

Laurie Leinonen  
CM Writing Group  
February Essay

### Caller ID

The phone rings. Caller ID appears on the TV screen. I let it ring. It is really hard for me to just let it ring. I have always been a compulsive phone answerer. My kids would say “just let it ring!” But I couldn’t. Maybe it came from growing up in a large family in a small town with party lines and not much privacy. You dialed but not really. The operator would put it through. It was a big deal when we got our own house lines. With these long cords so you could move around even while tethered to the wall or the base. There was major excitement when the Princess Wall Phone came out.

The phone rings again. I check caller ID on the phone. I let it ring. I really want to answer but I know it’s best that I don’t. It’s painful to let it ring and ring. I practically have to sit on my hands to keep from reaching out for it. I am coming up with reasons why I am not answering. I could be outside getting the mail or walking the dog. That helps calm me down. And lessen the guilt. We can’t always be available.

The phone rings again. On my cell phone while *I am* walking the dog. I check caller ID and know I will not answer. I come up with more rationalization...the battery is dead. I left it at home. There may or may not be a message to check later. At least the messages go straight to the phone so I don’t have to listen to them until I want to.  
*If I want to.*

It’s hard resisting the call, literally, of the phone, let alone the caller.

It has taken me more than a few months to come to the realization that it will really *not* matter *if I don’t answer*. But it still bothers me. Not just because I feel I am ignoring someone I care deeply about but because of the fear that something could be wrong.

One time the calls came later at night. I was able to ignore the first two but by the third one I could no longer resist for fear that something was wrong. Of course, nothing was really wrong. It was the same call I get many times a day.

*She says: "There is someone here I don't know; sitting at my dining room table. Just sitting there. I don't want him here. I don't need this! I am fine by myself. I don't drive. I have turned off the stove. This is ridiculous! I am going to tell him to go home. That a friend is coming over to take me to dinner so he doesn't need to be here. Can you do that?"*

No. The guilt and sadness washes over me even knowing that in less than 10 minutes the upset will be gone and there will be no memory of it...*for her.*