

Keep It Simple, Stupid

By Dennis Payton Knight

There is a mantra expressed by the acronym, KISS, for “Keep It Simple, Stupid.” It’s a worthy idea for mankind, but in the pursuit, we have instead proceeded to make our lives more complicated by the very devices that have promised to bring us simplicity.

Television, for instance, is something that was once just a tube, a switch and a knob. There are sets available now that would fit in your purse, and others as big as a wall. We have remote controllers to back it up and play it again without leaving our recliners. We get our channels on the internet, by cable, satellite or over the air. When we had six we had plenty to watch. Now with hundreds at our command we have nothing to watch.

In 1955 our neighbors covered their television with multi-hued cellophane to give the illusion of a color TV. It was a simple innovation, and what a sight it was to see the Lone Ranger chasing bad guys through a rainbow. Silver was anything but. The headshot of Tonto proved he was not only a redskin, but a blue-skin and a green-skin, too. Today I doubt you can find a monochromatic television anywhere, but if necessary I suppose you could cover your color screen with thick, gray cellophane.

In 1955 school research projects were centered simply around a set of encyclopedias, either at the library or, if you were lucky, in your own home in a cabinet under the television. Many school reports were authored by the folks at Britannica. It was always good for a B-plus, even if the info was dated by at least as many years as the books had been on the shelves.

Now kids have Wikipedia and Google on the internet, far better resources than we did to write a good paper. But teachers have the same resources to check the work, they have higher expectations, and I doubt they are so generous with grades. I think a B+ was simpler for us.

In 1955 a typical family had a black telephone in their house. Just one. Through it, with the assistance of a smart long-distance operator, we would be connected anywhere in the world. Now we’ve simplified our lives with smart phones that will connect us to anyone, anywhere as the operator once did, but only if we remember the password that turns the phone on in the first place.

Maybe I’m not giving the smart phone due credit as an instrument of modern-day simplicity. Did you know you can ask a virtual human behind the screen a question on any topic whatsoever, just as you might have once looked it up in the encyclopedia?

So being stumped for words to make an actual point of this essay, I pushed the button and asked, “Siri, does simplicity still exist?”

She gave me a simple answer, “That’s an interesting question, Dennis” Then, to keep things simple, she hung up.