

TIP A THIEF

...Tis the Season...

by Kat Rowoldt

Oh, it's that wonderful time of the year when houses sparkle at night, newspapers gain weight from ads, and thieves pop up in unexpected places. Such a glorious season! Sadly, it's also a time for us to guard our possessions and money more closely.



In the last couple of weeks we have already been hit twice by tip thieves. Leave it to a nerd like me to catch what is happening. It has been a while since we were victim of this simple, rarely detected theft. A couple of years ago it was happening a lot, then it dropped off. Seems Christmas brings the sticky fingers out more often.

The easy act of stealing money, a dollar here, three dollars there, adds up quickly. Over the course of a shift serving guests at a restaurant, it can be very profitable. Most people will never even notice the funds missing, and people don't go to jail for a dollar here and there.

So what am I talking about? You and your hubby have a nice dinner for twenty dollars. You leave a three dollar tip on the credit/debit card receipt and off you go. Most people do not take their receipts, and those who do, rarely note on their copy what they tipped. When the charges hit your card or bank, the total should have been \$23, but it's \$24 or \$26. Nerds notice the discrepancy, but even a nerd needs a receipt to know for sure.

Adding those few extra dollars before they close the ticket out is theft. If they add \$3 per table and move twenty tables in a shift, that's an additional \$60 on top of the tip that their guests generously left for them. Your only means of proving there was a problem is having your copy of the receipt.

A few days ago I took my copy of our receipt and a photo shot of our bank statement showing the added funds to a local restaurant and asked for the manager. My goal was not to get my three dollars back, but to let them know that

their new waitress was helping herself to additional dollars. That did not reflect well on the restaurant. They were grateful I took the time to document, gave them a copy, and shared this information with them. They were none too happy with what had occurred. The copy of the table receipt showed exactly who worked that table.

Today I noticed a little \$3 deposit in my bank account. I never expected that. I appreciated that they handled the situation professionally, and as an added bonus figured out how to track my account number down and put the stolen funds back into it.

I can't imagine doing the work of a wait staff person. That is one job I have never experienced firsthand. To me they are such a blessing. Having them serve me while I take a break from work and phone calls is a daily delight. I appreciate them and try to always let them know that I do. Their job has to be one of the hardest jobs on a daily basis, plus they don't always get the nicest customers either!

But...I can't stress enough how important it is to take and keep your receipts. Our craziest experience happened a few years back. We stopped to grab a really quick meal before we headed out of town for a little getaway. The waitress worked with us to get the food fast and we left her a generous \$5 tip on a \$14 bill. The next day, while we are out of town, I checked our bank account. Oh my gosh - that charge came through for \$64.

I made a fast call to the restaurant to let them know of the error. They happened to be a chain restaurant and the only way their corporate office would deal with the situation was with a receipt. We dug around to find the receipt. Being on the road and in a hurry, we hadn't handled the receipt as well as we usually do. We found it!

It occurred to us that this was probably an accident - or at least we hoped! When keying in the \$5, potentially they simply put in too many zeroes. The difference in the receipt and what the bank drafted was \$45 - the difference between \$5 and \$50. If we had not had that receipt, we would not have been able to get our \$45 back from corporate in Dallas. We would have been mad at the restaurant, but the irresponsibility would have actually have been on us.

If this ever should happen to you, please let the restaurant know. They really appreciate it. Plus, we need to drive this thieving lot out of San Angelo. I have

never had it happen to me on the road, but I've had it happen numerous times in San Angelo - sad to say!

The police department had a great suggestion on this too. Some people tip with cash and then charge their meal. They suggest writing on your receipt "cash left on table." That serves two purposes. It covers you and also lets the wait staff know that there should be cash for them. Never leave the tip line blank. If necessary, put a "0" in the tip line with a line through it and tally at bottom.

During this holiday season, let's remember all the men and women who are in the service industry, that pull double shifts, give up time with their families so we can enjoy time with ours, and be sure to thank them for their service. December can be a month of grumpy, tired, financially worried, and mad customers that they are dealing with throughout the day. Maybe we can be their ray of sunshine, hope, promise, and joy in the midst of it all.

I encourage you not to be careless with your receipts, but to fill out your copy, take it with you, keep it, and then reconcile it daily with your card or bank accounts. The SAPD encourages us to check things TWICE daily during this season. If you do catch an error or problem, graciously address the issue with the store or restaurant. They are typically very grateful to be alerted to an issue before it costs them customers.

Until next time....

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