

# A rebel girl who would not text

Bill Hall

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My wife and I marveled as we drove past a girl of about 12 because she was texting as she walked along the sidewalk, and she wasn't using a cell phone keyboard to do it.

She was scribbling something in a small notepad as she walked - pencil-and-paper texting. What will they think of next?

You see people all over these days, tapping their little fat thumbs on the tiny keys of a cell phone as they send severely abbreviated notes to others. Even the president of the United States does it, probably tapping out things like CS (Congress stinks).

But this was an old-fashioned girl walking along the other day texting with a pencil on paper. It was like watching the same girl ride a horse to school. There was something charmingly antiquated and redemptive about it in a world now depending on clumsy electronic hardware to communicate in shorthand with others of their kind.

Mind you, I do not normally resist new ways of doing things. I am what is known as an early adopter. You bring out some new gadget like a cell phone that is also an electric razor or a laptop computer with a hard lid that doubles as a walnut cracker and I mortgage the family car to be among the first to play with that wonderful device.

But I tilt toward gadgets that are an improvement over previous devices of the same sort. And so I ask, is an apparatus that lets you communicate by using fat fingers on a microscopic keyboard to send underspelled words an improvement? Does the fumble-thumb method of sending condensed words actually represent an advancement in communication over ordinary e-mail?

If you love somebody and you want to say so other than to her face, is it classier to do that by deliberate illiteracy? Or is it cooler to use that same textable cell phone to call her instead and let her relish the sound of your actual voice trembling with affection and passion?

Apparently that is an ignorant question. I suspect the texters are caught up in the game of showing off how much you can say in the fewest letters possible, providing they use the same style of condensed fadspeak that everyone else is

using. In other words, texting is like jeans. If you don't use the same style as everyone else, you're not with it.

As for actual cell phone calls, that is for someone who values the message more than the demonstration of your personal talent for using the universal texting language. It's more an attempt to show off your togetherness with the fashion of the day than to actually communicate useful information. The medium is the message and the message is how clever you are.

I suspect part of the appeal of using a form of communication more difficult and awkward than several better methods is simply that it's fun. It's something like those secret languages of yesteryear - pig Latin, for instance. (igpay atinlay).

However, if it is the degree of difficulty that strikes their fancy, then how long before they are tapping out messages to each other in Morse code?

My wife and I got a kick out of watching that revolutionary girl the other day walking along brazenly jotting down words with a pencil and paper, smiling broadly at what she was creating. That was a rebel at work, someone who defies the gray groupthink of the current crowd.

After all, rebels wrote the Declaration of Independence. They were the original early adapters, inventing something the world had not previously seen in such a pure and daring form. And they did it with quill pens rather than with thumbs.

There is no greater need for courage in life than when disagreeing with the mob, than when marching to your own drummer, than when escaping the awful social prison of following the fashion of the moment.

Most people are recyclers, repeating the steady, monotonous beat of the majority even when it's jarring on the ear. If the self-appointed leaders of the crowd say something is the latest thing to do, then most people, young and old, race to embrace it lest they appear to be out of step.

But when it comes time to build a better mousetrap or to abandon a defunct and useless practice, it is not people locked in a reverse gear like texting who advance civilization. They would never dare to be so different.

And besides, they're all thumbs.

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*Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's editorial page. His e-mail address is wilberth@cableone.net.*