

Traveling Companion: Track this bill

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Sunday collections yield a plethora of dollar bills. Rarely are they new ones. Most often they have been in the trenches of life, soiled by the many hands they have passed through; crumbled by constant folding and yet holding their value.

Recently, our Sunday collection yielded a unique dollar bill. No! it wasn't a counterfeited one. Part of it wasn't missing. Of course, it wasn't new. What made it unique was a message that someone had written on it along its outer edges with a red pen. The message simply said, "Trace this bill at www.wheresgeorge.com.

We didn't have the heart to fulfill the bill's desire. We just bundled him up with the many other dollar bills and sent him on his way to the bank. Maybe, some George will meet him there and trace his path or maybe, the bank, seeing his soiled, worn, sorry state, might send him to be reincarnated as a new dollar bill.

Recently, my email box has been flooded with requests to buy prescription drugs on line without a prescription. As one who does not take any medication, over the counter or prescribed, I have no need to even consider ordering such prescription drugs. Obviously, some enterprising individuals have allowed their web crawler to visit web sites and pick up millions of email addresses.

Also, recently, I have received some fantastic offers on mortgages. Even though I am not in the business of looking for such, I still receive emails that remind me that I am pre-approved and all I have to do is visit their site and will receive an instant mortgage in a matter of minutes.

Some months ago, I had received several emails from, especially Nigeria, reminding me that I had been heir to thousands if not millions of dollars. All I had to do was to visit a particular site and, presumably share some personal information, and I would inherit the money. Obviously, I am not any richer since.

I also have a healthy suspicion about "cookies." Obviously, these cookies are not the kind I eat – chocolate chip, but they are the ones that web sites casually drop onto unsuspecting computers to keep track of sites on the Internet one has visited. Obviously, such tactics can be used for marketing research.

Yahoo has its own "cookie" monster. It is called a "Web Beacon" that tracks the movements of people who have Yahoo accounts, while they surf Yahoo sites as well as beyond.

If I check in at an airport for a flight, I am asked for all kinds of personal information. My passport number and other details are typed into a computer system that is available to the government just in case I might fit a certain profile and might be a terrorist.

Attempts are made to ascertain my computer surfing habits through cookies, adware and spyware. No matter what anti-spyware, anti-virus ware one uses to block such intrusions, somehow, the enterprising find a way to short-circuit them. I can include all kinds of message rules to try and thwart certain emails but often they are futile.

Someone reminded me the other day that, back in the 1950's they worked at a local hardware store. They were paid by check but one had to cash the check in the store and in return one was paid in two dollar bills. The two dollar bills eventually came back to the same store so that the owner could trace the kind of stores his employees were purchasing from.

In stores, I am often asked for my zip code, I usually give a fictitious one. I am often asked for my social security number in stores and I simply say, "You don't need it." I refuse.

Over the years, I have developed a healthy suspicion about certain things. After all, Jesus warned us that he was sending us out as "lambs in the midst of wolves." Sometimes, the wolf is just a click away.