

Commending a Man Who Did the Right Thing

A Gift of Kindness

by Alexandra Armstrong, CFP, and Kelly Wright, CFP

Editor's note: This incident happened to columnist Alex Armstrong; columnist Kelly Wright co-wrote the following information about financial safeguards.

There are still Good Samaritans out there! In mid-December, I took a cab from my office to a PBS premier showing of "Downton Abbey" a few blocks away. I paid the fare in cash and rushed into the Lisner Auditorium in Washington, D.C., to see the much-anticipated first episode. After the thoroughly enjoyable show, my husband and I caught another cab to a local restaurant. Once there, I opened up my purse to find my wallet missing.

This was cause for panic, as we were scheduled to go on vacation the following week and the wallet contained three credit cards and my driver's license as well as a fair amount of cash. I retraced my steps back to the auditorium and searched our seats, but no wallet.

We went home and I pulled out the photocopy I'd made of my charge cards as well as my driver's license. I called the credit card issuers and after checking to see whether there had been any recent charges (there weren't any), I told them to stop charges temporarily in case I might recover my wallet, although I wasn't very hopeful. The next morning, I immediately went to the bank to report my ATM card missing.

At about 11 a.m. the next morning, I received a call from Abraham, my cab driver of the previous night. He said he had had seven passengers after me and this morning had cleaned out the car to find my wallet under the front passenger seat.

Fortunately, my business card was in the wallet and thus he was able to call me. Abraham told me that he had to go to the mosque but could come by afterward with my wallet. He ended the call by wishing me Merry Christmas!

Sure enough, midafternoon he arrived at my office lobby with my wallet. The wallet was intact complete with all the cash, which I gave to him as a reward. He left wishing me Merry Christmas once again. Needless to say I was very relieved and my faith in human nature was reinforced by this kind man's actions.

Take Precautions

There are some things I did that were helpful and I'd recommend to our readers.

- **First, make an inventory** of all the things you carry in your wallet. Keep this at home in a safe place. This is also a good time to pare down the cards that you



carry, if possible. This can be a digital or written record, as long as you do it.

- **Second, take a photocopy or picture** of all your credit cards, front and back, and keep them with your inventory sheet. It should include the phone numbers of the credit card issuers.
- **Third, make sure your address is in your wallet.** In my case, the business card was ideal, as the taxi driver could call me at work.
- **Fourth, if you lose your wallet, report it** to the credit card companies immediately.
- **Fifth, if my wallet hadn't been recovered,** I did have a passport that I could have used to get on the plane. It's a good idea to have a photocopy of your passport available as well.

Have a Backup System and a Backup of Your Backup System

If you use your phone to take pictures or copies of credit cards, make sure your phone is password-protected. Keep a spreadsheet with the name, address, phone number and credit-card number and a photocopy as a backup. Transfer the pictures to a USB drive for safekeeping. Password-protect the files storing the credit card information.

Other Financial Safeguards

Don't carry all your cards with you. Store at least one at home in a safe place.

Use a password management system on your phone, have a backup of your phone and a way to remotely lock or delete it. It's also important to shred account information that's in paper form before disposing of it.

We suggest writing "See Identification" on the back of your cards rather than signing them.

If you carry checks in your wallet (I don't), have them list just your name on the checks, not your home address. Also, you may consider asking your existing credit card companies to not send blank checks through the mail.

Sharing Financial Information — the Pitfalls

Be careful with whom you share financial information, particularly on the phone with someone you don't know. If you don't know the caller, ask for a phone number so that you can call the person back. Never share information if you're uncomfortable.

Check up on online companies before you give them a credit card number; there are several Internet sites that rate online retailers, such as www.resellerratings.com or the

Better Business Bureau at www.bbb.org.

Most credit card companies allow you to sign up for text alerts when your card is used. You'll get a text message on your phone any time your card is used to charge something. This is a good practice, as it may help prevent unauthorized use of your card.

There are monitoring services that will also track card usage, and this may help, but the best and fastest defense is to frequently check your accounts online.

Take care in dealing with income tax filings — this has been a hotbed of fraud in the last several years. File electronically, if possible, and direct your refund, if any, to a bank account. Also, if you receive a call from the Internal Revenue Service, it isn't legitimate. The IRS will always contact you in writing at the address on your return.

Charities and political campaigns often will call to ask for contributions. Never give your credit card information to someone who calls you. If you're motivated to contribute to a cause from a caller, explain that you'll call back once you verify the call is genuine.

Better yet, ask the caller to send you information for you to review before giving a donation.

Also, when working with online sellers, note that they'll never ask you

for your account password. We've seen cases in which a fraudulent party has tried to gain access to an account this way.

Monitor Your Credit Report

Your credit reports are available for free once a year. But if you sense you have been targeted, don't wait — check your credit report immediately. If any company that you have shopped with is breached, again, you should check your credit report right away and then do so regularly.

Some organizations will even offer free identity theft protection, and we strongly suggest you avail yourself of that offer. Sometimes this protection can be offered to groups for very little cost.

Identity theft protection is worth exploring. You may wish to see whether you're a member of a group that offers it at a discount.

A Happy Ending

I wanted to share my story that ended well to tell you there are still Good Samaritans who care about people. This recovery of my wallet made my holiday vacation even more pleasant.

If I hadn't been so lucky, or if you're not, it's important to be prepared ahead of time.

Finally, how many of you actually

know what's in your wallet? You might consider paring down the number of cards you carry. **R**



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