



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

A Heart-to-Heart Talk about Smartphones

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I have recently entered the 21st century with the disposal of my dumb flip phone. I purchased a smartphone. I was told by the people who use smartphones that I was smart to get rid of something so dumb it couldn't scroll. It was that old and that dumb.

They told me how much fun I would have with social media and texting...and especially being able to use thousands of apps. That way, I could occupy my waking hours, even tossing aside Netflix, to socially interact with software that mimics people.

It seems that all walks of life, every social interaction, requires downloading of yet another app. How many of these things can a smartphone hold? How in the world do smartphone users manage to scroll (and scroll and scroll) to find one of the 10^{10th} apps on their phones that are flashing by them on their screens?

I have become fascinated watching my friends and wife scrolling, back-and-forth, up-and-down, looking for an app or a Tweet that will make them smarter, while I remain as dumb as a flip phone.

And texting? I watch with awe as texters enter text---with their thumbs, no less---faster than I can talk. Granted, I tend to speak with a slow southwestern drawl, but I can type like a New Jersey Yankee talks: fast and unintelligible. But those nimble-thumbed texters even beat me with entering stuff on our machines---their smartphones and my PC...and I'm using two thumbs *and* eight fingers. It's pretty humiliating.

I've had my smartphone for several months. I have not downloaded one single app. After hours of mis-typing text on a smartphone keyboard designed for dwarfs or people with atrophied thumbs, I have succeeded in sending one or two texts. They were so full of typos you would have thought that the proverbial monkey was at my keyboard, working on a Shakespearean sonnet.

Text! Every time I call someone who does not answer, such as a 911 operator, I get this message, "And a text is being sent to your phone." I did not want a text. A text about what? That the person was not available? I already knew that.

But I get my revenge. I don't look at any of these texts. I probably have so many text messages stored on my phone that this machine is just waiting to ambush a call I make by flooding me with loads of old text messages. On the other hand, maybe my phone will run out of memory and stop working. I'm not using the thing much anyway. I'd be happy going back to my flip phone.

But in the long run, I know that is not possible. Most of the people I come across assume I have a smartphone, that I do text, that they can send me an app. And here is the downer: Increasingly, I will not be able to communicate with anyone because I don't do texting, apps, OCR scans, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and so on. I might as well retreat to Plato's cave.

I've given up. I've fought-off staying mostly to myself (with head held high instead of bending down to face a screen). Trying to communicate by conventional telephone calls is going against the social media tide. I've no choice but to become a born-again phone user. I've decided to bestow my virgin smartphone with its *very first app*. This fertilization might be painful to my maiden phone, not to mention the phone owner, who is a wallflower when it comes to apps.

The first app to be downloaded comes along at an opportune time. I just had a heart-beat monitor installed in my chest. It will communicate with my smartphone, which

will call my cardiologist's phone system to report on my heart's beating. If my heart stops beating...well, like the old Timex ad, one part of my chest will keep right on ticking and checking for ticking. My cardiologist's automatic smartphone system might even call for a hearse and dispense with an unnecessary ambulance. Automation comes in handy. No messy human involvement.

This saga cuts to the present...well, yesterday, to describe my call to the people who were going to download an app to my eager, yet anxious smartphone to begin the monitoring functions.

Putting on my Bluetooth hearing aids that are also Bluetoothed to my phone, I called the heart monitoring equipment vendor:

"Hello, this is the [name withheld to protect my phone and me from lawsuits and Twitter calls]. How can I help you?"

Me, "I was given this number to have you download an app to my phone for heart monitoring."

After preliminary talk, exchanging IDs and such, the representative said, "Okay, it's a simple process. Let's get started. First, turn on your phone speaker."

"Oh, that won't be necessary. I have hearing aids that are connected to my phone. I can hear you, loud and clear."

Rep, "Sir, you will have to take out your hearing aids and turn them off. They may interfere with the Bluetooth monitor in your chest."

I was tempted to explain to her that Bluetooth is designed to use different frequencies so nearby devices do not interfere with one another, but I did not want to come across as too geeky. So, I just offered, "My printer is next to me, Bluetoothing up a storm and printing a report. Do I turn off the printer, too?"

Rep, "That won't be necessary."

Without getting onto the geek train, why turn off my hearing aids, but not my printer? Bluetooth does not know or care if it is providing its different frequencies for a heart monitor, hearing aids, printers, or waffle irons. But on to the matter at hand.

Me, "Now, I can't hear you very well without my hearing aids."

Rep, "Well, sir, turn on your phone speaker, as I said."

"I don't know how to turn on the speaker. Never had a need for it."

And today's products do not come with a user's guide. Somehow, we are expected to be clairvoyant and instantly know how to use the 10^{20th} functions on a device that has more features than a Swiss army knife.

Rep, showing signs of exasperation, "What kind of phone are you using?"

"A cell phone."

"No! What is the brand name?"

I looked at the phone; front, back, ends, sides. Not one name. Not one logo. Nothing to identify it. I informed the rep, "The phone is really dumb. It can't tell me what it is."

Rep, "It is an iPhone?"

"No, it's the other kind. I don't use iPhones; don't want to take out a second mortgage to buy one."

Rep, “Now we’re getting somewhere. You’re using the Android operating system,” as we (I) struggled to find the model number and the Android OS version. ...No user guide again, and I am a whiz at technical user guides.

The rep had me go to several screens on my phone. I was doing this while holding the phone in one hand and trying to manipulate the phone keypad with the other hand. ...and at the same time, keeping an eye on the screen, which required taking the phone away from my ear. I was wishing I knew more about the speaker button.

“Look, I’m not trying to be contrary, but I was told at the hospital that getting the app on my phone was a very simple procedure. You have taken me to about ten screens and had me enter text. I have had no practice typing with my thumbs, except for the space bar.

“All I need is a user’s guide I can read about all this stuff we are going through. How about just sending me an email and attach your user’s guide? I’ll read it, learn how to turn on the speaker, and we can then breeze through this exercise.”

Rep, “We don’t have a user’s guide.”

That’s also what the smartphone salesman told me. That’s what just about everyone tells us nowadays, “We don’t do user’s guides.” Everything is supposed to be so “user friendly” that instructions on how to use things are not needed. Plus, it costs money for a company to write and maintain user guides. I’ll bet future self-driving cars will have no user guides because the user won’t be driving the car. Maybe they already don’t have them.

Who knows what’s next? “Good morning, folks, this is your captain speaking. You will be happy to know we have had no user’s guide to fly this airplane, and we’re passing this savings on to you!”

We finally succeeded in getting to the point where the rep was going to download the app and deflower my smartphone. To do this, she directed me to yet another button on yet another screen. A Google screen appeared.

Me, “Wait a minute! You mean the app will use Google for downloading to my phone?”

Rep, “Yes, just follow the instructions on your screen, and you’ll have the app on your phone in a jiffy.”

Me, “Miss, I do not do Google for many reasons. Please use Bing, that is my browser.”

“Sorry, Google is the only way we can download the app.”

Have you noticed over the past ten years or so that Google has become your only option for many Internet-based services? I used to run Google as my browser and search engine. No longer.

Me, “Sorry, risking being contrary again, but I will not use Google....and your company should give customers the option to make a choice of browsers.”

So, there I was. I had just spent untold amounts of Uncle Sam’s Medicare dollars for carting around a heart monitor in my chest that was sending out heartbeat signals to my printer.

This story has a happy ending. The heart monitor company is sending me an external device that...I am told...will automatically pair with the machine in my chest and not my printer, hearing aids, or my neighbor’s heart monitor.

PS

After writing this report, I was informed my smartphone is not an apps virgin. It came loaded with apps. The phone salesman kept me in the dark...relegating me to the demeaning status of a cuckhold, while probably laughing behind my back.