnings from returns. Pretty proud of that achievement.”

Want to start a can collecting business? It's all about scale. Find a local recycling center near you by visiting <http://earth911.com/>.

Did you ever collect cans as a way to make a little extra money? What was your favorite way to make money as a kid?