



RING-A-DING-DING

Since its invention, the telephone has grown to become a ubiquitous device, as essential to our lives as strong drink. Well, more essential than strong drink actually, because there's lots of people who get along quite well without drinking, but nobody who gets along without a telephone. Well, I take that back too, because there are some people who live without a telephone. For example, the homeless, who sleep on the streets in our big cities, have nowhere to plug in a telephone, so struggle along without a phone. If they had a billing address, they'd probably get a cell phone and then more easily respond to want ads, or be able to call any welfare office in the country for five cents a minute.

Cell phones take up a lot of advertising time on TV, and so I guess they must be great. I knew a guy in Toronto who had his car stolen with his car phone in it. He was cursing the inconvenience of the stolen car, but more the inconvenience of losing his phone, when his wife suggested he call his car and see if the thief would answer. He made an instant connection to a talkative thief who complained bitterly that the brakes were soft and the car pulled to the left. Shortly after, the thief called porn lines in Istanbul or Sweden or somewhere and logged huge bills on the car phone.

I seem to remember that Corrections Canada had the problem of inmates using their phone privileges to call 1-900 numbers, chatting for long periods of time with the kind of women who answer 1-900 numbers. It wasn't until the penitentiary got their phone bills that they figured this out, then were faced with the problem of sorting out the calls from the inmates with those of the guards, who were apparently calling the same numbers from the same phones. These phone numbers have no appeal to me, because I just know that the women mumbling obscenities to me would be my grandmother or someone we play bridge with earning a couple of extra bucks to pay for the groceries. The romance sort of leaves phone sex when you think of it that way, if there was any romance to begin with.

We get limitless unwanted phone calls for surveys and all manner of things meant to get us to part with the little bit of money we have left after the phone bill. I particularly enjoy The Frere Brothers rendition of "Everybody's Gotta Get Phoned" which they sing to the tune of Bob Dylans "Everybody's Gotta Get Stoned".

Maybe I'll mount that song on the tape deck and play it to the next person who phones me seeking to sell tickets to the Circus. My neighbour, Doug, receives many calls to a Picton video store that went out of business two years ago. He gets calls at 1AM, drunks mumbling into the phone, wanting an Arnold Schwarzenegger action film right away. Fortunately, Doug has caller ID and can tell who's calling. With one caller, who's phoned several times, Doug said, "Frank Furter (a made up name), if you don't get a new phone book and stop calling this number, I'm coming over there and rip out your voice box". He got no more calls.

Coming down Highway 400 one day, I saw a sod truck, loaded with green sod, and the sign on the truck said it was phone dispatched. Well, why would that be? Would someone call and say, "You have to help me! A dog just pooped on my lawn and I need a new piece of sod right away!" The urgency escapes me. Then again, much of the urgency of today's world escapes me, too.

I hear that party lines will soon be a memory. That's too bad, because there must be a certain recreational value in covertly listening to another's private conversation. I had a friend in The Town of Mount Royal, a ritzy zitzy suburb of Montreal, and this friend subscribed to a party line, not because he wanted to listen in on calls

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