

up front/ commentary Kathy Hedberg

My daily brain game is 'Remember That Password'

Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston Tribune

As people grow older, we're told we need to do things like crossword or Sudoku puzzles to challenge our brains and keep them from turning to Cream of Wheat consistency.

I've never been good at crosswords or any other kind of puzzle. But my brain is still Rice Krispie fresh because just being able to get by in today's technological world is mental challenge enough.

How many times on a daily basis are we tripped up trying to remember the myriad passwords and PIN numbers that protect our personal accounts? This is as much of a mental workout as trying to decipher the coordinates of a NASA space launch.

Everything these days needs a login and password. And since you never can be sure the Russians aren't carefully watching every little move we make, you have to keep updating these secret codes so they won't be able to steal your entire \$42.38 savings account.

The days of the simple secret-club code words and phrases that we used to make up in Girl Scouts are over. When we first signed on to our accounts, everybody used their last name and the year they graduated. But the Russians, not to mention the North Koreans, caught on to that pretty quickly and then we had to get more complicated. Those original passwords were so obvious even the Canadians could decode them.

Then we started using the names of our pets, our current spouse or partner, our first employer, our anniversary or children's birthdays to configure more difficult logins and passwords.

But most account managers don't let you keep the same sign-in forever because chances are you've mingled with some Russians or Canadians at a cocktail party and maybe you let it slip who your first employer was and then all your private information is exposed to the world.

So you have to continue changing your special words. And that makes it hard to remember - now who was my first dog? My first employer? Was that the year I graduated or my license plate number? Life is complicated and the next time you try to get into your account you're stuck.

One of my accounts asked for a whole phrase for identification.

I came up with something clever I thought I could remember. But the next time I called that institution and tried to get my personal information, I couldn't recall it.

I contacted customer service for help.

The service guy queried, "And the key phrase is ?"

"Eenie meenie miney mo?" I asked.

Wrong.

Well, how about: "There once was a girl from Nantucket."

No dice again.

Finally, in frustration I blurted out: "I have no freakin' idea what this password phrase is."

"Bingo," the service guy said and the account was unlocked.

Hedberg may be contacted at kathyhedberg@gmail.com or (208) 983-2326.