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Suspicion is suspect

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va. Suspicion is one of those human attitudes that erodes confidence in both ourselves and others. Once its on a roll, it can barrel into paranoia.

Still, we cant live without it.

I spent the weekend working with Melissa to clear out her parents house in Charlotte prior to it being sold later this month.

We trucked home about 350 books, an eight-inch Wsthof® Grand Prix II Chef knife, garments from he r Moms WWII Navy service and her Dads four-year hitch in the A rmy, three slide rules, family memorabilia, her Dads 80-year-old ho ckey skates and a half-dozen pairs of wool socks from the late 30s when he worked in the Maine woods.

Im wearing his socks as I write.

Before we left Blue Grass, I had two \$100 bills for gas. I spent \$93 on a fill up. I put the one five and two ones next to the remaining hundred in the front left pocket of my jeans, which I wore on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

We stayed at the Courtyard Marriott. On Saturday morning I got up at 5:15 and went to the lobby about 30 minutes later.

The desk clerk gave me a small, black coffee from the breakfast bar in return for our room number, 311. This motel has a fixedprice/fixed-menu option for breakfast, so I assumed I would be charged for my pre-breakfast drink. I worked out until about 7:30.

As I dressed to leave on Sunday morning, I checked my pocket. The \$100 bill was gone.

Melissa thought that it had fallen out. But I doubted that the \$100 bill could have escaped my pocket without taking the five

and two ones with it since the four were folded in half together.

My thought was that our room had been burgled during the hour and 45 minutes I was gone on Saturday morning and the mechanical door latch was not in locked position. Anyone with a master electronic key card could have entered during that time. I guessed the desk clerk had signaled an accomplice that I would be gone.

Nothing else was taken not cash that we noticed from two wallets, not credit cards, not jewelry, not a new iPad and not a cellphone.

The absence of other loss supports Melissas carelesss-husband theory.

But I suspected that the robber didnt clean us out to avoid bringing down official heat for an obvious soup-to-nuts theft. Selfrestraint is self-protective.

I noticed that the receipt did not charge the room for the extra coffee.

When I got home, I wrote to Courtyard Marriott headquarters, in part:

A room burglary happened to me once before, when my parents took me to visit the 1964

Worlds Fair in New York; our room was entered as we slept, and all money and credit cards were taken.

Im not accusing the desk person of anything, since I have no proof. But if youve had similar complaints, then further investigation is warranted.

I don't like suspecting people of crimes or even un-ethical behavior. Suspicion brings disappointment, either in the individual or with our fellow humans generally.

Suspicion subtracts what's hard to add back in—trust.

Suspicion poisons the suspects well. Once poisoned, people avoid drawing from it. An accusing finger pointed in your direction stays pointed.

Suspicion is often expressed in the idiom: Where there's smoke, there's fire. The problem, of course, is that whoever says that and whoever hears it have to know the difference between real smoke from a real fire and someone blowing smoke from a non-existent fire.

What if someone said: Seltzer is a closeted, beheading jihadist? The most I could say in my own defense would be: You're crazier than a loon. That's a pretty weak response if you ask me.

Once an accusation is hung around your neck, it never quite disappears. Denial is never as powerful as accusation.

On the other hand, suspicion is part of our evolutionary make-up. We had to be suspicious of dangerous wildlife, treacherous conditions and other people to survive—and still do.

Recall how our suspicion gene kicks in when we get a scammer's email or an offer that's too good to be true. Suspicion saves us from ourselves in a world that's often unfriendly and, occasionally, actively hostile.

I hope that my suspicion about the Charlotte desk clerk is wrong. I hope that my own carelessness lost the Benjamin. I much prefer being a dope than a dupe.

But I'm too old to be surprised if I'm right.

