

Berd Cage March 23/10

Check The Email Source

How many times a month do you receive an email telling you some urgent important news that could save your life? It was probably forwarded to you by an email friend that had the very best of intentions.

These emails usually have a very touching story attached that tugs at your heart-strings and pulls you in.

The email I received last week told a story of a young girl who was told by her mother that if an unmarked police car is trying to pull her over, to dial #77 on her cell phone. Of course, this allegedly happened to this young girl while driving alone one night, and she supposedly dialed #77 and was put through to police dispatch who informed her that they had no unmarked police cars in her location. The police dispatcher then allegedly gave this young girl instructions to drive to a certain location, by which time the actual police had the fake police car surrounded and were able to apprehend the culprit, who just happened to be a convicted rapist. You're thinking, "Wow, #77 really saved this girl's life. I'll have to forward this email to everyone on my email list." DON'T!

First of all, these are exactly the type of emails that are notorious for having viruses and spam attached. Secondly, most times they are bogus.

I had asked our current police reporter, Victoria Paterson, to question our local RCMP members about #77 and see what they had to say on the subject. The constable she questioned admitted she had never heard of such a thing and decided to dial #77 from her own cell phone. The call went nowhere. The constable then asked a very good question. "Why wouldn't you just call 9-1-1 if you were concerned?" about an unmarked police car trying to pull you over. An excellent question, don't you think?

We tend to get so caught up in the touching stories that accompany these emails, that we neglect to think them through before we forward them.

A friend of mine tells me that she checks those kinds of emails on a website entitled snopes.com, so I gave it a try. Sure enough, the very first item under the title Frauds and Scams was the #77 email. The only true part of that email was that criminals do indeed sometimes impersonate police officers to trap their victims. #77 does nothing in Canada or the United States, but 9-1-1 will work almost everywhere.

We need to all be diligent in not just reading, but really checking our emails before we forward them on so our email friends will always appreciate our communications.

Bernadine Visotto is a columnist who appreciates emails that contain accurate and good advice.