



## Pirates

by John D. Whitaker

Pirates like to pick the low hanging fruit. The easy stuff. They go for the slow moving ships because they are cowards. I was very pleased to see that a very clear message was sent to the pirates off the coast of Somalia recently. Don't screw around with the United States Navy. Somalia is a long way from Wyoming, but if you think that pirates are confined to the coast of Africa you are mistaken. Unfortunately, we have pirates sailing up and down our streets right here in Casper. The pirates I am talking about are real life "Pirates of the Caribbean" and they are terrorizing our more vulnerable citizens using computers and telephones.

With identity theft all over the news most of us recognize these scams immediately. When some guy sends you an e-mail or calls you on the phone and tells you that he is an African prince and needs your bank information to wire transfer millions of dollars to your bank account, he is lying. Unfortunately, some of our elderly friends and neighbors are too trusting. They may even suspect a scam, but more and more people here in Wyoming are falling for this scam because they want to believe they won something that might help their families.

I have an elderly friend who was being systematically ripped off by some pirate in Nassau. My friend lives alone but he does have family around. He worked hard all his life and was comfortable financially. He got a telephone call from a pirate who claimed he had won \$5 million and a new car in some sweepstakes that he did not enter. All he needed to do was send a processing fee of \$500 dollars and the \$5 million would be wire transferred to his bank. The pirate was very persuasive and talked him into sending the money. He was sending the money to a post office box in Las Vegas. Then more calls started coming and each time with a

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different story about why another \$500 or \$1000 was necessary to get the \$5 million released. My friend was too embarrassed to go to his family and this jerk kept calling him trying to get him to send more money. Sometimes he would call as many as 100 times a day. When my friend tried to say no, the calls started getting threatening. The pirate finally told my friend that he was in danger of physical injury if he did not send more money. When my friend finally called me he had been taken for over \$8,000. We immediately changed his telephone number and called the police. When I called the number that appeared on the caller ID, I got to talk to this jerk. I told him the party was over. After I hung up he called back from Nassau in the Bahamas, not Las Vegas to see if I was who I said I was.

The sad part of this scam is that once they get a hook in someone they are relentless. Vulnerable adults do not want to admit that they have fallen for a scam like this and so they are reluctant to tell anyone about it until it is too late. The calls quickly get threatening and these poor victims become terrified that these pirates will actually show up in Wyoming and try to hurt them. They won't because they are cowards. Because the calls are coming from outside the United States it is very hard to catch these weasels.

If you have an elderly family member or know a vulnerable adult, please take the time to talk to warn them about this problem. Tell them that if they get a call like this from someone that they should never send any money or provide any personal information. If you are being harassed by one of these pirates now, don't send any more money. There are a lot of things you can do to stop this. You shouldn't be embarrassed because you trusted someone. Tell your family, and call the police. I would give you the number for the United States Navy but they have their hands full in Africa right now.