

Safety on the streets

By BRIAN LOCKHART

A wise person once said, 'look both ways before you cross the street.'

I'm not sure those were the words of a truly wise sage, but even though it may have come from a Grade Two teacher or maybe it was Elmer the Safety Elephant mascot, it makes very good sense.

You may look for danger approaching from one way, but if you don't look the other way you could end up becoming a hood ornament on a speeding truck you didn't see coming.

I took a jaunt over to the Beer Store where I live a couple of weeks ago. This particular Beer Store is at the back of a plaza and the only real reason for parking there is because you are going in to buy some suds.

Everyone in town knows this. People pull in and park in the line and run inside to get their beer.

The parking lot is very narrow at this point, usually allowing only one car to pass between the rows of parked cars and the brick side wall of the mall.

For this reason, just about everyone who drives through usually slows, or stops when they see a person get out of their car.

A quick wave to the driver and you jog a few feet to the store. Easy.

As I exited my vehicle I noticed a small car approaching very slowly. Another man, a few feet away, also saw it and we both stopped while the car approached.

The car was moving slowly, maybe five miles-per-hour, but it also was steering slightly to the left, not in the usual straight line.

We both hesitated as it seemed the car was going to pass in front of us and not do the usual courtesy stop.

As it passed directly in front of me I could see why the driver was heading dangerously close to a brick wall.

She didn't have a hand on the steering wheel. She was using both thumbs to type a text message on an iPhone with her eyes focused on the phone below - not the road ahead.

When I saw this I yelled 'GET OFF THE PHONE!'

Busted!

She dropped that phone and looked shocked as she realized two people were standing by her moving car and she hadn't seen either of them.

That's why it is called distracted driving.

If there had been a child trying to cross or a slow-moving disabled person with a walker, the first she would have been aware something was wrong would be when she heard the 'thud' of a body hitting her windshield.

There's been a lot of talk recently about the number of pedestrians killed this year on Toronto streets. People are being mowed down

left and right. It sounds like there are a lot of crazy drivers there.

Yet the last couple of times I drove in downtown Toronto traffic during rush hour, it was pretty orderly.

It can be a little nerve-wracking when the biggest rush hour you normally run into is eight cars in a row on Broadway, but considering the volume, pretty much everyone was driving accordingly.

I have no doubt that most of those pedestrian accidents could have been prevented by people simply being aware of where they are and what is happening around them.

All the time, I see people waiting to cross a traffic light-controlled street ? the light turns green and they walk without even turning their head to see if traffic is stopped.

Just because you have a green light doesn't mean the guy coming the other way is going to stop.

Leaving my subdivision just the other day, I came to the stop sign at the end of the street.

A woman was crossing while pushing a baby carriage.

Of course I stopped.

However, that woman did not look, not even a glance in my direction. She just assumed I must stop because she was crossing the street.

Yes, she had right-of-way, but to believe the right-of-way means everyone else will stop places you in a very dangerous situation.

One of the smartest things you can teach a new driver is how to proceed on a green light.

The light may turn green, but you should always look left and right before you hit the gas.

Just because the other guy has a red light doesn't mean he's going to stop. Those type of collisions happen every single day.

It may be just a few words from an elephant mascot, but looking both ways could mean the difference between a good day and ending up dead or in the hospital.

Knock on wood!