

# Switching cell phones takes emotional toll

November 18 2009, By Patrick May

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She's gone. We were the best of friends, constant companions -- literally, because I carried her day and night in the left-front pocket of my jeans. For five years we roamed the world together, or at least the United States, since she wasn't GSM-compatible.

Cell mates to the end.

But nothing in the wireless world lasts forever, except maybe the carriers' ever-renewing two-year contract.

Now my Verizon LG VX6100 is no more. Something about the battery giving up the ghost. And I must move on.

But how? Shifting from one device to another -- did I really just call her a "device"? -- is a heartbreaking and soul-wrenching ordeal. I'll hold on to a computer, a TV, a car or even a pair of shoes as long as I possibly can to avoid the pain of letting go of something comfortable -- or in the case of a phone, the agony of relearning which buttons to push when.

As a non-techie, I've little interest in or need for a cutting-edge handheld wireless device at this juncture in my already sufficiently wireless life. My hands and head are full enough without adding 37,000 iPhone apps to the disorderly deficit of my attention.

I'm easy, or so I thought. Just give me another low-maintenance flip-phone with a sensible and illuminated keypad, clear connections and a decent camera. Throw in some clean lines and, most important, a [voice-](#)

[recognition](#) system that can learn my speech patterns, discern my tonal inflections and maybe one day appreciate my every double-entendre.

Find me that phone, and I'll try to live without 6100.

I didn't think that was too much to ask.

The Verizon Wireless store beckoned like a bejeweled cavern of glistening spun-metal and alphanumeric keypads.

But as I walked in, all I could see was the ghost of 6100, her stub of an external antenna searching desperately in the afterlife for a strong signal, that scratched cover enfolding the 17 burnished buttons that had launched so many deep conversations, high-pitched arguments and long-winded messages of Sturm und Drang.

The salesman patiently introduced me to every model. Then my phone-swapping misery kicked in -- I dawdled and debated, had him open one phone after another so I could feel their touch. I left and came back, sought advice from friends, Googled "how to pick a [cell phone](#)," all while the clock of my phone-less life kept ticking away.

In the end, I chose what could have been 6100's twin sister, the LG VX8360. She's sleeker and sexier than her predecessor (God, forgive me!). She's thinner, and lighter by half an ounce. She's got Bluetooth. And a video camera.

But she's not 6100 and never will be. You suddenly swap one phone out for another, and the intuitive shuffle that follows can be profoundly disorienting. It's as if we're asking ourselves to rethink the way we count to 10, or learn the Pledge of Allegiance again, but this time backward.

That's the nature of cell phones. As we scroll and peck and voice-

activate our way through every waking hour, these devices have made us wireless extensions of ourselves. These aren't just "phones." These are tools to embed and insinuate ourselves into each others' lives, to share stories, to snap at loved ones whom we casually mistake for an entry on the speed-dial list.

It's been a few weeks since 8360 and I left that Verizon store. And to be honest with you, it has not been an easy patch. I hate the way my thumb can't flip up her cover. Or easily find the speaker button in the dark. Or reply to a text without accidentally erasing it in the process.

Most of all, I hate the way she doesn't really listen to me. Not like 6100 did. I ask 8360 to call X, and she calls Y.

It's almost as if she's doing it on purpose.

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## TIPS ON BUYING A CELL PHONE

Although switching cell phones was a traumatic experience for me, there's no reason you have to go through the same suffering. Here are a few tips that might help ease the pain:

1. You change, and so does your phone: As you wade into the new models, remember that your phone habits may have changed since the last time you looked for a phone. Talking more during a long commute? New job requires you to have e-mail access 24/7? Traveling with it overseas? Answers to these questions will help you narrow your search.
2. Take your time: When you visit your carrier's store, choose the timing to avoid crowds. Allow yourself at least an hour so you can try out a wide range of models at a calm and deliberate pace.

3. Don't be a dummy: Once you've chosen a phone, take it home, open the box, turn it on, then read the user's manual from cover to cover. Seriously. I can't tell you how many features I didn't even know existed on my phone until years later when I finally bothered to look at the manual.

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