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LOVE ON LINE

It took me a while to realize that I missed it: Driving to work on Line Ave. in the morning after dropping my kids off at school.

Now, I-49 gives me another, faster route and my kids are basically grown (does that ever really happen?). [No longer am I required to] do my early morning up and down Line routine that had been a part of my daily life for more than 15 years.

I could go into the traffic jams, the construction of the bridge at Betty Virginia Park, the wait on students at Byrd crossing the street (grabbing a last drag on a cigarette), the countless lane changes to pass a slower car, the cop at South Highlands Elementary, and so forth, but what I *really* miss is the flirting on Line.

Maybe you were too busy or whatever and don't know what I'm talking about, but the rest of you do, don't you?

Think back for a second.

How was it done? Like many social activities, flirting on Line had certain rules.

First, all flirting was done on the way to work because we have more of a routine then and, besides, who has time after work? Second, most exchanges took place at traffic lights. Second, it had to be accidental. Like anything else, actions with a goal can sometimes be self defeating.

You had to be like, you know, friendly...genuinely friendly. And, finally, you had to know when to say goodbye.

Flirting on Line usually didn't just happen anywhere. You had to drive a few blocks from home before your brain and senses woke up and you couldn't yet have gotten too close to work where your mind would become focused on earning a living. But somewhere in between was the "flirt zone."

Since we live and work in different places, this zone was not the same for us all. In fact, Line Ave. could be looked at as a series of invisible, overlapping flirt zones.

Flirting took place with the same person over time or it happened with different people, depending in large part upon whether or not you kept to the same schedule.

I never knew their names and I'm glad they never knew mine or they would have quit looking over every couple of mornings a month and smiling 'cause they would have known what a jerk I can be at times. But, that's the beauty of flirting: You don't have to know the real person. You get to pass small looks and waves of the hand back and forth. You can enjoy five minutes fantasies without having to deal with a budget, dirty dishes, or irritating habits.

By the way, ladies, some of you were absolutely great at either keeping your ring hand off the steering wheel or at putting it on at strategic times, depending upon the message you wanted to send (or what I thought you wanted to send).

Many mornings were punctuated by a few brief moments of, well, to put it plainly, fun. It was fun to flirt on Line. I have to admit it, those times when I was busy and my mind was occupied by mundane matters, it was very flattering to turn my head for traffic and find the woman next to me was already looking over and smiling. And when I pulled up for a light, it was very, very enjoyable to glance across, catch the eye of the other driver, exchange smiles and thoughts, and continue on.

I remember quick hellos over steaming coffee cups, women turning to talk to a passenger and then looking past them to me.

I remember being snubbed.

I remember blondes with bows in the back of their hair and brunettes with baseball caps and pony tails.

And who says mothers can't do it all? Moms taking the kids to school have time to flirt, too.

I guess that maybe, most of all, I miss the brief islands of instant intimate (but safe) contact that happened rarely but did much to alleviate the inconvenience of that commute.

I shall miss Love on Line.

Mike Sledge