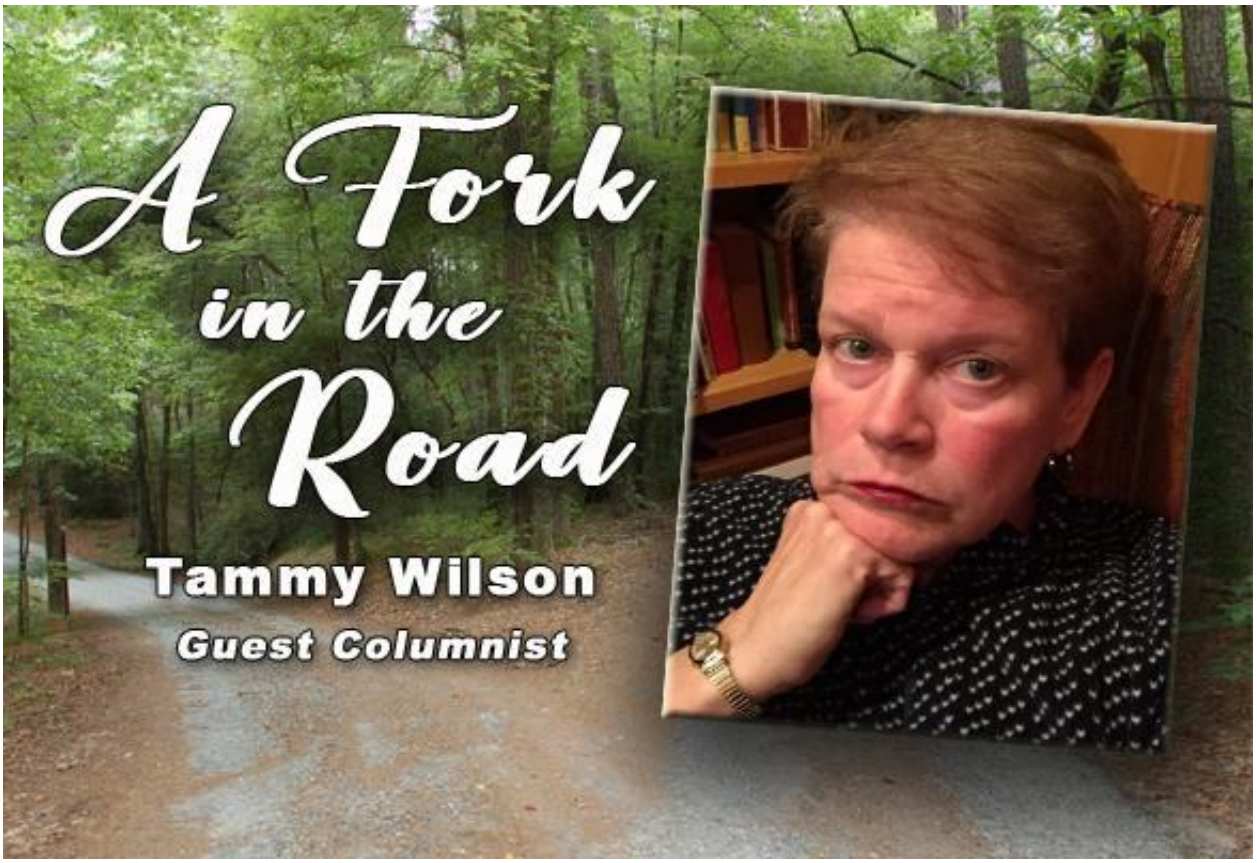

Aging Phones Bring Out The Luddite In Me

Tammy Wilson

Electronics stores are foreign territory, no more often than I replace my devices.

I figure if it still works, why buy a new one?

Case in point, my recent visit to the Walmart in search of a screen protector for my iPhone. I'd heard there are a lot of screen sizes available. It's been more than a while since I bought a new phone, but since my screen protector resembled crushed ice, I knew it was time to replace it.

I handed the electronics associate my red iPhone. The look on his face told me all I needed to know.

How old is this phone?

I couldn't remember. I don't keep up with the model of my laptop computer or the version of software. It updates itself when it forces me to make a decision, and if there's one thing I hate, it's having to risk having my world turned upside down with a new app.

It's been a while, I said.

He asked me to open my Settings to find the answer. I bought this phone in 2018, which

makes it something of an antique.

Either way, fellow at Walmart gave me a look as if I'd stepped out of a time machine.

I'm not sure he had seen an 8Plus in person, or if he had, it had been a long while, like maybe back in middle school.

I understand that about 12 percent of Smartphone users replace their phones every year, Another five percent do it every six months. Average users (not me) tend to replace their phones every two to three years.

I guess this puts me in the Luddite category—the name for people who are slow to adapt to new technology.

I looked it up later. I purchased the phone in 2018, the year I lost the new phone in a rental car. I remember the day well. I was at Logan Airport in Boston, rushing to catch a flight when—at the gate—I realized my new phone was missing. A brand new one, of course, not the old one I was ready to give up. I took the shuttle bus to the rental car center and after a panicked search for the car, the Avis attendant helped me locate my car in a sea of lookalike sedans. Frantically, we searched the interior. My phone had slipped between the seats and slid back to the rear floor board. A black screen on black carpet surrounded by black upholstery. Lucky to find it, indeed.

Back a Walmart, of course they didn't have the screen saver I needed. They only stock what they can easily sell, and accessories for six-year-old phones aren't on that list.

Of course, the associate wanted me to sign up for a new phone. Only doing his job, I know, but I didn't take the bait. I'd keep my old phone, and in doing so, I reminded myself of

my aunt who lived on a farm when I was growing up. Her wall phone was a classic wooden model with the separate ear and mouth pieces—the kind of model they used on *Lassie* or maybe *The Real McCoys*. The old phone followed her into town when she moved because she couldn't bear to part with it.

I couldn't bear to part with my phone the other day not because I have emotional ties, but more to avoid the hassle of setting up a new phone with all the passwords and "setting up." And so, I left the store without a new screen protector, which was the point of the shopping trip in the first place. I wound up ordering it on-line.

Luddites are people who refuse to keep up with the times out of nostalgia or laziness or not seeing the need to replace operable equipment. I'm not going to say that I hate technology. I love it when it works, and it if it's still working, why bother?

For me, the ultimate Luddite was a maiden lady named Esther, who lived on a farm outside the town I grew up. Most everyone knew she was in town because up until her death in 1978, she drove a Model A Ford—a touring car with side curtains. Think *Grapes of Wrath* had the Joads driven a car instead of a truck.

It was quite a site seeing Esther's car parked at the supermarket or puttering home down the state highway. As the story went, Esther's family bought the Model A around 1930 and drove it for a while, Esther's Dad, a thrifty farmer, was so disturbed at having to spend more money on gasoline when the tank ran dry, he declared the newfangled car ridiculous and parked it, reverting to horse and buggy. He reportedly used a team for years, never mind the cost of horse feed.

The other day, I looked up Esther's Dad on Ancestry. He lived to be 90, which makes me wonder if a simpler life may have contributed to his longevity. Either way, it was a prime example of how some people get along all right just keeping things even.

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