

I Once Was Lost...

By Reg P. Wydeven

August 24, 2014

I do not have a strong sense of direction. You could drop my buddy, Lee, in the middle of the wilderness in Canada and he would easily find his way home. I could get lost in Memorial Park if I didn't have my smartphone.

For example, during the summer of 1997, my wife and I went to a preseason Packer game. We parked in some guy's front yard and proceeded to walk into Lambeau Field. On the way in, in an effort to impress her, I explained why the Pack was going to have a great year, that Brett Favre was going to have a huge season, and the team would most likely return to the Super Bowl.

Perhaps I should have been paying slightly more attention to where we parked. Our seats were on the opposite side of the stadium from the entrance we went in, so after the game I completely lost my bearings. I remembered we followed a guy in a Reggie White jersey on the way in, but after the game I couldn't pick him out from the other 17,000 people wearing #92 shirts.

After wandering the streets of Ashwaubenon for 45 minutes, we finally found my car. And a mob of angry fans I had parked in. My wife found the whole episode terribly amusing and I'm convinced she sticks with me to see what stupid thing I'll do next.

Because I get lost so easily now, I fear what will happen when I get older. That's why I was so relieved when I learned about the Silver Alert program.

The Silver Alert program works similarly to the nationwide Amber Alert system for missing children, only the Silver Alert is for missing seniors, particularly those with dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

Like with the Amber Alert, Wisconsin's Crime Alert Network is used to very quickly disseminate information about seniors who are missing and may be in danger. Law enforcement agencies can use the Network to share information with broadcasters about the missing senior and even publish information on digital billboards and highway signage.

About 40 other states have similar programs already in place for seniors. In April, Governor Walker signed the bill creating the Silver Alert. The bill had been passed unanimously by the Legislature, and went into effect on August 1. "When an elderly person living with the effects of dementia or Alzheimer's is missing, every minute counts," Walker explained. "The Silver Alert system allows law enforcement to get the message out quickly through the media and other resources, so people across the state can help find these missing persons, to bring them home safely."

The inspiration for Wisconsin's system was Leo and Claire Baeb, an elderly couple from Townsend who got lost on the way to their child's home. The couple was missing for more than 24 hours and were later found at a Starbucks in West Bend.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are more than 110,000 adults in Wisconsin suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's. Approximately 60 percent of these people will tend to wander and possibly get lost. If not found within the first 24 hours, these seniors are at risk of serious injury or death.

Alzheimer's and dementia are terrible conditions and I hope researchers can soon find a cure for them. That being said, I wouldn't mind forgetting about the 1997 Super Bowl loss to the Broncos.

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