

# Confessions of a Cellphone-Challenged Journalist

I have a confession.

Not one of those tawdry confessions, but it is a little embarrassing. You see, I am cellphone challenged.

I used a cellphone once – about ten years ago when volunteering to help rebuild Miami after Hurricane Andrew. The BellSouth loaner, a real clunker, helped me navigate the storm-ravaged county amidst downed street signs and landmarks.

But I've never owned one. Voicemail takes my messages and I've seldom wanted to be more accessible. Some of my friends swear by cellphones. Others swear at them. Ever been in a movie theater when a filmgoer gets a call and decides to talk?

My wife attended a conference presentation during which a woman asked the speaker a question from the audience. In the middle of her question, with all eyes on her, her cellphone rang. She not only answered it, but also conducted a brief conversation while everyone watched aghast.

Airline travelers talk before takeoff until the flight attendant tells them to stop. They resume talking when the plane lands. They talk walking through the airport, on the inter-terminal shuttle, entering the restroom. They talk while using the toilet or washing their hands. Some restrooms sound like offices.

Drivers talk. Beachgoers talk. Students talk between classes. Shoppers talk while cruising the aisles. ("What kind of cheese did you want me to get?")

Some restaurants ask diners not to use cellphones. Some summer camps have banned them because they distract kids from social

and recreational activities.

My doctor's office has a sign asking patients to please not talk on cellphones while the doctor or nurse is examining them. (Let your mind wander on that theme for a moment.)

One of my favorite signs is inside a nearby church: "Please turn off cellphones during service. (Let God call you.)"

The hit movie, "Bruce Almighty," depicts God's attempts to contact the main character (played by Jim Carrey) by leaving a number on his pager. Turns out the number is valid in many area codes. After the film's release, people and businesses began getting calls from folks asking for God.

A Florida woman threatened to sue the film studio after 20 calls per hour clogged her cellphone. A Denver radio station built a contest around the fluke. Some callers to the station seemed to think they'd really discovered a direct line to God. One left a message confessing her adultery.

Another number holder decided to offer some friendly advice. She changed her voice message to say, "Looking for God? Well, I'm not Him, but I do know Him. And knowing Him has changed my life. You can know Him too. In fact, it's a local call."

Come to think of it, that may not be a bad idea. Jeremiah (the Jewish prophet, not the bullfrog) said God told him, "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." It doesn't even require a cellphone.

I guess I can live with cellphones if people can realize that they're not for everyone. If you have one, I certainly don't fault you. But please, do turn it off when you go to see the doctor.

---

# Laugh a Little: It's Good For Your Health

Had a good laugh recently? Need one?

Stressful days can invite comic relief. Doctors realize that laughter can enhance physical and mental health. Now it seems even looking forward to laughter can be good for you.

WebMD reports that Lee Berk, MD, a University of California Irvine medical professor, and his associates have for years investigated how moods affect immune systems and illness. They've found laughter has a role in fighting viruses, bacteria, cancer and heart disease.

Stress can hamper your immune system; a good chuckle can help. Berk found earlier that watching a one-hour humorous video reduced stress hormone secretion and helped the immune system counter viruses and bacteria.

But there's more: Berk now says the mere anticipation of laughing can help. He studied ten men, measured their stress signs, and told them that in about three days they would see a humorous video. In each man, spirits lifted before viewing the video.

Two days before the viewing, depression was down 51 percent, confusion 36 percent, anger 19 percent, fatigue 15 percent and tension 9 percent. Right after the viewing, depression and anger were both down 98 percent, fatigue 87 percent, confusion 75 percent and tension 61 percent.

Berk feels anticipating humor brightens life and affects health. He calls this influence the "biology of hope." Berk says, "Positive anticipation of humor starts the ball rolling

in a sense, in which moods begin to change in ways that help the body fight illness. We believe this shows that even anticipation can be used to help patients recover from a wide range of disorders.”

Moral: Planning humor can benefit your health. Watch a funny movie, spend time with humorous people. Tell your boss, professor, clergy or club chairperson to liven up their speeches a bit if they want healthy employees, students, or members. Put laugh-breaks on your calendar, since anticipation is part of the therapy.

A Jewish proverb observes, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” Paul, a first-Century follower of Jesus, emphasized hope: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope. . .” Those biblical writers have some good advice now and then, practical stuff for everyday life.

The other day, a friend sent what he claimed were comments from federal employee performance evaluations. Maybe because I’ve encountered a groundswell of administrivia-creating bureaucrats recently, some of the remarks left me roaring. . .and feeling much better. With apologies to the many capable federal workers, know anyone like this?

“Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig.”

“I would not allow this employee to breed.”

“This young lady has delusions of adequacy.”

“He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.”

“Got a full 6-pack, but lacks the plastic thing to hold it all together.”

Those biblical writers would probably tell me to pray for those who hassle me, advice I should heed. But this laughter-break lifted my spirits and got me going again.

So, laugh more. You'll like it. And say, have you heard the one about. . .?

© Rusty Wright 2002

---

## **Romantic Hyperbole: A Humorous Look at Honesty in Love**

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

It would be a great way to express my enduring affection for my wife. I would find seven romantic birthday cards and give one to Meg each day for a week, starting on her birthday. It would continue a sweet tradition begun before we married.

Each card would have a simple picture that would tenderly convey our feelings for one another. Inside would be an endearing slogan or affirmation to which I would add a personal expression of my love for her.

I didn't foresee that Day Three would bring an ethical dilemma.

I carefully selected the cards and arranged them in an appropriate sequence. Day One showed a cute puppy with a pink rose. Inside: "You're the one I love."

Day Two featured a picture of a little boy and girl in a

meadow with their arms over each other's shoulders. The slogan: "Happy Birthday to my favorite playmate."

Day Three depicted a beautiful tropical sunset: bluish pink sky, vast ocean, silhouetted palm trees. You could almost feel the balmy breeze. Inside: "Paradise is anywhere with you", to which I added personal mention of places holding special memories for us: an island vacation spot, a North Carolina hotel, our home.

I completed the remaining cards, dated the envelopes, and planned to bestow one card each morning of her birth week. Then reality happened.

You see, I had agreed to go camping with her for Days One and Two. Camping is something Meg thrives on—outdoor living, clean air, hiking, camp fires. It's in her blood. Camping is something I did in Boy Scouts—dust, mosquitoes, noisy campers, smelly latrines. It ranks just below root canals on my list of favorites.

We camped at a state park only fifteen minutes from our home. On her birthday morning, she liked the fluffy puppy. Day Two, the cute kids made her smile. So far, so good.

Meanwhile, I was tolerating camping, doing my best to keep my attitude positive. The food was OK; the bugs were scarce. After two days, I was ready to go home as planned. Meg wanted to stay an extra day. We each got our wish.

Once home and alone, I pulled out Meg's card for "Day Three," the one with the tropical sunset and the "paradise is anywhere with you" slogan.

Should I give her the card? I had chosen to leave the campground. "But," I reasoned with myself, "the slogan was true lots of the time."

I settled on a compromise, a post-it note on the envelope

explaining, "You may find that this card contains just a bit of romantic hyperbole."

Might giving it a clever-sounding label defuse my hypocrisy?

The echoes of her laughter still reverberate through our home. I got off easy.

"Speak the truth to each other," wrote a Jewish sage. "Speak. . . the truth in love," advocated a first-century biblical writer. Wise advice for just about any relationship.

"Romantic hyperbole" has become a humorous gauge of truthfulness in our relationship, a test for honesty. Neither of us enjoys every location on earth. She feels some sporting events are a waste of time. I can get bored at shopping malls. But as long as we are honest with each other about our feelings, the bond seems to grow stronger.

That's no hyperbole.

© 2002 Rusty Wright