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Movers held furniture for 'ransom,' client says

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Aug 15, 2008 04:30 AM

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BRETT POPPLEWELL
 STAFF REPORTER

When Chris Brown hired Dynamic Movers after reading an ad in a local newspaper he thought he was getting a good deal.



TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR

Chris Brown sits in his Port Credit apartment on Aug. 7, 2008, a month after he hired Dynamic Movers for a job that was supposed to cost less than \$500. Instead, he says he paid nearly \$2,000.

At \$65 an hour, the Scarborough-based company offered to move him from his old apartment on Lakeshore Rd. E. in Port Credit to his new one 200 metres away for less than \$500. But Brown says that, after the movers had put all his belongings into a truck marked Desi Movers Inc., they threatened to throw it all into a storage locker if he didn't pay \$1,497.50 more in "extra fees," such as charges for stairs and heavy items.

At that point, he began to think maybe he wasn't getting such a good deal after all. "All of my worldly possessions were on their truck, right down to my toothbrush," says Brown. "I felt I was being ransomed just to get it all back."

In the end, he says, he paid four times his initial quote.

Brown's not the only one. Nine clients of the same company told similar tales when contacted by the *Star*. The hard-luck stories illustrate the buyer-beware nature of an industry known for scams, thefts and outright violations of the provincial Consumer Protection Act.

Company owner Arif Adnan Syed wouldn't comment on specific complaints but denied that his movers have ever threatened to place clients' goods in storage if they refused to pay charges not outlined in the contract. "That's illegal, we don't do that," Syed said.

The "ransom" Brown alleges Desi Movers demanded of him falls into a grey zone legally. The wording in the company's contract violates the consumer's rights, according to the provincial consumer rights agency. But police are reluctant to lay charges in such cases because it looks more like a contractual dispute than a criminal offence – at least at first glance.

A Peel police officer Brown summoned decided not to intervene because the mover's contract stated – in small print – that excess charges may apply.

"I thought the presence of the police might encourage them to get on with the show, but instead they charged me extra for the time spent talking to the police," Brown now says. "I was completely rooked."

Following his June 18 "move from hell," the 30-something

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Protect yourself: Get it in writing

What should be included in a moving contract?

- An estimate (and the date it was determined). By law, the final price cannot be more than 10 per cent above the written estimate.
- Size and value of items.
- Estimated number of boxes to be moved (including cost per hour or flat rate, and payment terms).
- Number of staff and hours needed and size of vehicle.
- Any licences or customs

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administrative assistant complained to the Better Business Bureau. That's when he learned that Dynamic Movers has operated under various names – Desi Movers, Dynamic Moving and Dynamite Moving – each under the wing of a company registered to Syed.

According to the bureau, Brown's complaint was the 30th in three years about Syed's operations.

On July 31, Niranjn Kamath booked Desi Movers to move him from Markham to Newmarket for \$65 an hour. Kamath says he wound up paying an extra \$1,456 to prevent his belongings being locked in a storage closet at his expense.

"It's daylight robbery," Kamath says. "They know they have you because you have to move on that day and they have all your stuff on their truck. There's nothing you can do."

In the cases examined by the *Star*, the complainants said they dealt with a man named Jason, who gave them a quote over the phone but did not appear on moving day.

Many moving companies will do a no-cost, no-obligation in-house survey of the goods to be moved.

"Quoting without seeing the place?" said an incredulous Cameron Scheel, sales manager with AMJ Campbell, Canada's largest moving company. "That is the most critical part of the entire equation."

When reached by telephone, a man who identified himself as Jason and said he was the manager of Desi, Dynamic and Dynamite Movers, said the company went out of business in late June after receiving too many complaints against its drivers. He said they had given Syed's operation a bad name. When asked to explain how the company had carried out Kamath's move on July 31, he refused to comment.

Ads in community newspapers and on websites for Desi, Dynamic and Dynamite Movers indicate the company is based at six addresses in Toronto and Mississauga and one storage locker in Scarborough. None match the Munham Gate address, near Birchmount and Ellesmere Rds., where the *Star* met Syed. Trucks on the lot had Desi Movers logos.

Syed declined to explain why his company, which was officially registered as Ontario Inc 1715130 in late 2006, advertises as having been in business since 1996. Other trucks registered to another numbered company owned by "Amit Monwar Hussain Syed" were parked at the same address, bearing the decals of Comfortable Movers and A1 Express Movers.

Arif Syed said the two companies are not related. Police records – the result of a York Region investigation of one client's complaint – show Desi Movers was once located in the same one-room office on Brimley Rd. that was the registered address for Comfortable Movers until a few months ago.

The security guard at that building said he hadn't seen anyone from either company in several months. In their contracts, Desi, Dynamic and Dynamite quote an hourly rate, but stipulate that other charges may apply.

"Driver will collect the full amount of money before unloading. If a client is unable to make full payment, we will store all the goods at our storage and client will be responsible to pay additional cost," the contract reads.

Such stipulations violate Ontario's Consumer Protection Act, according to a spokesperson for the Consumer Protection Branch, a provincial entity.

"It is considered an unfair practice for a person to use his, her, or its custody or control of a consumer's goods to pressure the consumer into renegotiating the terms of a consumer transaction," says the CPB's Jason Wesley. "Consumers should also be aware of the 10 per cent rule (in the act): If an estimate is provided, the final cost cannot exceed the original estimated price by more than 10 per cent."

Police did take action against Desi Movers in one case.

On March 4, Don Klees hired Desi Movers for a four-hour Markham-Stouffville move. He was quoted \$60 an hour but says he was told to pay \$1,311 or his furniture, clothes and appliances would be locked in storage.

He struck a deal to pay some of the balance and in return the company would keep the leather cushions from his sofa as collateral. The movers then dumped all his belongings onto his lane, leaving the 62-year-old to move his stuff indoors.

Klees contacted York Region police who, according to the police report, spoke "with the owner (Jason Syed). ... Police advised Jason that he did not have the right to keep the complainant's belongings." The Desi driver told Jason he did not know where the cushions were.

Police didn't lay charges, but did issue a summons to Syed for failing to comply with the Consumer Protection Act by charging an amount that exceeded the estimate by more than 10 per cent.

Syed appeared in Newmarket provincial court on June 20, to face non-criminal charges. The

documents required (for instance, at border crossings).

- If goods are to be insured, name of person who holds the policy.

How to protect yourself:

In cases where movers insist on being paid before unloading goods, and where the bill far exceeds the estimate, the ministry advises consumers to:

- First, insist the mover adhere to the agreed contract.
- Tell the movers they are breaking the law if they won't adhere to the contract and, given no choice, say you are paying under protest.
- Contact the ministry's Consumer Services Bureau: 1-800-889-9768 or ontario.ca/consumerprotection.

Source: *Consumer Protection Branch*

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presiding judge felt the matter was outside that court's jurisdiction. The attorney-general's office says it should be heard in provincial court.

Klees is again trying to have his case heard.

Brett Popplewell can be reached at bpopplewell@thestar.ca

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Ridiculous

While reading the posted comments, it becomes obvious that ordinary citizens can solve this problem with ease. Why do our well-paid politicians, aided by our police, not care to shut this type of scam down? Innocent people are being financially hurt -- this kind of money is far too much for the ordinary person to lose, and criminals should not be rewarded by an apathetic system and its officials. We see the same thing happening with contractors, and Mike Holmes scratches his head wondering why they're getting away with it, too. Same reason. The justice system hides behind the "it's a civil matter" screen. No, it's clearly a crime when someone takes your money and does not render the service you paid for, or extorts more from you. If there is a stipulation in the Consumer Protection Act that you can't add more than 10% to the amount on the contract, it simply needs to be enforced. If the police could issue a summons once, then they can do it EVERY time until this nonsense stops.

Posted by what the what? at 1:22 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 15 | [Disagree](#) 1 | [Offensive](#)

My Experience ...

I too found a mover charging \$65/hour to move me. I packed all my belongings. I had small number of items (furniture and boxes) which could fit in a small truck. On the moving day a very large rented truck arrived, which immediately raised the caution flag; what kind of mover was he that he did not have his own truck? I was presented a contract, which I signed. Then he asked for my credit card, which I produced. He then stated making impression of the card on credit card paper by rubbing the side of a pencil on it. The second caution flag went up. Finally, he asked me to sign the credit card paper, saying that he will fill in the amount after the move was completed. I refused and had a wrestling match to get the credit card paper with my credit card impression from him. After that the duo went out but stood in the street arguing with each other regarding who was going to pay for the rented truck. I reported them to police, but they were not interested.

Posted by ThirdWordCharlie at 1:20 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 4 | [Disagree](#) 1 | [Offensive](#)

Don't Call the Cops, Call Border Services

My brother had a similar experience. From his cell phone he called directory assistance and asked for the number for Canadian Border Services. Then, in front of the movers, he called Canadian Border Services and asked how he could report people in the country working illegally. Before he finished the call, the movers had started moving his stuff into the house. They were done in 2 hours and there were no extra charges!

Posted by SpenceCole at 1:20 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 11 | [Disagree](#) | [Offensive](#) 2

Good & Bad in Every Industry

I feel compelled to respond to this article. I work for a family owned moving co. and have much respect for the honest hardworking owner and crew of movers and am offended by the comments that movers are the lowlives of our society. As for estimating moves, we have to trust the honesty of the customer in providing the info to base the estimate on. Even when doing in-home estimates, not always are the customers honest about what is actually moving. Many times movers are dispatched for what has been estimated to be a 5 - 6 move and upon arriving at the home, there is far more inventory than they have revealed, have not done what they said they were going to do, or they are completely disorganized and not prepared for the move. We don't collect payment until the end of the move and we do our utmost to satisfy customer complaints. Most of our business is repeat or referrals. Don't just hire whoever gives you the cheapest rate, these are the companies you should stay AWAY from.

Posted by I.care at 1:20 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 9 | [Disagree](#) 1 | [Offensive](#)

More widespread than I thought.

Something similar happened to my family 6 years ago. The difficulty in moving ourselves, like so many have suggested, was that all our belongings were going into storage while our new home

was undergoing a massive renovation. We had to hire the movers independently of the truck. The movers did not use their dolly for the boxes, moved only one box at a time, and dragged their feet until the mandatory first 4 hours were past. They left all the heavy furniture till the end, including our piano. They could not threaten to take the truck, it wasn't theirs. The did threaten to leave and take their ramp unless they were paid an additional 2 hours up front in cash. We said no and they left. Luckily, the area where we were living was still under construction and we had a great relationship with the site manager. He sent over a couple of his burly workers to lift the piano into the truck.

Posted by Tupps at 12:41 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 3 | [Disagree](#) 1 | [Offensive](#)

There are good movers out there

Our company moved from Markham to Aurora. A lot of stuffs, stairs... Cost us about \$600.

Posted by flum at 12:37 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) | [Disagree](#) 3 | [Offensive](#)

solution: dyi or get recommendation

I also had a bad experience with a mover about six years ago (forget the name, the drivers were Russian and barely spoke English). The drivers banged my furniture around without any apology and broke two items. I never got compensated. The only way to ensure a chance of satisfaction is to get a recommendation from a friend or family member. Or do it yourself as many do (what I've done the last two times).

Posted by damunicom at 12:24 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 6 | [Disagree](#) 1 | [Offensive](#)

A point by Joker

-Joker your points are helpful and nice and good but ur point: 3. do not allow the moving van to leave with your stuff This would be considered as criminal by the police even though u r being robbed in broad daylight,which would be a civil matter.

Posted by bigsaf at 12:24 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 1 | [Disagree](#) 1 | [Offensive](#) 1

One moving company

I dont want to advertise or anything & I wont guarantee any perfect treatment,but reading every1 here hving a horrid story or another I thought with the power of the human network through The Star I can help fellow readers with at least 1 moving company I know who treated me fine (BUT were expensive,even after discount! Though Im sure it was cheaper than scammers). Maybe we should open a website to rate moving companies & other services here. The one I'm mentioning is 'No Problem Movers' (ironic). You can Google them. Again no guarantees as I dont wanna tarnish my reputation on the Star. But I knew of them through my community links who the sales executive was also a part of. Hope this helps most...

Posted by bigsaf at 12:24 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 1 | [Disagree](#) 1 | [Offensive](#)

The Flip Side of the Moving Industry

We are a mover in the GTA and after reading the article and comments, we understand how a consumer can have this happen to them. The general public needs to understand that there are so many variables that are out of the movers control and that they do have a responsibility to tell their mover about the variables such as the items being moved, extra stops & pick ups, extra furniture, truck access at origin or destination, etc. They should not shop for the lowest price either. A red flag should go up when they get a low estimate. I have been a Moving Consultant for the past 20 years and found that there is little difference between an in-home estimate versus a phone estimate. If the consumer is honest and reveals all the information up front there should be no surprises. Please do not paint the entire moving industry with one color, there are many excellent independent movers who work very hard and care about their reputation.

Posted by Anissa at 12:22 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 2 | [Disagree](#) 8 | [Offensive](#)

Stories like this...

It's stories like this that are the reason i rent a Uhaul if i need to move. Offer you friends a case of beer and pizza and save yourself a pile of money. Cheap Labour from reliable, honest people.

Posted by TOCanada at 12:17 PM Friday, August 15 2008

[Agree](#) 12 | [Disagree](#) 5 | [Offensive](#)

Many stories

My uncle had a rude check as a new immigrant. He hired some movers to move stuff from Toronto to Mississauga. He even got them pizza&coke for their 'hard work'. But after loading everything in the truck,they refused to budge & wanted more money,not in their contract. My uncle called the police. They told him tht they KNEW he's getting ripped off but couldn't do a thing except give them a parking ticket. Tht got them moving,But in Mississauga,they refused to take the furniture out at 1st,so my uncle was forced to pay.Then they started to dump the furniture on the driveway.My uncle now called Peel police,who didn't bother to show up,b'coz he ended up arguing with an unsympathetic dispatcher saying this was a civil matter.My uncle threatened to park his car behind the truck & not let them get away until they moved the furniture into the house.Dispatcher said 'Now THAT would be criminal!'

Posted by bigsaf at 12:11 PM Friday, August 15 2008

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