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Stay in Touch

Many decades ago (*many!*) when I was a lad in a small farm town and someone was seen walking alone down the road while talking aloud, townspeople would shake their heads in compassion, perhaps tinged with some apprehension. In those days, there were “asylums” for such unfortunates—but only in the bigger towns or cities, of course.

Nowadays, it is common to see and hear people walking around (or driving!) alone and talking. Some are holding the ubiquitous cell phone but many have a device attached to an ear that leaves hands free to do other things: shopping, dog walking, washing a car or (of course) *driving* a car. For a long time, I was fooled into thinking someone in the same grocery store aisle where I was shopping was speaking to me, only to discover the person was checking with a disembodied electronic voice about whether to buy Brand X or Brand Y and in what quantity—or perhaps talking over some personal even intimate matter. Naturally, my accidental unwanted responses were met with a look of mind-your-own-business. Some people even carry devices that allow them to *see* the person they are talking with.

Our small town *did* have telephone service. Our kitchen wall boasted a wooden wall-mounted phone. To call someone, you lifted the earpiece and clicked its holder several times to get the attention of the town’s operator—who knew everyone in town, it seemed to me. You simply told her whom you wanted to call and she connected you. (I had to stand on a chair to speak into the mouthpiece. I was not supposed to use the phone but did a time or two.)

People used to write letters. The Internet has many love letters of famous people and

also letters of historical significance. I learned the Palmer method of cursive writing in Elementary School and used to write letters by hand. Family and friends would tell me how much they enjoyed getting letters from me—but they seldom wrote back. People seemed to like *getting* letters but not *writing* them. Perhaps letter writing by hand has become a lost art.

Nowadays, most of my correspondence is done via my computer keyboard and often by email. Email is fast and efficient but can be too impersonal, unless one gives time and thought to content, presentation and writing style. Even with care misunderstandings arise. Email mistakes cannot be retrieved. I have good email “pen pals” and I enjoy the contacts, news, and exchanges. But I’m still careful to re-read my emails before I click the send button, even to tolerant friends.

I am not a Luddite. I have a cell phone. Owning one has clear benefits, especially in urgent situations. And when my youngest daughter was studying in England, we stayed in touch via Skype. She used her laptop camera to show me her room, sent priceless photos as attachments to her emails and I sent photos and Internet links to her.

We humans need to stay in touch, whether by telecommunications, dinner conversation, water cooler chats, or the ancient art of smoke signals. Staying in touch with each other can be a matter of survival, of course, and information exchanges are essential. But staying in touch also satisfies our need for validation and acceptance. So, by all means

stay in touch.

Then:



Now:

