

# RANDOM

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COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

## THOUGHTS

### Passwords to Keep Your Data Secure

**P**asswords are what protect your data, so I was interested when a discussion recently turned to secure passwords that are easy to remember. Those are 2 key considerations: The password must be difficult to guess but easy to remember. If it's not easy to remember, you'll write it down. That makes it easy for somebody else to find and that is, of course, exactly what you don't want. One of the participants in the discussion had a simple, elegant solution that I'd like to share with you.

*I've used the same simple password on most things for a number of years, but coming up with one like mine can take a bit of thought. However, it's not a birthday or anything that would be obvious and it has about four permutations that can easily be changed, so it's easy to remember.*

*I got the idea from a friend who used to work at a bank. All personnel were required to change their passwords monthly. She used her long-deceased father's Social Security number, which she knew as well as her own, spelling out one number in it and modifying which number she spelled each month. (Example: one234567891 and 1two34567891.) She could also cap or not cap one or two letters. Mine is based on a similar principle.*

*I doubt if this tactic would work against password-hacking software, but this password is not the one I use for financial accounts.*

#### This is a Good Plan

**P**ermutations are good and this scheme is particularly good because it creates a password that's easy to remember, complex, and hard to guess.

The best passwords from a technical standpoint are at least 15 characters long and contain upper case letters, lower case letters, numbers, and symbols. The resulting number of permutations is huge.

A password like that would have 15 to the 72nd power permutations (26 lower case letters, 26 upper case letters, 10 numbers, and at least 10 symbols that are legal to use).

The trouble is that these passwords tend to look like this: U85q#293pTMTY6h or KD&N!|^16%1ot.

There's no way that a human will be able to remember either one of those. The password will be written down on a Post-It and stuck to the monitor. More careful people will hide it in the desk drawer. Some will put it under something in the desk drawer.

Passwords like that may seem smart, but really they're dumb.

I have used passwords that include the name of a long-dead cat, the address of the house where I grew up, and a daughter's nickname backward. I can even leave myself notes that clearly tell me what the password would be.

For example, "St. C cat, Bellefontaine address, and #1 dot nickname." I'll know exactly what that means, but I challenge you to figure out the components. More clues: "WOMP cat, 1964 address, EL animal nickname." Did that help? I've never used this password, although I have used some of the pieces. I don't use any of the components any more, so it's safe for me to explain it:

- Part 1: More than 30 years ago, I lived in St. Clairsville, Ohio, and worked for WOMP radio. I owned a cat named **Finster**. She came to live with me in 1972; the name came from *Rocky and Bullwinkle*.
- Part 2: I lived in Bellefontaine, Ohio, until 1965 and my street address was **517**.
- Part 3: Older daughter Elizabeth was born during a blizzard and used the nickname Liz, which eventually morphed to **Lizzard**.
- The password: **Finster517Lizzard**. Easy for me to remember; hard for anyone to guess.

#### Other Good Options

**I**'ve seen recommendations for long plain-text passwords (length is more important than using multiple character sets), so passwords like these would be secure even though a password checker would say that they're not:

- ItWasADarkAndStormyNight
- TwasBriligAndTheSlithyToves
- FourScoreAndSevenYearsAgo
- OutOfTheNightThatCoversMe

Or, if you want to get tricky, append your college apartment's address:

- ItWasADarkAndStormyNight1653
- TwasBriligAndTheSlithyToves1653
- FourScoreAndSevenYearsAgo1653
- OutOfTheNightThatCoversMe1653

No, 1653 was never my address anywhere. No, I don't use any of those bits of text for any account. Pick a phrase or song title you like.

# Letter from the Future



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**Здесь важную новость о вашем природного газа службы**

**Here is Important News About Your Natural Gas Service**

На русском языке • In Russian

В Английский • In English

Здравствуй, новый Газпром Заказчик:

Dear New Gazprom Customer:

После приобрел оставшиеся assents в Соединенных Штатах Америки за 137 рублей, мы настоящим консультирование вы, что определенные изменения в Вашей предстоящей газовой службы.

Having purchased the remaining assents of the United States of America for 137 rubles, we are hereby advising you that certain changes are forthcoming in your gas service.

Имейте в виду, что из-за необычных обстоятельств, нам необходимо будет поднять цену на природный газ незначительно. Мы ожидаем, что увеличение будет, самое большое, четыре раза ставки вы сейчас уделяют. Тем не менее, другие непредвиденные обстоятельства могут потребовать, чтобы мы внести дополнительные коррективы аналогичные несколько раз в течение ближайших месяцев.

Please note that because of unusual circumstances, we will need to raise the price of natural gas slightly. We expect the increase will, at most, quadruple the rate you are now paying. However, other unforeseen circumstances may require that we make additional similar adjustments several times over the coming months.

Будьте уверены, что оставаться теплыми. И «дрель, детка, дрель!»

Be sure to stay warm. And "Drill, baby, drill!"

С уважением,

Sincerely,

Your New Friends at Gazprom

Ваши новые друзья на Газпром

Yes, this is a hoax. No, Gazprom has not purchased the remaining assets of the United States (yet). But Cheney-Bush still have a few months to fix that.

to obtain "detailed photographic information about you and your family." In a video on the organization's website, Rumenap says a predator could use the service to map the most likely route your child walks to school and even figure out the location of your family's bedroom windows.

Nonsense! Those who have researched the topic know that about four fifths of all abuse cases involving children are perpetrated by someone who is in the family or who is known to the family. **Four fifths.** Eighty percent. The people we have to fear, then, is ourselves! If you think this sounds like an absurd plot line for *The Simpsons*, you're right.

If you have children, you're right to want to safeguard them. But let's use a little common sense. Google Street View isn't the threat this group makes it out to be. Be aware. Be alert. Be safe. But don't be stupid. **β**

## on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

*"To recruit and retain the most qualified people, select well-qualified employees, promote from within whenever possible, and make equitable decisions on matters of advancement."*

For a lot of low-priority accounts, I have a single, relatively short, password that doesn't change. Eventually I started prepending some letters that always follow a specific pattern (not a particularly great idea, but this was for low-risk uses—website logins and the like). That made the password a bit more secure.

When I'm creating passwords, I try to make them something I can remember, but something that even people who know me well won't be able to guess. I don't change passwords as often as I should and I don't spend a lot of time worrying about them.

If you keep rogue applications off your computer (so far I've been successful at that) relatively simple passwords are sufficient. But if you allow your computer to be compromised, even **KD&NL!\*^I6%|1ot** won't save you. **β**

## More Fear and Paranoia For Sale

**T**V stations are spreading fear and paranoia from a group that seems not to understand technology or child predators. They're claiming that Google's Street View is a threat to children. According to the group's website, "Stop Internet Predators" is a project of Stop Child Predators, launched to educate parents and communities on emerging online child safety issues and empower them to protect their children's privacy and safety. "Stop Internet Predators has a special focus on new [I]nternet technologies that pose a risk to their children's safety, such as Google's Street View." Is this a serious issue? Hardly.

Historians may well call this **The Fear Generation** because we seem to be afraid of everything except the things that matter. Global warming is "junk science", but threats posed by services such as Google Street View are blown all out of proportion.

### A Solution Looking for a Problem

**S**top Child Predators may mean well or it may be an organization founded simply to separate suckers from their money. The group's website doesn't make it clear. But let's assume that it's a legitimate organization formed by people who are sincerely concerned with the welfare of children. This probably is the case.

But what are their fears? *Because Google's Street View shows homes, predators will learn where children live.* Really. That's their point.

Might not child predators drive around looking for schools? That's usually a sure sign that children are about! Or look for bikes and toys in the yard? The absurdity of the fear being spread, perhaps inadvertently, by this group would be nothing more than absurd—except that some people are actually taking it seriously.

The head of the organization is a former deputy director of the American Conservative Union, Stacie D. Rumenap. She says that Google Street View makes it easy for anyone