

Grandma Scams a Scammer

By Tom Purcell



A few years ago, my then 70-something mom was targeted by telephone scammers.

“Grandma,” said a young man pretending to be her grandson, Jerrod, “I’m in trouble.”

He said he was in Canada, unaware he had been fishing illegally. He said he was arrested and needed bail money.

My mother immediately became aware the caller was a fraudster. In her feeblest voice, she said, “What do you need, honey?”

“They assigned me a lawyer,” said the scammer. “Can I have him call you? Please don’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t even tell Grandpa!” she said.

A moment later, “the lawyer” called.

“This is serious,” said a stern male voice. “We need to raise \$575 in two hours or the judge will send Jerrod to jail.”

He gave her instructions to wire money to Vancouver. She told him she’d do her best.

Ninety minutes later, the scammer called back.

“I have the cash,” said my mother, “but my car won’t start!”

“Can you take a cab?”

“I don’t know how,” she said. “Maybe my neighbors can help. Can you give me 15 minutes?”

He called back.

“My neighbor’s husband will be home soon. Can you give me a half-hour?”

He called again.

“I went to Western Union, but the lady said I didn’t have the right information. Can you give it to me again?”

Grumbling, he did.

“Can I talk to my grandson?”

“He’s with the judge,” said the scammer.

“May I have your number in case I forget something?”

“I can’t take calls while in court. How long to wire the money?”

“Maybe a half-hour,” said my mother.

He called back again and again — but my mother always made him wait.

“I gave the Western Union lady the money!” she said at last.

“Do you have the receipt?”

“Receipt?”

“When you give them the money, they give you a receipt,” he snapped.

“I didn’t get one!”

“Lady, how do you give someone \$575 and not get a receipt?!”

“I’m so worried about Jerrod! Can you give me another half-hour?”

“For God’s sakes, lady. Get it right this time!”

She gave him a fake Western Union confirmation number. When he realized it was useless, he called every two minutes for over an hour.

My mother never answered.

She tied him up for over seven hours — and hopefully prevented someone else from being robbed.

But detecting such scams is not so easy anymore, thanks to artificial intelligence. Scammers can now clone a loved one’s voice using just a short clip lifted from voicemail or social media.

These AI-generated scams are so sophisticated that elderly scams are growing rapidly.

According to the FBI, Americans aged 60 and older reported losses exceeding \$3.4 billion in 2023. Victims lost, on average, nearly \$34,000. More than 100,000 people filed complaints.

Elderly victims are currently being tricked by deepfake videos falsely claiming Elon Musk is backing a new DOGE cryptocurrency. Others fall for fake Medicare calls or IRS impersonations.

We must encourage our elderly loved ones to screen unknown calls, never give out personal information, and remember that real government agencies never demand money over the phone.

In our digital world, we have to assume every contact could be from a fraudster.

By teaching more people to detect scams, they’ll be able to outwit the scammers — just like my mother did.

See Tom Purcell’s syndicated column, humor books and funny videos featuring his dog, Thurber, at TomPurcell.com. Email him at Tom@TomPurcell.com.