



Recovery of Lost or Stolen Property

Foster Mayo

There is probably nothing more invasive or disrespectful as a burglary or theft of personal property. Part of the terrible emotion of 'invasion' comes from being jerked out of the complacent world of safety and security that we think we live in. The most common response that law enforcement hears when responding to a property crime is: "I can't believe it happens *here*" or "I can't believe this happened to *me*" or "you used to be able to leave your house unlocked", heavy emphasis on the past tense.

As much as we would like to be 100% safe and secure in our homes and workplaces, it just isn't so. The recent homicide in Boundary County shows that all offenses happen here and we are certainly NOT immune to the national epidemic of opioid addiction and the accompanying property crimes that follow.

Clearance rates for property crimes are not high; recovery of stolen property is less. Often the victim must share responsibility for the failure to recover stolen (or lost) property.

First, there are things that can be done to 'harden' your property site and make it more difficult for our things to be stolen. One example: it's very common, nowadays, for people to have a safe in their residence. They are not 100% but they can certainly be described as fire and theft *resistant*. You likely can't put your car, television or stereo in the safe but some of the other 'high value' items such as jewelry, firearms, and personal identity documents can be stored. Safes are expensive but less than the price of a single high end pistol or rifle. An acquaintance recently sold one of his Perazzi shotguns for more than \$10,000. That would buy a lot of safes. I doubt that he stored it under a bed.

1. Inventory your property. Maintain files with purchase receipts and written description of the property. I have my inventory on my computer drive and backed up on a thumb drive that I keep hidden somewhere else. Thumb drives are great because they are small but will also store photographs. I have different colors so I can quickly identify the contents of each drive, family photos are on a blue drive, etc.
2. Photograph your property. A Nikon digital SLR camera was used for the accompanying photographs but it's not necessary to have a complicated camera. A shirt pocket size camera will work just fine on 'close up' mode. Some of the new cell phones have cameras with high resolution rates. Don't forget to photograph your camera too.



3. Document your property in the pictures. This photo identifies an expensive pistol by make and model: Kimber Master Carry Pro 4" barrel. This only narrows down this **specific** weapon to be among hundreds or perhaps thousands that have been made. The next accompanying photo should be of the serial number or some other personal identification number (PIN). Be careful how you engrave such items as not to lower the value by putting initials or other marks immediately visible to the eye. In fact, your PIN should be hidden from view, such as under the pistol's grips, as long as you document the location by photo or text. If a thief does not see your PIN he has no reason to deface the weapon by filing it off.



4. Have an appraisal or documented value. This photo portrays a custom made ring. The owner has kept the original receipt that lists the size and clarity of the diamond and the approximate amount of gold by weight and karat. Even though it may be a one-of-a-kind item, it should be photographed **and** engraved with a personal identification mark (PIM) engraved inside the ring. The ring is too small to write a social security number (for example) so some other type of a mark should be used and documented. Because this ring was made 25 years ago, the value has certainly changed.



Kyle, owner of the local pawn shop, tells me he will evaluate your weapons for insurance and valuation purposes. He recommends one of the jewelry stores in Sandpoint for appraising your jewelry and precious stones.

The seriousness of the crime of theft is defined by the value of the property stolen not its sentimental value. Retaining purchase receipts and proper documentation can help establish replacement value which should be the type of insurance that you carry. Perhaps it's time to contact your insurance agent and update or critique the amount of coverage you actually have. After the theft is no time for surprises about your insurance coverage.

There is an old saying that in the 1880s you could buy a Colt Peacemaker revolver for a \$20 gold piece. Nowadays with the rising price of guns and gold, it would probably still take a \$20 gold piece to buy the weapon.

Thieves, especially druggies, are willing to trade your high value property for ten cents on the dollar for drugs. Take a few hours out of an afternoon and photograph and document

your property. Let's make it as difficult as possible for them to get your stuff and as easy as possible for your property to be identified and returned to you.

My thanks to the friends who allowed me to use the photographs of their property. I'm glad they were motivated to have their property documented.