

One Toea Wisdom – A Game, A Memory, A Turning Point

Perspective | Reflections



One Toea Wisdom Practices

A Game, A Memory, A Turning Point

This is a one toea coin.

It once jingled in pockets across Papua New Guinea before quietly slipping out of circulation sometime around 2004. It wasn't glamorous, and it certainly wasn't the coin you saved with pride. But in the village, especially in childhood, the one toea lived a life far bigger than its size.

We had a game.

Simple. Dusty. Competitive.

Each of us would place a coin in the middle of the road and draw a circle around it. That coin was your bet. Then, using a small circular lead nugget, we'd take turns trying to knock the coins out of the circle. No toys. No written rules. Just skill, laughter, and the satisfaction of getting it right.

The real joy wasn't in winning the coins. It was the sound - that sharp *clink* - when you struck one cleanly. It was the teasing, the pride, the rhythm of taking turns. If you won a few coins, good. If not, it didn't matter. Playing was enough. And even when we did take the winnings to the store, some shopkeepers refused them - too bent, too scratched, too worn from our games.

At home, though, the adults saw those coins differently.

My mother and grandfather kept every one toea they could find, straight or battered, inside a small hand-sewn string bag called a *puse-puse*. Nothing was thrown away.

"A coin is a coin," my mother would say.

When the bag grew heavy, she'd take it to the PNGBC bank and deposit everything.

My grandfather did the same. He'd gather a pile of worn toetas, exchange them for higher denominations, and come home with food for the household.

Village economics at its most practical, small things adding up to something that mattered.

As children, we didn't see it that way. But the elders did. They understood what we didn't yet know: value isn't always obvious. Momokani! Sometimes it grows quietly, tucked away in a string bag.

Years later, that memory returned to me when one of my proposals was rejected. Actually, not just one, many have been.

Rejection always stings, especially at the start of a new year when you're hoping for momentum. It's easy to take it personally. Easy to feel small. Dented. Almost worthless like those beaten-up toetas we once flicked across the road.

But then I thought of the *puse-puse*.

Do I treat this rejection as a useless coin?

Or do I bank it, the way my parents did, as experience, as something that will carry value later?

Every setback, every rejection, every quiet “no” feels small in the moment. But over time, they fill the bag. They shape you. They teach you without making a sound.

There really are two sides to every coin.

One side is what it looks like now - unimpressive, easily dismissed.

The other is what it can become, if you choose to keep it, learn from it, and use it when the time is right.

The choice, as always, is yours.

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