

You Have Something I Don't Have

by Roz Warren

My smart phone has a feature that allows you to scan in your thumb print, after which it will recognize your thumb and unlock itself so you don't have to enter your password each time you want to use it.

And yet, when I scanned in my thumb, then tried to open the phone using my thumb print, I didn't get, "Welcome Back, Roz!"

Instead I got "Who the hell are you??"

Snubbed -- by my own phone.

I tried again. No dice. I tried any number of times but it never worked. After a while, I just gave up.

The computerized cash register at the library where I work doesn't know who the hell I am either. When we first got it, all of us scanned in our fingerprints. Now everyone can pop open the cash drawer with the touch of a fingertip. Except me.

With the cash register, as with my phone, I still have to type in the four digit security code. Every. Single. Time.

I used to wonder why these gizmos recognized everyone but me.

Were they using some kind of canny algorithm to see deep into my soul, register my ambivalence about the way technology has invaded every aspect of our lives, and punish me for it?

Or were they just being jerks?

When the library system where I work decided to require that all its employees get fingerprinted as a security measure, I finally learned what the problem was.

When I turned up for fingerprinting, the technician pressed my fingertips, one by one, onto a little glass plate, then frowned as the machine kept trying and trying scan them, with no success.

Finally, she looked at me and sighed.

"You don't have fingerprints," she said.

"That can't be," I protested. "Everyone has fingerprints."

"Not you," she said. "It's rare. But it happens."

There are several reasons, she told me, why you might not have fingerprints.

A few folks are actually born without them. (That's called adermatoglyphia.) Some medications can "erase" them. (A good case of poison ivy can do this too, but only temporarily.) They can also wear out if you use your finger tips too much. Bricklayers often end up "sanding" theirs down. If you're a secretary, your prints are also at risk -- handling all that paper can wear down the ridge detail.

I'm a writer who also works at her local public library. Between writing for hours every day and using the computers at work to check material in and out, I keep my fingertips very busy.

But just as likely a culprit? My age. I'm 63. "As we get older," the technician explained, "our fingerprints can become too faint to register."

So, as the lines on my face grow more pronounced, the lines on my finger prints are fading away?

All I can say is that it's a damn shame it's not the other way around.

Still, look on the bright side -- if I ever commit a heinous crime I won't have to wear latex gloves!

As it turns out, everyone else at work who got scanned has finger prints, except for one other woman who is, like me, an AARP-aged librarian.

I'm tempted to phone her up and propose that the two of us get together and rob a bank. Instead of Ocean's Eleven we can call it Librarian's 364.1523. (That's the Dewey Decimal Number for true crime.)

Maybe we'll do it to raise sorely needed funds for our library. Or to fund research into what the hell happened to our fingerprints.

Or perhaps we'll just fund our escape to a tropical island where we can lounge on the beach all day, wearing down our fingerprints by hoisting pina coladas and toasting to a stressfree and fingerprint-free future.

If your phone refuses to recognize you, give me a call. You're welcome to join us.

(Roz Warren www.rosalindwarren.com writes for everyone from the New York Times to the Funny Times.)

