

Garage Sale Gal

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC



Fake fifty puts damper on sale

Lynda Hammond

Clay and Mae Cowgill were eager to earn some extra cash from their clutter. They were having a huge garage sale at their Gilbert home selling a “collection of stuff from over the years”.

Business was great on Friday. They unloaded more than half their items. Saturday was slower but it was still action packed. Something the Cowgills could’ve done without.

It was early in the day when a Grinch stopped by their sale. It happened during a busy time, when at least four cars with buyers had stopped by at the same time. “Folks were asking lots of questions and my wife was making change. We were swamped.” That’s when another woman asked Mae if she could break a \$50 bill. Clay piped in his opinion. “I told the woman it depended on how much she bought. And she turned around and grabbed something right beside her and said ‘How about this?’.” The woman picked up a few craft items totaling \$9. Clay gave her the change and she and her male companion left.

All seemed well until it came time to count the money. The Cowgills noticed that \$50 bill didn’t look quite right. “The front side looked fine but the back looked kind of funny. So, we went over to the bank and they verified that it was a counterfeit..and a pretty good one.” Turns out the bill was slightly smaller than regular US currency and an identifying watermark was missing.

So, the criminals paid with a fake fifty and made away with \$41 of Clay’s real money.

Sgt. Mark Marino with the Gilbert Police Department says they don’t have statistics on counterfeit bills being passed at garage sales but it can happen...and pretty easily. “Some of the technology people are using to make money is quite sophisticated . It’s difficult to tell if it’s real.”

Here are a few tips from Sgt. Marino on how you can avoid getting stuck with funny money.

1/Small bills only- Don’t take anything bigger than a \$20. “People that have big bills in the first place at a garage sale—that should be a red flag for you right there.”

2/Distractions- Be watchful of folks who may be trying to keep you busy while slipping you a fake bill. Clay says the woman caught them at a time when their sale was crowded.

3/Counterfeit marker- Invest a few dollars in a bill marker. You can buy them at business supply stores. If the bill is authentic the pen mark will turn amber in color. If the mark on the bill turns black the bill is suspicious.

4/Safety first- If you suspect a bill is fake don’t approach or accuse the “buyers”. “You don’t want to confront someone on your own property. It’s not worth it to get hurt or worse over a few dollars. If you suspect it’s a fake, just tell them you don’t have the change.”

Clay says while he’s not losing any sleep over the incident, he says he thinks the U.S. Department of the Treasury will eventually catch up with them. Meanwhile, he has a message for the criminals: “Shame on you! I hope they give you 20 years of breaking rocks somewhere (in prison).”



Courtesy Gilbert Police Department

Do you have a garage sale find you love? Something that makes you smile when you look at it? Share it with us. Send us your picture. Include your name, email address and phone number and email it to: Lynda@GarageSaleGal.com. Watch for the story of *your* treasure in this column!

Lynda Hammond is a former television anchor who left the anchor desk for the love of garage sales. Contact her at Lynda@GarageSaleGal.com. Lynda also does garage sale segments on 3-TV's Good Morning Arizona.

#####