**THE FOUR HUNDRED DOLLAR CHRISTMAS BONUS:**

**HOW CRIME DID NOT PAY**

 --The word *crime* is rich in meaning.

Keith D. Harris, *The Geography of Crime and Justice,* 1974, p.2.

Allison Pitts was a good carpet cleaner. A thin, muscular guy in his mid-twenties, he worked in fact for his maternal Grandfather who owned Klean Floors. Allison *was* the company, as he was the only employee. It made for easy bookkeeping. He had one steam vacuum and that could do the job. He cleaned our carpets several times over the years.

Suddenly, Allison Pitts was out of a job, as his grandfather sold his business to home Depot. Allison called my wife and offered to do yard work or to clean the house—do laundry, vacuum, dust, whatever was needed. Feeling some pity for a loyal and good worker, we said to come over tomorrow, Wednesday and do some housework. He asked, “May I bring my dad, who has been laid off from Gold Kist Poultry?” (It turns out he was fired for excessive absenteeism.) We said, “All right.”

I was in my office that Wednesday when my wife called. She said that the Pitts were there. She reminded me that she had a 10:00 a.m. appointment and was about to leave. Would I come home to oversee the housecleaning?

She left at ten of ten. I got home at twenty past ten. There was a thirty minute hole.

The two Pitts, Allison and father Joseph, needed little direction, as my wife had given them detailed instructions. They left at 12:30 p.m. after I had written Joseph a check for their efforts. I left the house when they did and went to purchase a subway sandwich at a shop just inside Wal-Mart. I took the subway home, I mean the sandwich, as in fact I drove since there was no subway between Wal-Mart and our house.

As soon as I got home, I took change from my pocket to place it in the coin dish on my great grandfather’s bookcase, except the coin dish was missing. I immediately glanced at our much larger coin collection under the coffee table in a large, ceramic container, but there was nothing to glance at. It too was missing.

Only the Pitts, no doubt the father joseph, could have taken it during the 30 minute gap. I did not notice the coins missing until my return just now. We estimated the total coin change, including lots of quarters, at $400.

Allison did not answer his phone all afternoon. We called the police out to file a report. Finally, Allison called back that evening. He seemed genuinely surprised by my accusation. He said he did not take the money. Did his father take it? If so, it must have been a misunderstanding. He said his father must have taken it while he was working in the basement. He then recounted how his father had bought a half-gallon of Jim beam later that afternoon and had filled up his girlfriend’s car with gas.

Now, here is why this petty crime did not pay and became merely a sad and tragic $400 misunderstanding.

Mr. Joseph Pitts, the almost certain thief and fired poultry worker, had a big fight with his girlfriend, got in her gassed-up car, and stealing it (worth more than $400), headed to Monroe, Georgia, to see his old girlfriend. Except he never arrived to see his old girlfriend. He crossed the median at Cattle Barn Road on highway 78, rolled his girlfriend’s gassed-up car over and over, killing himself. A total of $310 was found in his wallet, plus an uncashed check signed by one James O. Wheeler.

That Wednesday was the Wednesday before Christmas, December 19, 2007.

We had a clean home for Christmas.