

# Texting among the zombies

**Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune**

That railroad engineer whose Philadelphia train derailed last month killing eight people may have been cleared of any texting or talking on a phone while in charge.

I wish I could say the same about some automobile drivers.

I stroll the streets for exercise and it's a jungle out there. Every morning, at least one sleepy driver goes past, using one hand on the wheel and the other hand holding a phone with the motorist dangerously driving dull-eyed and blatantly lost in thought. It's like pedestrians are invisible.

I think it must have something to do with the zombie fad in the movies. Zombies stumble along, coming toward you looking for lunch. You're lunch. But at least zombies are paying attention to the walkers and joggers, which is more than some texters I have seen.

About once a week, when I'm out for a sidewalk stroll, one of those drivers, lost in texting, blindly turns the corner and flits past me with that look of the undead in her eyes. She zooms around me without even realizing there is a person in her path.

Thank goodness I am a natural athlete, a newspaperman like Clark Kent, who is capable of leaping over tall buildings at a single bound. If I hadn't been light on my feet, I could be joining the undead right now, or worse.

Nevertheless, I do understand the temptation to operate an automobile and a smartphone simultaneously. We are creatures ruled by our own curiosity. When I am inside our house and the phone rings, I not only can't resist answering the call, but I race quickly to the phone. As a journalist, I don't want to miss a call. It could be anyone, maybe even the president of the United States contacting me to give me a big story.

It hasn't happened yet, but that could happen any day now.

Those same impulses apply to me when I am driving. The phone rings and I'm dying to know who it is, but our family doesn't take phone calls while driving because we don't want to accidentally run over someone, even if they are texters with their eyes off the road and richly deserving of my driving error.

But in truth, when I'm driving and my smart phone rings, I would really rather grab it, slam it up against my ear and find out if this time it really is the president calling.

However, our rule is this: If the traffic is clear we are permitted to pull over to the curb and stop. Only then can we answer that call, even if the president is never on the line and even if it is some fat-headed huckster trying to sell us some siding.

You would think that the few seconds it takes to pull over to the curb would be tolerable even for the kind of hysterical people who can't bring themselves to ignore a phone. After all, most of us began our lives before portable telephones came along.

If someone back then was trying to call you and you weren't home, you wouldn't even know you had a phone call.

Before that, the catch was that the telephone hadn't been invented yet, although neighboring farmers would sometimes stand on a knoll and yell greetings to one and all.

Then there were those years back in 1789, when messengers from Europe boarded sailing ships and spent several weeks crossing the ocean. They came to tell an immigrant to this land that his daughter was arrested for running over a pedestrian with an ox cart while gossiping with a neighbor.

Today is different. Since it is possible to pick up a phone and answer monumental questions like, "What do you want for dinner, Harvey?" then what's the rush to answer a telephone? Why do we always have to know every moment of our lives?

It's galling enough when you are out for a stroll and get run over by a car. It would be twice as galling if the phone call is answered by some shallow, self-centered twit whose wife wants him to drive by the grocery store for another six pack of her favorite beer.

Meanwhile, if you drive by and see me flattened on the street by some frantic phone freak, call my wife and tell her I'll be late for dinner.

(Has Barack called yet?)

---

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