**Internet Safety Story**

Shannon could hear the footsteps behind her as she walked toward home. The thought of being followed made her heart beat faster. “You’re being silly,” she told herself, “no one is following you.” To be safe she began to walk faster, but the footsteps kept up with her pace. She was afraid to look back and she was glad she was almost home. She saw the porch light burning and ran the rest of the way home.

Once inside she leaned against the door for a moment, relieved to be in the safety of her home. She glanced out the window to see if anyone was there. The sidewalk was empty. After tossing her books on the sofa she decided to grab a snack and get on line. There she could talk to strangers without being afraid. After all, no one knew who she really was and couldn’t hurt her. She logged on under her screen name “ByAngel213”. Checking her Buddy List she saw GoTo123 was on. She sent him an instant message:

**Angel213**: Hi I’m glad you are on! I thought someone was following me home today. It was really weird!

**GoTo123**: LOL You watch too much TV. Why would someone be following you? Don’t you live in a safe neighborhood?

**Angel213**: Of course I do…I guess it was my imagination…cause I didn’t see anybody when I looked out.

**GoTo123**: Unless you gave your name out on line… You haven’t done that have you?

**Angel213**: Of course not. I’m not stupid you know.

**GoTo123**: Did you have a softball game after school today?

**Angel213**: Yes and we won!!

**GoTo123**: That’s great! Who did you play?

**Angel213**: We played the Hornets… LOL..their uniforms are so gross! They look like bees… LOL

**GoTo123**: What is your team called?

**Angel213**: We are the Canton Cats. We have tiger paws on our uniforms. They are really kewl.

**GoTo123**: Do you pitch or what?

**Angel213**: No… I play second base. I got to go.. My homework has to be done before my parents get home. I don’t want them mad at me…Bye

**Angel213**: Catch you later. Bye

GoTo123 decided it was time to teach Angel a lesson. One she would never forget. He went to the member menu and began to search for her profile. When it came up he highlighted it and printed it out. He took out a pen and began to write down what he knew about Angel so far.

Her name: Shannon.

Birthday: Jan. 3

Age: 13

State where she lived: North Carolina.

Hobbies: softball, chorus, skating and going to the mall.

Besides this information he knew she lived in Canton. **How did he know this?** He knew she stayed by herself until 6:30 every afternoon until her parents came home from work. **How did he know this?** He knew she played softball on Thursday afternoons on the school team and the team was named the Canton Cats. **How did he know this?** Her favorite number 7 was printed on her jersey. **How did he know this?** He knew she was in the seventh grade at the Canton Junior High School. She had told him all this in the conversations they had on line. He had enough information to find her now.

“She’ll be so surprised,” he thought, “she doesn’t even know what she’s done.”

Shannon didn’t tell her parents about the incident on the way home from the ball park that day. She didn’t want them to make a scene and stop her from walking home from the softball games. Parents were always overreacting and hers were the worst.

By Thursday Shannon had forgotten about the footsteps following her. Her game was in full swing when suddenly she felt someone staring at her. It was then that the memory came back. She glanced up from her second base position to see a man watching her closely. He was leaning against the fence behind first base and he smiled when she looked at him. He didn’t look scary and she quickly dismissed the fear she had felt.

After the game he sat on a bleacher while she talked to the coach. She noticed his smile once again as she walked past him. He nodded and she smiled back. He noticed her name on back of the shirt. He knew he had found her. Quietly he walked a safe distance behind her. He didn’t want to frighten her or have to explain what he was doing to anyone.

It was only a few blocks to Shannon’s home and once he saw where she lived he quickly returned to the park to get his car. Now he had to wait.

Shannon was in her room later that evening when she heard voices in the living room. “Shannon, come here,” her father called. He sounded upset and she couldn’t imagine why. She went into the room to see the man from the ballpark sitting on the sofa. “Sit down, Shannon, this man has just told us a most interesting story about you.”

Shannon moved cautiously to a chair across from the man. How could he tell her parents anything? She had never seen him before today!

“Do you know who I am Shannon?” the man asked.

“No…” Shannon answered.

“I am your on line friend, GoTo123.”

Shannon was stunned. “That’s impossible! GoTo is a kid my age! He’s 14 and he lives in Michigan!”

The man smiled. “I know I told you all that… but it wasn’t true. You see, Shannon, there are people on line who pretend to be kids; I was one of them. But while others do it to find kids and hurt them, I belong to a group of parents who do it to protect kids from predators. I came here to find you to teach you how dangerous it is to give out too much information to people online. You told me enough about yourself to make it easy for me to find you. Your name, the school you went to, the name of your ball team and the position you played. The number and name on your jersey just made finding you a breeze.”

Shannon was shocked. “You mean you don’t live in Michigan?”

He laughed. “No, I live in Raleigh. It made you feel safe to think I was so far away, didn’t it?” She nodded. “I had a friend whose daughter was like you. Only she wasn’t as lucky. The guy found her and murdered her while she was home alone. Kids are taught not to tell anyone when they are alone, yet they do it all the time on line. The wrong people trick you into giving out information a little here and there online. Before you know it, you have told them enough for them to find you without even realizing you have done it. I hope you’ve learned a lesson from this and won’t do it again.”

“I won’t,” Shannon promised solemnly.

“Will you tell others about this so they will be safe too?”

It’s a promise!”