

The Stolen Taxi
by Abe Mittleman

Have you ever had your car stolen? I did. Here is a story that I every now and then tell.

It was a cold winter night some time in the late 1980s. I was working the night shift in my taxi. The time was around 8PM. After working through the rush hour, it was time to take a break and have something to eat. On the Upper West side of Manhattan, Broadway between W83rd and W84th streets was a sort of fast food Chinese restaurant.

This restaurant had very good food with some table service and also a counter that others by themselves could sit at. I ate there often. My favorite order was a very large bowl of soup that had noodles, shrimp and Chinese vegetables. After parking my taxi on the corner of W83rd and Broadway, I walked into the restaurant and ordered a bowl of soup. I couldn't have been in the restaurant more than 20 minutes when I left and walked to where I had parked the taxi. The taxi was not there!

I had the keys in my pocket. I was certain that I wasn't mistaken about where I parked the taxi. I was sure it had to be stolen. So I walked to nearest police precinct at 120 West 82nd Street to report the taxi had been stolen.

Now you would think that this would be a priority, Considering that the stolen vehicle was a taxi, it's very likely that the thief was using it to pick up passengers on the street and conceivably do harm to innocent people. The police have many vehicles that roam the area. So, how hard would it be to put out a bulletin to all the police cars to look for this taxi. BUT NO! When I asked if this would be done the officer took my report, then told me that I should look for the taxi.

So I did. I had my private vehicle parked in a garage on W 42nd street. I called one of my drivers who worked the taxi also and asked him to meet me at the garage. He did, and together we started to look for the taxi.

I had a plan. We would go in and out of all the streets on the west side of Central Park. We started at W72nd Street. We would drive from Central Park West to Riverside Drive and next to W 73rd Street to do the same going in the other direction. We would do this for each street going further uptown. We had four eyes on the roads and if we would be lucky enough to spot the taxi, we would take action. Keep in mind that this was before there were cell phones. So if we spotted the taxi, we were on our own.

Well, we went in and out of the streets. And after a few hours of this, I turned left onto W 115th Street and there parked was the taxi. Wow! We found it. There was no one in the car. The engine was still warm and there was a noticeable amount of gas missing, so was a winter coat I had bought that was in the trunk. Also, the removable taxi meter was gone. My taxi driver's licence was there, but turned around hiding the identity of who the driver was. Seeing this and the missing gasoline confirmed my thoughts that the thief was picking up passengers.

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It was too late at night by the time it was found to go to the meter shop. But I let the police know that I had recovered the vehicle. I certainly didn't want to be stopped and accused of being the thief.

The next morning I went to the meter shop to buy a new meter. After telling the story to the owner of the shop he asked me: Did you find it on W 115th Street? Astonished, I asked him, how did you know? He told me that this has happened to others, the thief obviously has a master key and he has done this before. The cars have been found at that location a few times before. You would think that police may have known that!