

Death of a Cell Phone

an anthology

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Introduction

My mother lost her cell phone in a dumpster today. We watched the GPS tracking, helplessly, as it made its way along the garbage route, to the depot, and eventually to a local dump where it is lost forever. She's been distraught for hours, and worst of all she feels bad about herself because she thinks these things don't happen every day.

This little collection is our chance to prove her wrong! Friends, family, and internet denizens have donated these short vignettes chronicling the fates of various lost and damaged cell phones.

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My cell phone died in a skiing accident

I was racing down a ski slope that I'd been down a hundred times before, not knowing that moguls had just put in right around a blind corner. I hit one at about 40mph and landed about 50 yards away from where my skis did. Somehow, I managed to walk away from this. My phone

was not so lucky. I never did get a picture of it but I'll leave it to your imagination based on this picture of my keys from the same accident:



My cell phone died of hypothermia

I went hiking all day in -20°F weather and at one point during the hike dropped my phone in a snowbank. My phone battery did not appreciate this treatment. RIP.

My cell phone died before it ever had a chance to live

I broke the screen on a brand new Galaxy the day I bought it. I hadn't gotten a case for it yet and didn't appreciate just how slippery those things are.

My cell phone died in a flood.

My son and I were going stir crazy from four straight days of rain. When the weather finally let up, we went out to a local park, to a shallow creek where we often played. Due to the rain water, the creek was up to my thighs instead of just below knee height like it usually was. We waded in, slowly making our way toward the little islands in the middle of the creek where my son loved to play.

Just then, a rush of water came from upstream, battering us both. My little boy tried to climb up me like a frightened monkey. Looking at the cell phone tucked away in my shirt, I knew I could lower us both into the water and stay steady, or be swept off my feet (now top-heavy from scrambling child) and have to recover downstream, swimming with the current. The latter meant a very wet and frightened child. So, down I went. I squatted into the water, keeping my body between the incoming water and my son as I coaxed him into putting his feet back on the creek bed and wading back to shore with me.

A log jam had broken upstream, sending a lot of water at debris at us very quickly. However, with some coaxing, talking, and soothing, we both made it back to shore upright and with dry faces. My cell phone, however, was not so lucky.

It was completely waterlogged and even drying in a desiccant bag was not enough to save it. The kid is harder to replace, though.

My cell phone died in a swimming accident, despite being an experienced rescue diver.

I'm a volunteer search-and-rescue worker. On my very first practice day with a new team, everyone else was late. As if set up by a movie director, some kid comes out of the woods near where I was waiting to meet them and said he needed help. His father had collapsed while fishing! The boy wasn't strong enough to get his father out of the spillway alone, and the man was still down on the bank, unconscious, nearly in the water.

I called 911 on my new Moto X (1st gen) Dev Edition, and was connected to an operator who did not have access to my GPS locator and couldn't seem to understand where the park was. I began talking her through where to send an ambulance as I made my way to the fisherman in distress.

I slid down the bank, into the spillway up to my stomach. My phone was in my hip pocket. Not only was the phone not destroyed, but it kept the connection to 911, whom I was still conversing with via my bluetooth headset! The rescue proceeded apace, and soon the gentleman (who had neglected his blood sugar over the course of a day of fishing) was brought out of the spillway and along the woodland path to a parking lot where we could meet an ambulance.

That phone made it through a second similar incident later that summer. In recounting my phone's adventures at a family picnic, I was met with some skepticism. So, I decided to prove the waterproofness of my little rescue companion by chucking it into my aunt's swimming pool.

Apparently, a third dunk was one too many, because by the end of the day, water had seeped in and destroyed not just the digitizer, but the poor phone's brain. Rest In Peace, little buddy. I'm sorry I let you down.

My cell phone died on my porch

7 days after I got my nice, fancy new phone... it died a most painful death by falling out of my pocket. Not the first time a phone had fallen out of the particular pair of pants I was wearing, either.



My loved one's cell phone died in a drive-by.

A family member left a cellphone on the top of the car before driving away. As we pulled out and turned to drive off the phone slid off and straight into a sewage drain. It was lost forever.

I murdered my cell phone – more than once

Back when Nextel was a thing, they had very rugged phones which were used primarily in the construction industry, because of the push-to-talk walkie-talkie feature. In the NYC area you literally couldn't work construction without having a Nextel phone.

One downside of the phones was their internal construction was cheap – so the multiple circuit boards would gently separate from each other and eventually lose connection to each other, and the phone would stop working. The other downside was that they would beep in your ear AMAZINGLY LOUDLY when they dropped a call, which they did often.

The cure for the loose boards inside was to gently drop the phone onto the floor from about three feet up – that would mush the boards all back together. Or it would break the little screen. We had the full insurance on the phones, so if it broke the screen, you'd bring the phone in to the store and they'd go in the back and fix it all up again.

The response to getting your eardrum blasted out by the BEEP noise (I still have tinnitus in both ears from that, 20 years later) was to throw the phone hard, far, and fast. I broke the windshield and dashboard of my Toyota Prius by throwing the phone, put a fist-sized hole ten feet up a wall in the office workshop, and eventually had to bring the phone in for repair.

The technician took the phone in the back, then came out, kinda puzzled, and said “What happened to this phone?”

I asked why he was asking. He said “Every single component in the phone is destroyed. There's not a single salvageable part.”

I told him it wasn't my problem, and he should get me a new phone – which he did.

Eventually Nextel got bought by Sprint and they lost the construction market through idiotic marketing practices, and I got a smartphone from T-Mobile.

I never broke a smartphone – until last week

I've been a big believer in “everybody gets the same phone” – that way it's easier to support everybody, it's easier to keep parts and chargers and batteries and such in stock.

Our current phones are the LG V20 – I like it because it's got a replaceable battery, and I replaced mine with one that lasts for three days of heavy use. The phone looks like a pregnant whale, but I'm OK with that – I don't have to ever worry about the battery life.

Of the four people I've got using that phone, I'm the one who has never broken a smartphone. Everybody else has been smashing the screens right and left – to the point that I've got several spare phones in stock, and I've started buying screens on ebay three at a time. I'm now good enough at repairing them that I can swap a screen in about ten minutes.

But I never broke a smartphone – until last week, when I was running up the stairs for some reason, then remembered I needed something from downstairs. I turned, and the phone in my hand went flying – it hit the carpet on the stairs a couple times, then landed face down on the hardwood floor.

Usually, when people “break a screen” they just crack the glass that's under the touchscreen layer, so it looks cracked but still functions well enough.

This phone had stuff dripping out the front.

Ten minutes later, I was back on-line, because I'd gotten so good at fixing everybody else's phone...

My Palm Pilot died because I ran to catch a bus

About 19 years ago I was hurrying to catch a bus to get to the train to get to my job at my school. I had my Sony Clié Palm Pilot with me in my pocket. I'd had this gadget at least six months and it was very useful to me as a digital agenda/diary. I slipped on some slush and I fell.

The impact broke the Clié, and it never worked again.



My cell phone died at a moonlit pier.

Once upon a time, in a galaxy quite close by, I was working late hours in an amusement park.

As it was summer, and the nearby beach was nicely deserted in the hours of the night, I would often go for a night swim after work.

One of those times, as I was daintily removing my clothing for a refreshing dip in the dark waters, I heard a single *plop*. I looked over the edge of the wooden pier, and, yes, lo and behold, saw the quickly retreating light of my frantically shining phone which had somehow plopped out of my pocket, over the pier and into the water.

Quickly, I jumped to the rescue - my hand following the glowing yellow light and, upon closing upon the hard plastic casing, feeling the vibration from the phone as well, desperate to make itself noticed so as to be rescued from the dark depths.

I sort of managed.

It was in the salten sea for maybe 15, 20 seconds, the dismantling afterwards and the subsequent drying must have taken another 10, 15.. After the drying-out and careful assembly it worked sometimes, and sometimes not. 50% uptime is not a good stat for phone.

It was a nice phone. Bought during the age where it was still possible to find calling devices that would be designed to do just that, call.. and apparently call for assistance during deep-sea dives.. I have not since found its like. Powered for a week or more, fine call quality, predictive typing that was only utterly wrong 5% of the time and which included my language; a plethora of demands ill-met by today's modern age.

My child's brand new cell phone died 5 minutes after we came ashore

My family went on a cruise together a few years ago and the week prior to leaving, my youngest child's cell phone broke by falling off of a desk at school. We had bought a special case to try and prevent this, but the phone was out of the case "because I was showing the case to my friend."

So, we rushed to a store and purchased a brand new cell phone that they could have with them on the cruise.

Turns out, the WiFi on the cruise was broken, so none of us could really use our phones for anything. So the brand new phone spent the vast majority of the vacation locked in a safe.

We arrive home, disembark and wait in line on the concrete dock at customs. Child gleefully cries out "I can use my phone!" ... fumbles as they took it out of their pocket and dropped it face down on the very solid concrete. We heard the glass crack. The screen was dead. I think it only saw one or two days of use, in total.

My cell phone might still be alive somewhere. Who knows? Not me!

I'd already lost one phone -- the free phone that came when we renewed our contract. Pulled it out somewhere to check the time, and set it down, and never picked it up again. Absolutely no idea where it happened.

So it's gone, and now I'm paying for a phone out of pocket, looking through whatever options are relatively cheap. One of the choices was a Nokia flip phone intended for construction sites: bright yellow, so you could see it across a parking lot; huge and clunky, so you couldn't miss it in a pocket or the bottom of a bag. A little more expensive than the truly cheapest choices, but an absolutely un-lose-able phone. Perfect.

Got my phone. Hooked it up to our account. Left our house one morning to help a friend move. Got a flat tire about a mile from our house. While my spouse jacked up the car, I called our friend to let them know we weren't going to make it today.

Then I set
my phone
down.
On the curb
in the parking lot.
To help change the tire.

We changed the tire to the doughnut spare. We drove home. We made an appointment at the tire place. I pulled out my phone to see if the friends had called back. Except.... I didn't, actually, because I didn't have a phone. We searched the car -- it must have fallen down beneath the seat? We shine flashlights everywhere. We called it -- no hint of a ring whatsoever.

Fine. We've literally only been one place since I had my phone. It has to be in that Starbucks parking lot where we changed the tire. We'll just go back and get it. It's not like you can miss the thing: it's bright yellow and has all the graceful silhouette of a brick.

Drove back. Got out. Searched every square inch of that parking lot. Searched the grass around the parking lot. It's bright yellow! You cannot miss it!

It was not there.

I have no idea. No explanation. I somehow managed to lose a phone in a mile's drive in the car.

I paid extra for a specifically un-lose-able phone... and then I lost it.

My cell phone died so often I had to get an electronic cover story

I genuinely am not a lose-your-expensive-possession kind of person, but I had a real string of bad luck with cell phones for some reason. I think I lost 3 in the same year? And then another one shortly after New Year's?

It got bad enough that I signed up for Google Voice. I didn't need any of the features they were touting -- customized voicemails, spam blocking, none of that -- but it had two features I very much needed

- 1) It would forward my official phone number to any phone I told it to
- 2) it would let me reply to texts, listen to voicemails, and make phone calls, from a web browser.

I was working two jobs at the time, and I successfully concealed from BOTH of my bosses that I had lost my phone (*again*) by giving them my Google Voice number, forwarding the number to my husband's cell phone, and by checking the google voice website obsessively.

My cell phone died... An Election Day Tragedy.

In 2004, I volunteered for a campaign in Lake County Illinois. I also volunteered to be a poll watcher on election day. All of the party campaigns were at a centralized location on election day. Pick up time for poll watching packets was around 5am. I parked, walked in and got my poll watching materials and went back to my car. After unlocking my car, I checked my coat pocket for my phone.

I started back to the building to see if I'd left it on the table when I signed out my packet. As I walked back, there was a car picking up someone in front of the building. I spotted my phone on the ground. How did I see it when it was still dark outside? All the buttons lit up as the car drove over it. It had fallen out of my pocket when I pulled gloves or keys out of my coat upon exiting the building.

I needed a phone for checking in with the campaign at certain times during the day. Fortunately, I'd kept my old phone and reactivated it (over the phone while at lunch). But, I still had to pay for another phone (because the old one had a dying battery and was a discontinued model).

After that, I became obsessive about where I put my phone and decided if I was going to be up at 5am, I might as well be a ballot box judge.

My cell phone has died many deaths.

It always manages to come back over and over in many different forms in some sort of grand wasteful reincarnation. It's form may be different than the times before (Android, Apple, Blackberry), (Sliding screens, Dual screens, No Screens), (Touch Screen, Buttons, Keyboard). Despite its appearance and overall function, it's sole purpose remains the same: Get me through the day by distracting me with boops, beeps and arrant vibratory stimulus.

Here is a list in ascending order of the phones that I, in recent memory, remember having and if possible it's mortal destination.

Gray Motorola "Cellular One" Brick Phone (Had to put it out to pasture also known as a microwave, it cost almost 1.50/min and it made my head hurt. After struggling with uncontrollable nosebleeds when I'd call MoviePhone, I decided it was either "It" or me)

Nokia 3310 (The good ol' Finnish bar of soap got me through some good and bad times in LA, it got chucked down a bowling alley and had it's internals separated by a runaway ball from the next lane.

Siemens E50 (I painted it butter yellow... It smelled like paint, I gave it to a homeless person in a fit of drunken generosity my goodness was that a high bill)

Nondescript Tracfone (Replaced the Siemens with a phone that did not possess a contract, given I was now paying early termination fees on the last phone, I needed something I could go to the gas station and refill with quarters.)

Samsung BlackJack II (Obtained my first job that paid over time, needless to say I was now the proverbial "Hot Shit" with a phone I could type very long messages to my friends declaring just that. I had only wished that it were waterproof and floated. Pontoon crash)

Black Berry 7100 (We tried to make it work for a few weeks, split up amicably. I see it around every once in awhile when I open my junk drawer)

Samsung BlackJack II (Looked almost like my old one, just newer. I tried to extend it's battery life through experimentation. Did not go according to plan)

<Took a mobile phone break for a couple years, convinced myself that landlines with really long curly cords and tape based answering machines were all I needed. This was one of the most productive times of my life>

PCD Chaser (First smart phone, I played so much angry birds that I wore a groove into the plastic screen)

HTC Desire (Sat with it in my back pocket, it curved in such a way that I think I may have single handedly invented the curved display AND the fidget spinner)

Samsung Note 7<?> (The notorious fire catching phone. I imported one after the recall. It was made of glass and larger than any of my pockets. It lasted a week and never set fire to anything, ho hum...

HTC Desire 810 (It got waterboarded with coke zero because I mistook it for my cup at the soda fountain.)

Blackberry Priv (Snapped in half, I fell from a pretty tall height. Don't take roof selfies)

T-Mobile Revvl (Stunt man jump off a deck)

T-Mobile Revvl 2 (Stunt man jump off a bicycle)

Had a week right after this where I lost 1 chinese feature phone, 1 Nokia 5110, 1 Nokia Lumina and One Verizon Tablet I was using as a phone because it "Was so big how could I lose it?"

Took another phone hiatus and abused my poor work phone, I'm sure they love the bill and now have an LG Nexus 5x that appears to have some form of Alzheimer's as it keeps turning itself on and calling my mother at the worst possible times!!

All of this to say that losing/maiming/destroying/exchanging phones is (what I believe to be) a new normal cycle of life.

My Cell Phone is Somebody Else's Problem Now

My first smartphone was a T-Mo Galaxy S 4G in 2011. Not a Galaxy S4, but "S 4G." A T-Mobile specialty. It was the daily driver for 3 1/2 years. I liked it because it was actually reasonably sized. I got an Otterbox with it when I bought it (only the "Commuter" series, though).

I dropped that thing off a second floor balcony, into the street, at least three times. Once, it hit the pavement corner-first. As I scrambled downstairs to retrieve it before it was also run over, I knew I was out a couple hundred bucks. But there it was, still powered on and with no visible damage, my waifu background still smiling back at me. The only damage was the home button backlight. That was in 2012 and it was a trooper for another couple years.

In 2014 I got a 2nd gen Moto G (which is still among the living), and repurposed the "Galaxy S 4G" as a HUD in my hooptie, running Torque. I dremeled out the gauge cluster trim, making a snug little home for it, routed a micro USB cable behind the trim for power, and got it all tricked out. Baddest-ass cluster on a '98 Lumina ever.

Then one day I left the car unlocked, and the phone was stolen overnight.

I guess the joke is really on the Thief, who had to disassemble quite a bit of my handiwork to even get to the device, pry the hot-glued case from the cluster, and even then it was so riddled with half-assed Tasker routines it must have been infuriating to even try to turn the thing on.

But the Thief must have realized their folly while still in the vehicle; There was nothing else of value to steal, but they managed to find a bottle of 3-in-1 oil, and sprayed it all over the cloth interior. Again the joke is on the Thief, because that car smells like cigarettes and grease already anyway (The joke will be on me when it all goes up in a great conflagration).

I'd love to tell you about the death of my Zune, but this is about cell phones, and I don't miss it anyway.

My cell phone died when I dropped it

Three days before it happened, I was going on a hike. It was really difficult because we forgot to bring water. As I walked I noticed that there were birds flying over my head. So I threw a stick at them. Then I tripped on a wood bench a couple times by accident. Anyway, we hiked up to the top, then realized we took the wrong path. So we went back down and up to the **real** top. And at the top we dug a hole by a tree. And you wouldn't believe what we found next. An arch linux install key! Just sitting in the hole. I'm not sure how it got there but when I plugged it into the school computer I replaced the OS with arch btw.

2 days before "The Incident"

I was still at school installing arch when the teacher walked over. He casually looked at me and whispered in my ear, "I use arch btw"

1 day before "The Incident"

When the weekend finally came (it was a saturday) I decided to pet my cat and tell her how she's a good kitty (the same old line). But she loved it anyway.

The Abominable Day

I dropped it. It was a pretty nice phone, but I dropped it on a wood floor. The SD card was still intact though so that was good. But then my cat ate the SD card, so that was the end of that.¹ For weeks I went to the litter box every day hoping to find it, and I finally found it after about 5 weeks. Then I got my meme folder off the sd card and life was good.

pacman -Syu ← oops wrong window sorry

¹ Partly true story