

Telephones are for Nagging

By Dennis Payton Knight

Telephones are for nagging. Thus it was that its inventor Alexander Graham Bell used the occasion of the very first call on March 10, 1876 to nag his assistant who was obviously busy working in another cubicle. "Mr. Watson – Come here – I want to see you."

At any rate, that probably was not the first time a telephone call was used to nag, because mechanical telephones preceded Bell's invention by two hundred years. Yes, the very tin can telephone system we played with as children was actually a viable concept used in commerce and interpersonal exchanges until well into the twentieth century.

The electro-magnetic telephone empire started by Mr. Bell has grown to connect the cities and deserts of the world so we may be nagged daily by politicians, survey takers and robots with the very latest equipment and all the enunciation of a sixth grader and the sound fidelity of a cotton string.

The tin can telephone was known as the lovers' telephone, but I cannot picture how it ever worked for that purpose, because such a system is useless if the string is not stretched to a humming tension with no obstructions. Not the corner of a building, not passing buggies. Not even a jealous husband.

I do not know what kind of can worked best. If I were building my own system today, I would favor something from the Progressive Soup outfit, which uses that same communications concept in its commercials. I would shun anything Campbell's, unless of course it was chicken noodle which persists as a life necessity today in all its saltiness, even in the face of Healthy Choice and choices healthier. But I digress.

Today we cannot just walk away from the nag of a telephone call, because it will automatically go to voice mail which will then record the nag in all its glory. The advantage is you can leave it until you are good and ready, or so it would be if the machine did not nag you with a beep every twenty seconds. When you do succumb to playing the nag, you still must call that person back, only to be nagged again about why you were not there to answer, and then again with a repeat of the original nag which you were avoiding, and for which you still have no way out.

But addressing the idea of a tin can telephone being for lovers, I suspect it was a matter of one Miss Hermione suggesting to a smitten Charlie they could connect in sweet privacy if at some appointed wee hour he would come by with his device, throw one can romantically through her window and skip with the other can straight to the corner of her block, which was the range of his system and all the string he could muster. Then she would commence to nag until the string vibrated into annihilation. Or until he cut it and ran.