1/21/09

Back in the Day

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Do you dogpile, Bing, Twitter or tweet? Blog? Skype? Text? Google or Google goggle? Use a Kindle, GPS, Blackberry or iPhone? Know what a Zhou Zhou hamster pet is? How about an Apple tablet?

The world is changing faster than we can keep up and terminology along with it. At this rate, today's children of cyberspace will be old fogies by their 20's! Obvious when you consider that current technology tools are ones today's ten-year old children didn't grow up with. How about what us real old fogies grew up with?

Back in the day, I'll tell my young grandsons, a lot of us lived without television. All telephones had the same ring tone and were connected to the wall. I'll tell them about the thrill of writing and receiving letters in the mail and collecting stamps, about the beginning of an era of "programmed learning" in which computers were huge monsters with vacuum tubes and took up an entire room. If their eyes haven't glazed over yet, I'll tell them we read road maps.   If we got lost, we stopped at a service station where service was actually provided and people knew how to help us find our way.

There used to be a time when we'd look under the hood of a car, be able to figure out what's wrong and fix it. When we took our first airplane trip, our relatives accompanied us to the plane and waved goodbye from the window. We didn't have to hold up our purses to see whose phone was ringing and toilets didn't flush before we could get off the seat. On walks, we listened to the ocean or birdsong rather our iPods.

This new generation appears focused on virtual worlds and online games rather than on real connections. Studies show they expect instant responses from everyone they communicate with including their teachers and think nothing of reckless behavior such as sharing intimate details of their lives online. They don't know what it's like to not be connected to their friends at all times. Facebook and Twitter have lured millions of people away from TV, and kids spend more time texting than talking on the phone or watching television.

Yet the sheer power of the Internet was revealed this month in the way the American Red Cross raised $22 million for Haiti relief through a simple click on the computer and by cell phone users texting "Haiti" which automatically added a $10 pledge to their telephone bill. A wounded man trapped in an elevator in Haiti used his iPhone to learn how to treat his wounds before being rescued three days later.

Think of the over 100,000 applications for iPhone today that didn't exist when iPhone was first introduced three years ago. We have more computer power on today's laptops than NASA did in their 1969 moon launch! We get our movies through cable providers'

on-demand channels or Netflix. We listen to music through Internet radio or iTunes. We communicate in groups where we know each other only by email. We start our cars from across the parking lot, microchip our pets, buy electric cars, program our thermostats.

The debate still continues on whether the Internet changes the way we think. There's no need for deep thought on Twitter with its limit of 140 characters. Our lives have changed--mostly for the better. Seventy-four percent of American adults 18 and older now use the Internet, but only 38% of seniors go online and mostly for email and search. We've probably met all the friends we can manage in real life and we're not interested in watering crops on virtual farms.

I'll take real--a real garden, real friends, a real small town coffee shop where I'm bound to run into someone I know and someone who knows what I usually order and most importantly knows my name. I like popping $2 in a jar at a roadside flower stand to get a bunch of daffodils grown in a field just off the road. And compared to today's beeps that assault us from all directions, there's something still endearing about the old fashion ringy-dingy of a telephone.