

## GRANDPARENT SCAMMERS HIT US HARD

Scammers made another big score off a Clinton County senior citizen last week. Crooks using the tried and true grandparent scam fleeced Grace Knapper of rural Camanche of \$12,000. Mrs. Knapper courageously volunteered to publicize her name in this matter, in the hopes of warning and educating other senior citizens to guard against such a loss.

Mrs. Knapper told me, "I lost a year's worth of Social Security in three days." How did this happen? Well, just like it always does. The scammers did nothing new, or technically advanced to pull this off. They did what they always do, played on emotions. Mrs. Knapper got a call from someone posing as her grandson, Ben. "He told me he was sick, and he sounded stuffed up, but it still sounded like my grandson." The caller claimed he was getting a ride to a pharmacy from a friend. Police pulled them over, and found a lot of drugs in the car. Police arrested Mrs. Knapper's grandson. At this point in the story, the caller handed off the phone to another man, who claimed he was a police officer, "Sgt Davis". Sgt Davis said the bond was \$4000. He wanted it paid in Best Buy or Walmart gift cards.

Now, Mrs. Knapper felt especially responsible for solving this problem. First, the caller said it needed to be a secret, no one else could know. Second, Ben needed to participate in his sister's wedding in three days. Mrs. Knapper was motivated by one thought. "What's going to happen if I can't get him out of jail?" So what followed was three days of paying more and more money to get Ben out of jail. Every time Mrs. Knapper paid the demand, the scammers came up with a reason for another demand. Ben lied in court – need another \$2000 to smooth that over. Ben screwed up the electronic payment of the bond – need another \$4000. Ben got released, but immediately broke a no-contact order and was re-arrested – need another \$2000. "No one in my family has ever been involved with the legal system or courts, we didn't know anything about how the system worked," Mrs. Knapper explained.

Looking back now, Mrs. Knapper saw a lot of red flags. Clerks at Best Buy refused to sell her giftcards twice in one day. Clerks at Walmart warned her of scams involving these cards. Mrs. Knapper ignored the warnings. She followed the script the scammers told her to use when withdrawing money from the bank, and buying the gift cards. She kept it a secret, only telling her husband.

How did she learn the truth? When she walked into the wedding rehearsal dinner and saw Ben, whom she feared was still in jail. "You could have knocked me over with a feather when I saw him there," she told me.

So what's the warning Mrs. Knapper wants you to hear? Just know you can get this phone call, so be ready. Be aware the scam exists. Even though we've endured this scam for decades, written about it, talked about it, warned about it, Mrs. Knapper never heard of it. She is no recluse. She is a college-educated retired education professional, with a wide social circle and

interests. We need to talk about this, tell everyone. Mrs. Knapper also warns if you get such a call, “ask a lot of questions, talk it over with other people, and do not keep it a secret.”

## PHONE SPOOFING USES HIGH-PROFILE NUMBERS

In the last two weeks, several Dewitt residents reported receiving phone calls from what their Caller ID showed as the Dewitt Genesis Medical Center. When they answered the calls, they heard a robo-caller pitch credit card rate reductions. The Clinton Police Department reported someone spoofed or disguised calls using their non-emergency number. These are examples of crooks, usually telemarketers, spoofing the phone numbers of institutions important in the community, in the hope of getting the call answered. And it’s working.

Caller ID, while a valuable screening tool, is not a perfect foil for telemarketers. Crooks can trick it to display any number they choose. We need to know this, and when we do answer and hear that sales pitch, to just hang up. Don’t answer any questions, don’t ask any questions.

## STOPPING ROBO-CALLS

The Iowa Senior Medicare Patrol published tips on enhancing your robo-call blocking ability. Some of these are free, some cost money, but are worth considering. Here are their suggestions:

- **Set up “anonymous call rejection” option:** This is a free landline-calling feature available from most telephone companies. It lets you screen out calls from callers who blocked their caller ID information — a favorite tactic of telemarketers. To set it up, dial \*77 from your landline. Call your phone service provider, asking if they offer this feature, and how to enable it.
- **Nomorobo:** This is a free service and works only if you use an Internet-based VoIP phone service. It won’t work on traditional analog landlines or wireless phones. Nomorobo uses a “simultaneous ring” service that detects and blocks robocalls on a blacklist of known offender numbers. Access the internet at [Nomorobo.com](http://Nomorobo.com) to sign up, or see if Nomorobo works with your phone service provider.
- **Use robocall-blocking devices:** This will cost a little money. Purchase a call-blocking device like the [Sentry 2](#) (\$59) or [Digitone Call Blocker Plus](#) (\$100). These small devices, which plug into your phone line, allow you to blacklist numbers you no longer wish to receive, and set up a whitelist, or manually program the phone to recognize and accept a certain number of safe numbers. Both devices are very effective.
- **Get a cellphone app:** Some apps help with robo telemarketing calls and robo spam texts to your cellphone. Try [Truecaller](#) or [PrivacyStar](#), which screen and block these calls.

And if all else fails, and you find yourself on the line with a robo-caller or telemarketer, hang up. Don't engage, don't talk to them, don't push 1 or follow any other instructions. HANG UP, HANG UP, HANG UP.

### **CONTACT SENIORS VS. CRIME**

Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you. Contact me at Seniors vs. Crime, Clinton County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211 extension 4433, or email me at [randymeier@gapa911.us](mailto:randymeier@gapa911.us)

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