

Identity Crisis

By Reg P. Wydeven
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In 1982, my buddy Pearl and I would go swimming at Kimberly's public pool, which was down the street from his house. The pool didn't open until 1:00, so we'd eat our lunches at his house and try to kill time until we could swim. That's when it happened - that's when we got hooked on Days of Our Lives.

I watched Days from that fateful summer until I graduated from law school. I saw many shocking, scandalous and always steamy storylines during those years, and most of them involved Days' hottest couple, Roman Brady and Marlena Evans.

In 1991, Marlena returned to her husband Roman after being kidnapped and held captive on a tropical island after being in a drug-induced coma for five years. The separated lovers quickly rekindled their timeless romance only to have their reunion interrupted by none other than...Roman Brady. It turns out the real Roman was also being held prisoner, but his captor was the evil Victor Kiriakis. The Roman imposter was actually John Black, the pawn of super villain Stefano DiMera, who had brainwashed Black into thinking he was the real Roman Brady.

The twisted plot of DiMera created quite the dilemma - Marlena was torn between the two men she thought were her husband. On the one hand, her original husband, the love of her life, was alive and back in Salem. On the other, even though the man she had recently shared her bed with was an imposter, the feelings she had for him were real.

While it may not be as exciting in real life, identity theft is every bit as traumatic as any storyline on a daytime soap opera. According to McGruff the Crime Dog, identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America and it affects half a million new victims each year.

Every bit as wicked as Days' Kiriakis and DiMera, identity thieves steal social security numbers, dates of birth, addresses, phone numbers, maiden names, or any other identifying information to defraud their unsuspecting victims. Armed with this information, the thieves use their victims' credit cards, bank accounts or library privileges. The thieves even apply for loans, complete rental or job applications, and in Salem, steal their victim's wife.

During the holidays, the busiest shopping season of the year, identity thieves have greater access to credit cards and other valuable personal information. To protect your identity, follow these simple steps:

- * Only give your vital personal information to trusted sources, and if it's over the internet, make sure the site is secured or encrypted. Scam artists love to pose as government officials, bankers, etc., in an effort to obtain this information.
- * Shred old bank/credit card statements and don't just throw them away. Identity thieves aren't above nosing through your trash.
- * Be cautious using ATM machines and your credit cards to protect your PIN or card number. Thanks to camera phones, crooks have a much easier time getting these digits.
- * Leave your social security card, passport and any unused credit cards at home.
- * Don't write your social security or telephone numbers on your checks.

Finally, thanks to the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1970, it's easy to obtain your credit report, which you should do every six months and make sure it is accurate. Following these guidelines will hopefully prevent your life from becoming a soap opera.

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