

# Passwords are Wearing Me Out

By Dennis Payton Knight

I learned about passwords pulling guard duty back in 1962 when I was stationed in Alaska. It was a matter of staying up all night by myself, hanging out at the motor pool, watching for commies going out for a smoke and wandering too far from their outfit over in Siberia. Democracy was safely in my hands, because I was armed with the password of the day. No one would get by me who didn't know Mickey Mantle was the quarterback of the Colts (or was it Mickey Mouse, the shortstop for the Dodgers).

I respectfully submit this statement to prove I am aware of the value and purpose of passwords. I am secure knowing I cannot deal with the amazons over at Amazon-dot-com without first establishing a password known only between them and, when I am sober, me. My bank account, too, is walled off from miscreants, communist or not, and I need a password to read my own mail.

Life is safer for me because of passwords, but frankly they are wearing me out. I have them by the dozens. I got my first one concurrently with my first computer and the birth of my first son. His name was useful then and it has continued to serve me over the years as a password generator. I have them in combinations of birthdates, birthplaces, grandparents, godparents, pets and cars I have owned; so many I can't keep track.

This morning was a good example. Downtown with no quarters in my pocket, I needed to see if I had enough funds on my debit card to plug the parking meter for an hour. I tapped the bank icon on my moderately smart phone, entered my user name, and my password, Open-Sesame.

Another screen demanded the name of my first born niece, whether I have an Uncle Harry, and my acknowledgment that providing this information was for my own damned good. I answered both queries, expecting then to be taken to the accounting of my account, but instead I was directed to create a new password. I was the victim of a petulantly persnickety policy that allows no password a life of more than three months. It's a concept called "password aging," and it is aging me.

The reset routine is as fussy as its creator. It requires between eight and fifteen characters, including one capital letter, one lower case, numbers, and one of those symbols in the family of ampersands and asterisks that represent cussing in cartoons. I formulated something that might stick to the ribs of my cranium and, as I typed, it appeared as dots on the screen, apparently because commies might be watching over my shoulder. Finally and meticulously done, I hit the enter key, and, poof, yet another window ordered me to do it again, and maybe someday I will.

And that, Your Honor, is the story of why I got the parking ticket this morning.