

**TROUBLE**  
~~~~~ IN ~~~~~  
**PARADISE**



**S**ummer vacation is a time for rest and relaxation away from home. But what happens when your home is everything but OK? In our latest e-book, Alan shares his horrific story to remind us that bad things can happen at any time. We'll show how to prevent Alan's disaster from happening to you while also providing tips to keep your summer horror-free.

*Subject's name changed for privacy reasons.*



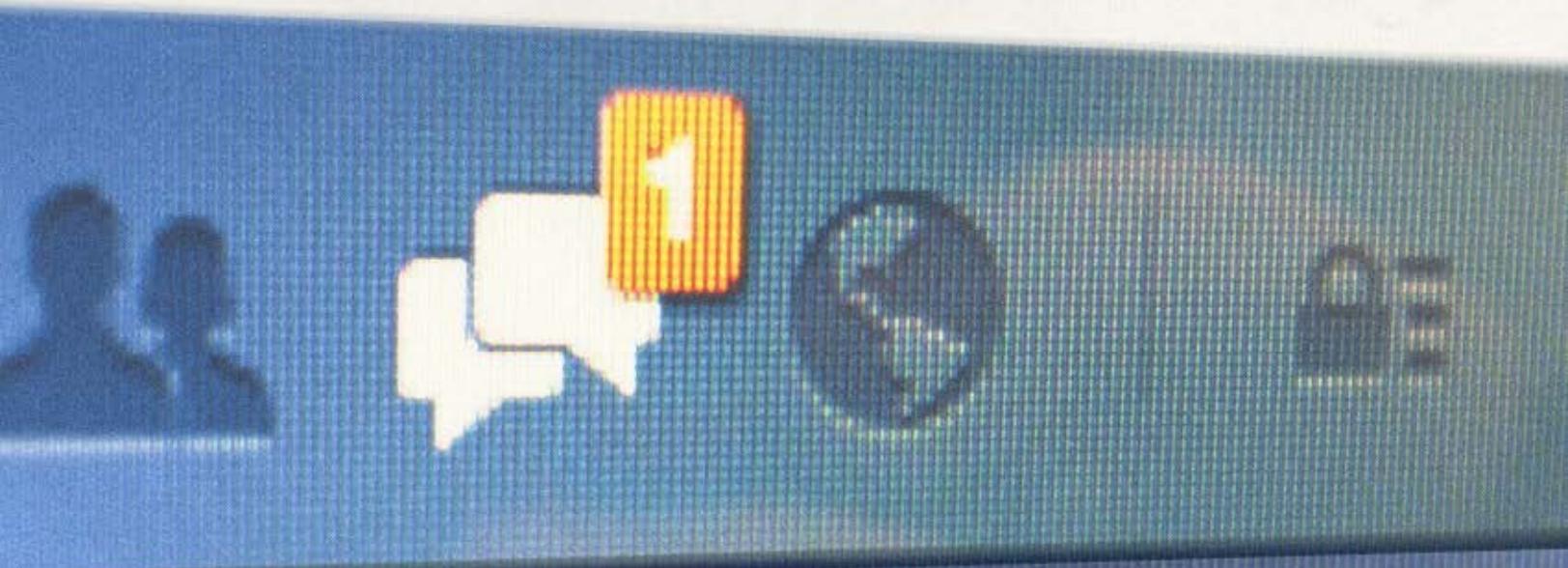


It was a warm summer morning in Merida, Mexico. A hot cup of coffee sat on Alan's hotel patio table and slowly steamed over the white linen as he watched hibiscus plants shift in the breeze. Days earlier, he had landed in Cancun and had driven through the Northern Yucatan, stopping to explore the great ruins of Chichen Itza.



It was his time for escape: to venture deep into paradise and discover something – maybe even about himself. Alan, a real estate and property investor, was in heaven. “It was, and is, a completely breathtaking place,” he said. “You can’t help but be sucked into the primal beauty of the Mexican coast.”

Before finishing his coffee and heading for the beach, he opened his laptop and casually clicked through the regular Rolodex of email and websites. Then came Facebook. The little red “message” icon appeared immediately. “I thought nothing of it, really. I get messages all the time.” What he would find, however, was a complete nightmare.





The message was from a friend back home. Alan had been robbed. His friend discovered the break-in while picking up some tools to borrow. “He told me what happened, and my heart sank a little. Apparently there was a fair amount of damage done, and I kept thinking: is this even real?” His friend boarded up the house and called the police.

Some days later, Alan returned home to what can only be described as total devastation. As soon as he walked through the door, he was faced with the scope of what happened. Glass littered the floor. Every room of his house was ripped apart. Every drawer, every bag, every box; anything that wasn’t bolted down had been flipped over and strewn about without a care. His flat screen TV was gone, as were other electronics. A duvet and pillows were taken, presumably to wrap the stolen things. The floors were scratched, and no place was left unsearched – even the chimney.

“It wasn’t only the things they took. It was crushing to realize how much work it would take to sift through the rubble in every single room of what used to resemble my house, document what was missing, and begin to rebuild. Sometimes that moment of shock: how it twists your stomach and rings in your head... that’s the worst part.”

Alan, not sure if or how the burglars knew he was away on vacation, remembers “checking in” and updating his Facebook status upon arriving in Mexico. “I still have no idea,” he said. “But I wonder. Was it someone I know? They took their time as if they knew I was a world away.”

Alan’s story is a common one. Criminals know we are drawn out of our homes during the warm summer weather and take an opportunity whenever they can. This summer, it’s time to fight back.

# Summer is a great time to be a burglar. Why?

## We love to travel!

**29.8 MILLION**

more leisure trips in 2014 than 2013.  
61.8 million trips added by 2016.

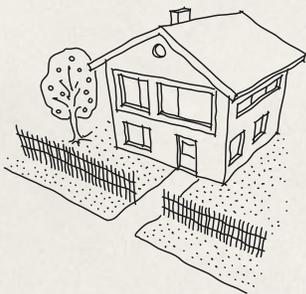
(U.S. Travel Association Public Forecast Summary Report 2013)

**84% OF FAMILIES**

planned one or more getaways  
of at least five nights in 2013.

(Minitime survey Family Vacation Planning 2013 Statistics)

## Empty home? Prime target



### Warm weather draws us outdoors

July and August “most popular months for travel,  
but they’re also the most popular months for home  
burglaries.” – National Crime Prevention Council

## Summer burglar convenience

**Doors and  
windows left  
open**

### Longer days

Most home burglaries  
occur during the day

(UNC Charlotte Dept. of Criminal Justice  
& Criminology Understanding Decisions to  
Burglarize from the Offender’s Perspective)

**Emptier  
neighborhoods  
mean fewer  
watchful eyes**



## Keep up appearances

Make sure your lawn and landscaping is trimmed before you leave. An overgrown yard is a dead giveaway that you're gone.

Don't just put lights on a timer. Put your TV on a timer too! A loud, glowing TV might make a burglar think twice.

## Resist the apps

Believe it or not, posting your plans or "checking in" on social media while away from home can lead to burglary. Resist the urge to share details until after you return, and double-check privacy settings.

## Connected is protected

Having a home security system is crucial. Researches indicate that 60% of burglars avoid a home if an alarm system is present<sup>1</sup>. Display a sign in the front yard, but also use your security system's smartphone app to receive real-time notifications if an alarm is sounded, and even arm or disarm your home from anywhere.

## Know thy neighbor

Always develop a rapport with a neighbor or two, and notify them that you will be on vacation. They can keep an eye out for suspicious activity.

<sup>1</sup> UNC Charlotte Dept. of Criminal Justice & Criminology Understanding Decisions to Burglarize from the Offender's Perspective





## Don't be transparent

Never leave valuables within view of windows. A burglar peering into your home will be much more tempted to break-in if he sees jewelry, an iPod, car keys or a flat screen TV.

## No ladders, no snakes

Been doing some house work? Never leave a ladder lying around the yard, especially if you're leaving. Thieves have been known to slither through second floor windows using a convenient ladder.

## Detach and latch

A garage is prime real estate for burglars. Disconnect your garage door opener so thieves can't use a universal remote to open it. Also, lock the door leading into your home from the garage in case someone forces their way through.



## Dare they return?

Actually, yes. Have you already been a victim of burglary? Be extra vigilant. Thieves aren't beyond returning to the same home twice. In fact, it's more common than you think.

# One more thing or two...

**STAYCATION** - stay-ca-tion noun \ 'stā-'kā-shən \: a vacation spent at home or nearby

On a staycation? Follow the summer tips, even if you're spending some vacation time at home. Burglars typically need less than 10 minutes to complete a break-in, so don't become complacent. Also, beware of "doorknockers." It's not uncommon for criminals to knock on doors to see if a house is empty. If someone answers, they simply walk away or pretend as if they have the wrong house. Never open a door for strangers. If you see someone going door to door in your neighborhood without an obvious purpose, notify the authorities.

## The walkthrough

Ready to leave for vacation? Do a final walkthrough of your home. Are all windows and doors locked, including the door leading from the garage to your home? Are lights on a timer? Is your security smartphone app downloaded? Make a mental checklist and take five minutes to ensure your home is ready. Those five minutes could save you thousands of dollars in property loss and damage.



Summer is, in many ways, a release for us all. It's the great oasis of the calendar year where we free ourselves to truly follow our interests, seek new experiences and relax in ways we see fit. Ensuring your home is safe during a summer vacation or even a bike ride to the park is essential for obvious reasons but also for a greater goal: a relaxing summer and better quality of life. Knowing your options and capabilities as a homeowner is the first step, and you've just taken it.



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