



Source: Raymond Whitaker, 'A symbol of the desolation of Iraq', *The Independent on Sunday* online, 19/08/07.

Tags: [crime](#), [home](#)

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I woke around 6.30am and went downstairs to put on the kettle and let the cat out. At first I thought the open window was my fault. Then I saw that it had been smashed. Here is the way it was done: The window is a narrow, floor-to-ceiling unit with a heavy steel frame and a deadlock, the key to which was not in at the time of entry. The intruder used the point of a screw driver placed skillfully on the rim of the window just near the lock. A firm hit with his, or less likely her hand, using the padded area at the base of the thumb referred to as the Mound of Venus in palmistry, was sufficient to cause the glass to crack rather than shatter. Venus was the goddess of love whose husband was the god of blacksmiths but that's another story the irony of which still irks me. The point of impact formed the apex of a triangular crack that was then artfully dislodged allowing access to the lock. When I went outside that morning to inspect the damage I saw a footprint in the garden. The fly screen had been removed and leaned against the wall and the shard of glass, twenty centimetres long and five centimetres at the widest, was laid delicately on the lawn nearby. Using the screwdriver, the burglar then prised the lock to dislodge the screws holding it to the frame and was then able to slide the window open and climb inside.

Upstairs my children slept. My wife slept warm beside me, our bedroom door closed. Once inside the intruder would have noticed a momentary flash of red light coming from the infrared alarm sensor mounted in the corner of the room. It would have been impossible not to have noticed it in the pre-dawn darkness. Unfortunately, the alarm was not engaged because we had no thought that our threshold would be violated under cover of night while we were in the house. Having seen the flash of red light and not knowing at that point if the alarm was engaged or not, the thief would have paused, allowing himself, or less likely herself, to be close enough to the means of escape should the alarm sound. But having waited a few seconds, and being an experienced operator, the thief would then have moved forward into the darkened house with some confidence, down the hallway, past the kitchen, past the laundry and the downstairs bathroom and stopped at the open door of my office. The blind was up but he already knew that because he had come down the side passage of the house and looked into the office window where he had seen my slim black briefcase and my mobile phone sitting on top of it. These items were the thief's quarry. I know this because nothing else was taken. Sitting next to my briefcase was my wife's wallet containing a wad of cash and several credit cards

including an American Express Platinum card that would have been a trophy even if never used. None of this was touched. My camera was on my desk. An expensive Nikon SLR digital with a telephoto lens. Not taken. My laptop computer was in its case nearby. Only my slim black briefcase and mobile phone were found to be missing after we had searched the house that morning.

My briefcase contained a business proposal I had been working on which was to be delivered to its intended recipient later that day. Nothing too confidential or profitable in someone else's possession. My dark blue fountain pen was in the brief case, the one I bought in Amsterdam in 1993. And there was a book I'd bought when I was living in New Zealand in 1974, a cookbook illustrated by the renowned psychedelia artist Peter Max. It had a very good recipe for toasted muesli in it and had become ragged over the years from overuse so I had put it in my briefcase intending to send it to a bookbinder friend of mine for repair. It never made it and I doubt the thief would have cared for the high standard of the toasted muesli but that may be too harsh. My mobile phone was nothing too fancy. I am not prone to technological fetishism and regard the mobile phone as a necessary, utilitarian evil to be endured so the phone itself was worth nothing and the SIM card was cancelled by me at 8am that morning. The thief would have anticipated this and downloaded its contents with time to spare. My telephone numbers were those of friends, family and business associates, many of them journalists. Later I would remember that there was a number on the card under the name 'Sayeed' who was a security guard I met once at a nightclub. He was very polite and gave me his number in case I ever needed his services.

When the police arrived one of the officers had a finger print kit. She wore white gloves as she dusted the powder onto the window frame and the glass. I thought they would take a plaster cast of the footprint but they didn't. She told me the thief was no amateur. She said there had been another break and enter around the corner the night before. I wondered what that person had lost and later I went to visit them only to find that they regarded me with suspicion and not the camaraderie I had expected. The police officers told me the thief had worn gloves and I was impressed by that information. I cannot account for the motives of the thief.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Boris Kelly.*