

The Tennis Racquet
By Abe Mittleman

It's funny! There are usually very little times when finding lost items there is no clue as to who owns the item.

It was late on a Sunday night when I picked up two young ladies very routinely who were going to two different stops in Manhattan. After dropping off the first lady I dropped off the second lady on the corner of Ave B and E 9th street in the East Village.

A little while later I discovered a Tennis Racquet had been left in my taxi. I was about 95% sure it was the woman I dropped off in the East Village. But, there were many buildings there and I had no idea which building she went to. Even if I did, these building have many residents. What I did not want to do is look for a parking space. That is always a difficult thing to do. I also didn't want to go on a search mission in this neighborhood, especially late at night. That could possibly endanger me. So, I took a different approach.

The case the Tennis Racquet was in contained the only clue as to who owned the Tennis Racquet. I zipped open a pocket on the case and found a card with a woman's phone number. It was after 11PM. Despite the hour, I made the call. A man answered and I asked for the woman who's number was on the card. "Who is this"? he said. I thought "My God", from his tone of voice I thought maybe he thinks I was her secret lover calling at this late hour. But no, I explained the situation and he put the woman on the phone.

She told me that she had no idea who the racquet belonged to. I left a voice mail number that I used (this was a long time before there were smart phones and other devices that had voice mail service). I told her if she perhaps could think of who possibly owned the racquet to call me and leave a message.

I went home with the Tennis Racquet and went to bed. When I woke up late the next morning the woman who lost the Racquet had left a message for me. Wow! She was found. I lived upstate 90 miles out of NYC and asked her if I could wait a few days to return it. That would be the next time I'd be in Manhattan. When I returned it she handed me \$20. and told me I saved her life. To me it was just one of many times I returned items to passengers. But, in doing so you always feel good about helping someone reunite with an important lost item.

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Bonnie Berman Stockwell

Dear Madame / Sir,

April, 14, 1997

Having lived in New York City for almost twenty years, I rarely have had occasion to write a letter of gratitude to anyone for anything ; honestly, I have never, until today. Last night, after a grueling two hour doubles tennis tournament match which we lost, my friend and I shared a cab downtown and so busy were we conducting the autopsy on our game, we hardly noticed the driver. Had we been more attentive, we would have seen the small signs of his heroism from the first: that he dimmed his lights from a distance, saying he saw us waving madly, thus saving our serve weary arms further ache; that he kindly received our request for two stops without even an eyebrow shrug; that he waited patiently when, at my friend's stop, she held the door ajar for a moment and asked me to hold her tennis racquet for the next few weeks, thereby saving her the embarrassment of leaving work midday with it slung brazenly on her shoulder.

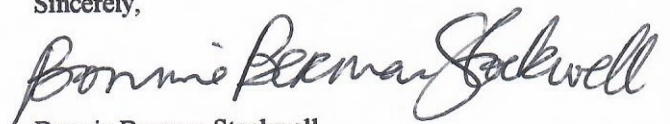
When we reached my destination, I (half in a daze) paid the fare and climbed the stairs , nodded to the doorman and entered the elevator, wondering how to break it to my kids that their Mom lost her first tournament match. Reaching for my key, I realized something was missing and began to pray. By the time I got back outside, the only cab in sight was headed in the opposite direction and a woman was walking away from it with luggage in her hands. Breathless, I recounted to the doorman what had happened and asked that anyone bearing a tennis racquet be let in and sent to my place -- not just any tennis racquet, mind you, but my best friend's top of the line Wilson Hammer that her husband gave her last year for Mother's Day.

I was in agony. I telephoned the TLC and got no answer. My husband doubted I'd ever see it again. I took it as a sign I should quit tennis forever. My kids thought that was silly. At eleven o'clock, I called the doorman to ask him to spot me a twenty to give the driver, if he came, because I was going to try to sleep. Fat chance. All night, I tossed, berating myself for not heeding the taxi message we all make fun of, and turned, hoping against hope that the racquet would find its way back to me.

Enter our story's hero, Abe Mittleman, Yellow cab driver, Medallion number 7L98. Not knowing which building I'd entered, he held onto the racquet and, in the morning, telephoned another of my tennis partners whose number happened to be scrawled on a scrap of paper in the case. She, in turn, phoned my friend, who phoned me, who was on the other line still trying to reach the Lost and Found at TLC-- I was rescued.

Abe Mittleman saved not only my friendship, but also my marriage, my bank account, and my self esteem in making that phone call. Most importantly, I would say, Abe Mittleman saved my faith in the ability of human beings to beat back the overwhelming tide of detail and disconnectedness; he helped me believe in the possibility of a more forgiving existence in this hard-edged city I call home. And when he delivers that racquet to its home on Thursday, I wish I had a big trophy to hand Abe Mittleman, a champion among cabbies, a New Yorker's best friend. Instead, I offer this testimonial along with my heartfelt thanks.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Berman Stockwell.