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Identity theft victim locked up

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Identity theft is a huge problem in the Valley. If it happens to you it can damage your credit, and take years for the theft to be fixed. But for a local woman, the theft of her identity put her behind bars.

"Knowing that I'm innocent. Knowing that I did not do this and having to try and prove it."

Christie Scalzo was a fugitive from the law. That's because she is a victim of stolen identity. "I really felt I was guilty until proven innocent and the hardest thing for me was trying to prove that," Scalzo said.

Proving her innocence began six years ago when Scalzo's car was broken into. "My backpack was taken. It had everything: my identification, my license, my social security card - the whole nine yards."

Fast forward to 2008. Scalzo is now married, a mother of two with another one on the way. She was driving with her kids when the 2002 incident would suddenly come back to haunt her.

"It was right past the signal when he pulled me over. He said 'Can I see your license?' and I said 'Yeah, what's the matter?' Because I know nothing is wrong, I know I don't have any problems. And he said, 'Well, I just ran your plates and you have a warrant out of Henderson.' And, I said, 'What?'"

That warrant stemmed from a 2002 arrest of someone claiming to be Christi Scalzo. The real Christi Scalzo believes this is what happened: Her car was broken into her at a 99 cent store and an unknown person took her identification. That person was then busted by police doing the same thing the very next day. That unknown person told police she was Christi Scalzo.

"They (police) wouldn't believe me. They said whatever we've heard this all before."

Despite Scalzo's explanations of identity theft to arresting officers, she was taken to the Henderson Detention Center. She was locked up. But the fingerprints from the 2002 arrest were not compared to hers. Neither was the mug shot.

Scalzo was booked on burglary, drugs and weapon charges. She faced twenty years behind bars. "I'm a mother of two and I am facing twenty years for something I didn't do?"

Scalzo thought if law enforcement would not compare the fingerprints and mug shots, she would have to do that herself. "I went to Henderson courts, police station. I needed mug shots, fingerprints, discovery, all my files, and they all said I have to have an attorney here to subpoena the records."

Craig Perry, Scalzo's attorney, tells us the rise of identity theft creates new and unforeseen problems for both police and the public. "The police had the booking information from the original arrest, but they didn't pull the records and compare. It took me five seconds to tell they weren't the same fingerprints," Perry said.

After spending \$3,500 on legal fees and months of litigation, Scalzo would finally get her day in court. It took only seconds. "They dismissed the case. That was it," Scalzo explains.

Perry cautions this could happen to anyone. "Everyone should be on notice from this case. When your identity is stolen, you should report it, maybe carry the papers around with you. But there's nothing in the system that prevents this from happening in the future."

Although this mix up is now solved for Scalzo, the story does not end on a happy note. Hours after she was released from the Henderson Detention Center, she miscarried.

"I hope this isn't the end of the case," Perry said. "They ought to be finding this woman. That woman is still out there somewhere. Still has Christie's information."

A spokesperson for Henderson Police told us they can not comment on the specifics of this case. They did inform us that whenever an arrest is made on a warrant that is four years or older and the identity of that person is in question, delays can happen.

Delays also happen when arrests are made after hours and on weekends. During those times, fingerprints are sent out to the FBI and not compared in house. That's because on nights and weekends, there is no one available to do that.



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