

village view

by Andrea Leonard

If you've ever considered getting along without a telephone, you've probably dismissed the notion nearly as quickly as the idea crossed your mind.

Sometimes, of course, when your bill arrives (as regularly as the moon fulls each month) it's a temptation; few of us, however, actually would have our phones disconnected for they provide a vital communications link with the entire world. We'd feel isolated and vulnerable without them.

If you've ever lived without a telephone in your home, even for a few weeks, you appreciate having your instrument at hand at a moment's notice.

In the years immediately following WWII, when materials were scarce and millions of returning servicemen were setting up new households, the demand for phone installations outstripped the capacity of phone companies to provide them. Sometimes it was a couple of months after your order was placed before the man came with your phone.

Remembering those days, as well as other occasions when delays in obtaining phone service meant driving or walking to a public phone booth, or, where possible, making a personal visit instead of a call, the thought of doing without a telephone is preposterous.

There are, however, moments when it's more of a nuisance than a convenience.

One such incident, a good many years ago, is a call I'll always remember. I was traveling, and had arrived in London from the Continent the previous day. Hotel reservations had been difficult to obtain so arrangements had been made for us to stay at the English Speaking Union, an international club catering to English-speaking non-Britons stopping in London.

Our accommodations were than adequate and included a marble-tiled bath off our large room which was completely furnished with a handsome suite donated by Queen Victoria. A brass plaque imbedded in the tea table credited the former queen with the gift.

The building was really several ancient structures tied together with twisting halls, frequent short flights of stairs, and dark narrow corridors leading to the high-ceilinged guest rooms.

Although the Union's location near Berkeley Square was ideal for sightseeing, theatre-going, and shopping in London's famous shops, there were no telephones in the rooms. It was for this reason the hall porter knocked at our door to waken us at two in the morning. In distressed whispers he informed us an overseas call from the States awaited us downstairs.

Struggling into robes and slippers, rubbing sleep from our eyes, we hurried to the creaky elevator and took the call in a small room off the lobby on the first floor. Of course, we were frightened to be telephoned from such a distance at such an hour.

We hadn't the presence of mind to realize it was only 8 P.M. Eastern Time. Neither had our caller, who'd thought we'd be overjoyed to hear a voice from home assuring us all was well. He'd simply wanted to welcome us to London.

At moments like that, one wishes Alexander Graham Bell had never been conceived!

There are other times we all feel the same way. No one appreciates being waked from a sound sleep no matter what the hour. Does it seem to you your phone rings oftenest when you're having a shampoo, just sitting down to a meal, or are

soaping in the shower?

Have you the fortitude to let the fool thing ring when it's inconvenient to answer it? If you have, you're among the minority, for most of us not only have responsibilities to other people and imagine the caller may be one of these, but we're curious.

Chances are, instead of being a call you've been waiting for, it's someone selling magazine subscriptions, someone who's reached a wrong number, someone hoping you'll agree to work on a committee or canvas your neighborhood on behalf of a political hopeful. All such calls you can afford to miss.

Occasionally come crank calls. There are few things more unsettling. Recently there've been a rash of these, and folks on the receiving end will be glad when the scallawags, making them, grow up, their pranks are controlled by a concerned adult, or their identities are discovered by the utility.

That it's children or adolescents doing the calling is easily ascertained. Their voices betray their immaturity. The giggles following the "jokes" are those of youngsters.

Calling the telephone company Business Office is not always particularly satisfying, although the voice-with-a-smile is ever so sympathetic. You're advised either to let the phone ring unless you're expecting a call (and who isn't always expecting a call?), or, as soon as you determine it's "another one of those", to hang up... quietly.

"Don't give them the satisfaction of knowing they've gotten under your skin," you're advised. "That only encourages them to keep calling your number."

"The instructions in your directory indicate calls like these should be reported," you explain defensively, somehow feeling you've bothered the company with an insignificant complaint.

"Well, if it continues from more than a few weeks, call again and we'll see what we can do."

You hang up, feeling vaguely dissatisfied, wondering if you're making a mountain of an anthill. For the next several days, whenever the bell rings, you answer in a guarded manner, ready to replace the phone on its hook at the first hint the incoming call is "another one of those."

Your Aunt Jane calls and, not recognizing your hesitant "Hello?" excuses herself thinking she's misdialed, and hangs up.

In trying to return her call (you can't get through because her line is busy while she redials your number), you forget the batch of cookies in the oven, and they burn.

It's times like these you consider calling Bell Tel and asking them to come and get the telephone.

But what would you do without it? What would you do in an emergency, if the house caught fire, should illness strike, when the plumbing breaks down or the heating system declines to operate?

What would you do without it when you want to share special joys with a distant friend or relative, when plans involving several other people must be made - or changed at short notice?

In spite of calls that waken you from sleep, in spite of nuisance or crank calls, in spite of calls that come at inconvenient moments or those you'd just as soon miss, until someone invents a gadget permitting you to know who's on the other end before you answer, most of us will respond whenever the bell rings.

You can't help wishing, though, parents would teach children the phone's a convenient tool, a safeguard in time of trouble, and not a toy for their amusement at the expense of other people.