

# Commentary Bill Hall Everybody gets an extra brain

*Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune*

My wife tells me that when she was 5 her kindergarten teacher sent a note home to her mother complaining that Sharon was absent-minded.

And she is, to this day. So am I. But just because you are absent-minded in your senior years doesn't mean that you're losing it. Most of us have always been that way. Don't we all forget where we left our car keys? Don't we all go into a room from time to time and, upon arriving, have to stop and think what we went after?

Absent-mindedness is more glaring at an advanced age than it was when we were 6 or 60 or - the most distracted age of all - sweet 16. Whatever our mental status at 80, we are brilliantly focused by comparison with a 16-year-old boy ogling a 16-year-old girl while walking insanely across a busy street without looking.

Sharon has told younger members of our family that story about her teacher's kindergarten note. She urges them to keep that in mind before they decide to park us in some human storage unit because we seem to be getting absent-minded.

In a similar vein, it is I who sometimes looks at my own shaky memory and wonders if I don't bear watching. Losing it or not, we who have spent our entire lives having trouble remembering names may actually be getting a bit worse in that regard. It does go with the territory of aging, and that's why you may hear a gathering of seniors talking about favorite movie stars without using any names at all:

"Remember that red-headed actress who was so funny, the one who married that Cuban musician, what'shisname?"

"Yeah, I remember her. She starred with the Cuban guy in that sitcom called 'I Love Somebody or other.'"

We do tend to slip more into that mode each year. And it used to be that there was no solution short of lying awake all night until your petrified brain finally coughs up the name "Lucy."

If you, old or young, are slow to remember famous names along with others, I have good news for you. The electronic community has invented what amounts to a small computerized brain attachment somewhat like a pacemaker heart attachment. The brain unit offers instant recall of all the words in your head, including the many you have forgotten.

The device is not carried inside your skin like a pacemaker. It is wireless and works from inside your purse, your chest pocket or a holster on your waist. It's loosely known as a "smart phone."

It's a robotic helper for your brain, giving you back not only all the words you have misplaced but even some new words that your head has never held before.

The version I carry has what they call "voice recognition." It listens to my voice and actually recognizes about 95 percent of the words I say, automatically typing them on the little smart phone screen. For instance, if several of us are sitting around talking about the Seattle Mariners and none of us can remember the name of the Mariners' shortstop, I whip out my little electronic container of supplemental brains and say, "Mariners' shortstop."

Within a few seconds, it shows the words "Mariners' shortstop" on the screen. I touch the words and, within a few more seconds, it identifies the player as Brendan Ryan.

Not surprisingly in my crowd, how old someone is often makes us curious. If you tell the device the name of practically any slightly famous or very famous person and add the word "birthdate," it will tell you within seconds. It told me the other day when Phyllis Diller died how old she was - 95.

You can also find practically any fuzzy fact from science or daily life, such as how many quarts are in a gallon, the current temperature in practically every city on earth, not to mention a head count on how many innocent people some moral nitwit of a dictator has killed this month.

As a consequence, my half-electronic and half-me brain has never been larger. I think of that smart phone as "Bill's other brain."

However, there is a downside. I have never before been a bigger bore when sitting around a coffee table with friends. Knowing everything is never popular.

---

*Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's Opinion page. His email address is [wilberth@cableone.net](mailto:wilberth@cableone.net).*