

Everyday Cheapskate: Debt collectors find relatives of missing debtors

by *Mary_Hunt*

Dear Mary: My husband receives calls from debt collectors looking for relatives who have fallen behind on payments. These callers don't harass us or seek money from us, but they are nuisances. This has happened with at least three different relatives. None of them ever has lived with us. How do the lenders find us? â€” Erika T., e-mail

Dear Erika: You know when you go to the doctor or other care provider and they ask for an emergency contact who does not live with you? You think that's so they will know whom to call if you become unconscious or need medical help. You provide the phone number and address of a relative or someone who knows you well. The real reason they ask for this information is so they can find out what happened to you if you are unreachable and skip out on your bill.

I'll bet these family members see your husband as their favorite uncle or a caring soul whom they would want authorities to contact if they needed help. Meanwhile, creditors or authorities assume you will know where this person they're chasing has moved.

Dear Mary: I am in my late 40s. I never have had a loan. I pay for big-ticket items by opening savings accounts and making payments to myself. The way I see it, if I need money and am not able to leverage my properties, I've done something wrong. I don't use credit. How can I turn my credit off so I don't have to worry about identity fraud? â€” Caroline, e-mail

Dear Caroline: You're a smart woman. You can request a "credit freeze" on all three of your credit files. This means no one can look at them. If you ever need to apply for credit, you can have them unfrozen. It's an effective tool. Go to each of the credit bureaus' Web sites or call them to learn how to apply a credit freeze. It might cost you a fee, but it's worth it if you are concerned about identity theft.

Dear Mary: I have had your books and an online membership for quite a while but did not actively work The Plan. This month, I studied and read until I absorbed the process. I spent one entire day putting pencil to paper and worked out my family's plan. My husband and I have credit card debt. If we stay the course, we will be free in four years or less. Thank you for all you've done to help us! â€” Carolyn S., e-mail

Dear Carolyn: Confetti and cartwheels for you! I am gratified to know that you're on board and (finally) working The Plan. You are not the only one who has become a member of Debt-Proof Living and not been actively engaged. The good thing is that just by being here, you knew what to do and how to do it. Four years will go by so quickly. I will be here all the way, cheering you on. Stick close!

Do you have a question for Mary? E-mail her at mary@everydaycheapskate.com, or write to Everyday Cheapskate, P.O. Box 2135, Paramount, CA 90723. Mary Hunt is the author of 17 books, including "Debt-Proof Living."

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