



“I learned to live without objects that had become permanent appendages.”

## Hold The Phone

Last month, two unexpected incidents occurred. Both my cell phone and my computer broke. As the phone plunged toward the ground, I quickly realized that most objects don't fare well upon immediate impact with concrete. Ditto for laptop computers with faulty keys that pop out of place. Have you ever tried to type without using the letter "A"? Not easy. And while panic temporarily overtook me by these simultaneous experiences, I came to appreciate this fortunate twist of electronic fate.

Recently, I had purchased the Mother Of All Cell Phones, one of those fancy gizmos with all the bells and whistles. This phone had e-mail, text messaging, a camera, voice-automated response, and, oh yeah, telephone-answering capacity. I painstakingly inputted all of my handwritten addresses into the phone's address book, even selecting special ring tones to identify calls from friends and family. I was on a cell phone high.

Then came the crash.

After being shuffled from one telephone store to the next, I was directed to a repair shop where long lines of frazzled faces stood holding their wounded cellular babies. The phone technician said my phone was fixable, but all my information had been deleted into the unknown. When I asked him to elaborate as to where my precious database could have evaporated, he just waved his hand up in the air and said, "Out there." Then he shook his head, handed me a bill, and told me to pick up my phone in three days. "Oh," he added, "don't forget to back-up your information next time."

Upon returning home to find comfort in the arms of my computer, the keyboard informed me it had something else in mind.

Like not working. Letters started popping out and falling underneath my desk. Frustrated, I grabbed the laptop and drove to the computer repair store where even longer lines of frazzled faces stood hugging their critically-ill computers. The diagnosis: One to two weeks without a computer until a new keyboard was ordered. I was also informed of the importance of backing up all of my information to prevent a computer catastrophe. I stumbled back into my car, now *sans* a phone — and a computer.

For the next week, I learned to live without objects that had become permanent appendages. Life changed. I enjoyed quiet car drives, had lunch with friends without an annoying interruption, and went through car line at school where my children were greeted by a mother without a phone attached to her ear.

When I picked up the repaired cell phone, I asked the technician to uninstall the e-mail component. He looked at me like I was crazy, but acquiesced as if an alien had entered the store. And when I retrieved my healed computer, I made a conscientious decision to limit computer time to just a few hours each day.

This new electronic embargo policy has extended in other ways, too. My family has initiated a No Call Day where, once a week, we simply do not answer or talk on the phone. We do other things like talk to one another, read, play games, and take long walks together with a dog that is especially appreciative of this sudden attention.

While the electronic age has opened our lives to many exciting horizons, another, more intimate world invites us to join. We simply need to remember that, sometimes, we need to turn *off* in order to tune *in*.

That's the best back-up plan I have. ●●●

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