

## The Tale of Two Brians

Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in the United States and it costs the economy billions of dollars in lost revenue, fraud prevention, criminal investigation and the cost of the time and the aggravation to the victim is immeasurable.

An associate of mine some years back, named Brian Jones\*, had excellent credit. He didn't know just how good it was until someone stole his identity and purchased over \$150,000 in vehicles, credit cards and consumer loans – all in his name.

The happy ending, sort of anyway, is that the fake Brian Jones is still doing time in prison for the crimes but the real Brian Jones had to rebuild his credit and actually fight with the creditors to have his credit updated.

At a glance, the question is how did this happen to Brian? Did he lose his wallet or leave it in a restaurant? Did someone pick his pocket, open his mail or did they hack into the computer at his bank? No unfortunately, nothing quite so ordinary. Apparently someone at the Department of Motor Vehicles was selling real licenses with other people's photos on them. These were real state issued DMV driver's licenses with the fake Brian Jones' photo and a mail center P.O. Box address on them that didn't like a P.O. Box address. Keep in mind you usually need to show the P.O. Box owner an ID to open a P.O. Box and of course Brian Jones had more than one license with fake information on it.

Anyway, once the fake Brian Jones had a license he also had Brian's social security number because DMV records that information, as well as your date of birth, with your license and then it was simply a question of opening up a checking account and applying for new credit cards or buying a new car. Three of them to be exact.

Here's the million dollar question: How do you stop a DMV, bank, auto dealership, or any store, restaurant or service employee from stealing your information like they did to Brian? You can't.

Frank Abagnale ([www.abagnale.com](http://www.abagnale.com)) said it best. "It's easier to hack people than computers..." Frank made a career of identity fraud and he now consults for a living and he knows better than anyone how this can happen.

So what can you do to prevent identity theft? The good news is, if you have poor credit, anything less than a 640 FICO score, no one will want to steal it. However, if you have good credit and if you have exceptional credit, scores over 700, then you need to take steps to protect your credit.

The easiest way to stop fraud is to look out for it. You should order a copy of your credit report from each of the 3 bureaus, (Trans Union, Equifax & Experian) every 6 months and every quarter is even better. It's easier to stop fraud before the identity thief starts

to default on the accounts he/she has opened and to do this you need to look at your credit. You can sign up through a service that will pull all 3 bureaus together for an annual fee ranging from \$39 to \$79 depending upon whether or not you want to see your credit scores? Getting a copy of your credit report will not have an impact on your score unlike applying for a loan or credit which does have an impact on your scores.

While you can't control what happens to your information when it's in the hands of DMV, the bank, or any other state or federal agency, you can take some basic steps to protect your own documents:

- Shred all bank, investment account and credit card statements before throwing them away (ideally, you should save 2-3 months of statements for future financing needs).
- Shred all credit card receipts that you don't need to save or use for tax purposes.
- Keep your social security card, birth certificate and copies of all your credit cards, driver's license or any professional licenses locked in a fire proof safe at home or a safety deposit box at a bank.
- Do not keep your garage door opener in the car with your vehicle registration showing your home address (some states allow you to present photo copies of the registration and insurance cards sans your home address).
- Do not give out any personal information online to any company unless you initiate the contact.
- Do contact all credit bureaus and have a fraud alert put on your credit file and have each bureau remove your name from their marketing lists.

In the end it took Brian Jones over 2 years and it cost him several thousand dollars to get his credit back in shape. And you can bet he regularly looks at his credit reports to make sure all the accounts that are on it are his.

\*Of course the name is a pseudonym

**This article was written by Adam Palmer, who is a client and the mortgage broker in my professional networking group. He already has helped many of you deal with the crazy mortgage situation we now have. Adam is a great resource for advice on mortgage and debt consolidation issues.**

**I am proud that he is part of my network of advisors. The members of this network have all been personally screened by me so I can recommend them to you with confidence. They are available to help you in the areas I do not deal with directly, like legal, accounting and investments.**

**Adam saw the article I sent you a few months ago about "An Attorney's Advice" and asked to do a follow up and provide additional information.**

**Why not?**

**I hope you found the article helpful. I think it is good to get someone else's ideas and point of view every now and then. Identity theft is one area that we all need to pay attention to, especially if you have good credit.**

**Your comments and questions are welcome.**

### **UPDATES**

I was able to have vacation the week before Easter. As I write this, Gail is on vacation in FL for a week. By the end of the month we will all actually be back in the office at the same time.

The webinars we did the end of March went well. I now have a recording of that. This is the same introductory dinner seminar that I have done for the past two years periodically. It is designed to provide basic information on the BOY concept and how this can help people succeed financially. If you would like a copy for yourself or to introduce family and friends to the BOY concept, please let us know. We have set up a link where the seminar can be downloaded directly to your computer without running into file size problems on email.

Something very interesting has happened over the last 6 months or so. We have started working with many people from across the country that live in areas that do not have local BOY certified advisors. Using telephone and computer technology, I am able to do the same planning and analysis for them that I do for people in person. Many people have told me that they prefer doing things this way, as it is a hassle to find the time in their schedule to come to Torrington. At the present time I am working with people in MA, VA, MO, FL, WA and CT. So it really is not a problem if someone lives in another area of the country. If you have family or friends who live outside CT or who would have to travel a while to get here, we now have an alternative for them if you care enough about them to want to introduce them to BOY.

**SEE YOU IN MAY!**

**APRIL 2007 NEWSLETTER  
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