

### BACKGROUND

Until about ten years ago, the department store, oil company, and bank credit cards that I used were opened in joint names with my husband using his Social Security Number. In the late 1980's, I responded to one of the many and frequent mail offers for a credit card in my own name and Social Security Number. During the next few years I applied for and received several additional credit cards. Since I was not employed and had limited income from baby sitting, holiday gifts and occasional garage sale income, my purchases were modest and it was my practice to pay the entire balance when the monthly bill was received. I felt a small sense of independence but little did I know of the perils that lay ahead.

### IDENTITY FRAUD TESTIMONY

On or about April 1, 1997, I wrote one of my credit card accounts to have the credit limit increased from \$300 to \$800 for the purpose of buying a much needed kitchen range. I expected prompt approval since I had always paid the full balance on-time over the 5-6 years that I held the card. About ten days later, I received a letter from the Card Issuer advising me that they were sorry that they could not grant my request because of unfavorable information in my Consumer Credit Files. In the same letter, I was notified that I was entitled to receive a statement of the principal reasons for the unfavorable decision by contacting The Credit Bureau (Experian). As directed, I contacted The Credit Bureau and requested a copy of my Consumer Credit Report.

Approximately three weeks later, I received my Consumer Credit Report. Incredibly, expecting a one page document since I only held 3-4 cards under my Social Security Number, I was astounded to find a fourteen (14) page report containing more than sixty (60) total accounts. After identifying my own valid accounts, which were all current, I was left with 50-plus bogus accounts, many of which were seriously delinquent. The bogus accounts included Real Estate Mortgages, Bank Cards, Department Stores and Utility accounts. Additionally, the Report contained a listing of eight (8) aliases and several employers that I had no knowledge of. The next day, I went to The Credit Bureau office in Carnegie, Pa. with credit report in hand.

I provided The Credit Bureau with a copy of my Credit Report with the bogus accounts noted. The Bureau representative advised me that this was not uncommon and promised a full audit and corrective action within six (6) weeks. They also provided me with a form to complete that would require future creditors to call me at my home phone if credit was being applied for with my Social Security Number. They also advised me that there were two (2) additional Consumer Credit Agencies, Equifax and Transunion, that I needed to contact.

I contacted both additional agencies and in about two weeks, I received their Credit History Reports. These reports contained another 12-15 bogus accounts and aliases similar to those identified previously. I, again, noted the accounts that were not mine, and returned the reports to the respective agencies with a letter requesting corrective action and a fraud block.

Several weeks later, I received an updated report from The Credit Bureau. All original bogus accounts were removed, but, alas, three (3) additional bogus accounts appeared. It was later determined that these were in process at the time of the original credit report and prior to placing the "block" on the account. Disturbingly, my account still displayed the original aliases. Once again, a letter was prepared and the second credit report was returned for audit and correction.

Shortly thereafter, corrected reports were received from Transunion and Equifax. They, too, contained several new bogus accounts that required additional correspondence and returned mailings.

Several weeks later, I received the second corrected credit history report back from The Credit Bureau. All the bogus accounts noted in my previous correspondence had been removed as were the list of aliases and incorrect employers. Alarming, however, the new report now included a new account from Allegheny County Civil Court on a civil claim judgement in the amount of \$ 4300. This item was added to my record despite the fraudulent activity block that had been put on the account months prior. The next day I traveled to the Allegheny County Courthouse to find the source of this judgement. I was advised by the Court Clerk that the party whose name matched one of the aliases associated with my account, removed her mother from a Nursing Home and did not pay for final charges. The County Clerk had no idea how the judgement got into my name except for the use of my social security number. They said they do not check SS# on judgements of this type. I was told that it was again, my responsibility to clear my record with The Credit Bureau. An additional letter was written and forwarded to the Credit Bureau for correction.

I'm happy to say that as of this day of my testimony, my Credit History with each of the three agencies, is free of fraudulently opened accounts. Initially, but not for long, we tried to imagine this situation was happening as the result of human error in transcribing numbers when accounts were opened. Soon it was obvious that it was carefully calculated and executed over and over again. It took nearly a year, considerable time and expense, to pursue just the clearing of my credit history. We have gained a lot of knowledge and are definitely more aware of the devious ways members of our society use to enhance their lives at others expense. **THESE IDENTITY FRAUD ACTIONS NEED TO BE STOPPED!**

I wrote to the Social Security Administration to advise them of the events and to solicit their help. None was forthcoming and all they could do was send me a pamphlet that gave guidelines on how to protect oneself by securing wallets and tissues from credit card purchases.

In summary, I'd like to see the following minimum features in your legislation:

- \* The ability to bring punitive action to the perpetrators.
- \* Education to the consumers/ regular issuance of credit history reports
- \* Notification if aliases are received.
- \* More responsible research by the credit issuers.

Thank you, again, for your efforts in developing effective legislation so that others do not have to experience what we did.