

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

Hands-Free At Last

I have a love-hate relationship with phones. Always have, always will. Yes, I know. The technology's brilliant. I mean, you can use a phone these days to take photos, surf the net, make music, locate lost trampers, and even mow lawns. But phones have become far too complicated, for my liking ...

It was so much simpler back in the Good Old Days, when people just shouted at each other. Or sent pigeons. Or used smoke-signals when they wanted to chat. Sure, you had to climb a hill and light a fire. And it probably took a little longer than phoning, texting or tweeting. But the stress was minimal:

"Puff-puff?" (Feel like a coffee?)

"Puff-puff-puff?" (Yeah! I'll meet you at McCafe?)

"Puff!" (Great!)

Contrast that with the panic-attacks, migraines and brain-ulcers now known to be caused by modern gizmos, and you'll get my point.

Last year, for example, I purchased a hands-free kit so I could use my cellphone in the car without being arrested. It's a dinky little thing, with a wire loop that goes over my ear, and a tiny rubber ear-piece that fits snugly into my lug-hole.

But, oh, the STRESS ...!

I keep forgetting to charge it up. I keep forgetting to turn it on. I keep forgetting to wear it when I'm in the car. And I keep forgetting to take it off when I'm



NOT in the car. I entered our local *Lotto* shop in the weekend with my hands-free gadget dangling from my ear, and the dairy-owner asked me how long I've had a hearing-aid!

Only last week, my wife (who's hopeless with anything digital) made a call on my cellphone using my hands-free gadget. And, when she handed it back, the tiny rubber ear-piece was missing. I was so annoyed that we finally had to stop the car. But a thorough search of the entire surrounds failed to retrieve it.

I told her to be more careful in future, and we drove on. But, half-an-hour later, while fiddling with her hair, she *found* it. My tiny rubber ear-piece had actually come off – and was stuck inside her ear!

My war with phones sometimes goes the other way, thankfully. And I recently scored a point for Kiwi ingenuity. I was in my home-office, and had occasion to call a certain government department about a certain matter. I was using my landline, and I'd finally negotiated the obstacle course that government departments employ to determine what you want and who you need to talk to – when the pre-recorded voice informed me that I had to join a queue. *"There is currently an hour-long wait,"* said the voice. *"But please hold, because one of our staff will be with you eventually ..."*

I had little option but to wait. I needed certain information from that certain department, and I needed it that day – not sometime next year. So I hung on ... and hung on ... and hung on ...

Seated at my desk, I tried holding the phone with one hand while I typed with the other – but that proved unbearably slow. I tried leaving both hands free to

type by jamming the phone against my ear with my shoulder – but that made my neck ache.

Desperate now, I rummaged in a drawer and found a large rubber-band which I managed to stretch over my head and around the phone – but it was too tight across my forehead, and cut off the circulation to my eyeballs.

My wife walked in about now, and asked what was I doing, and did I realise how stupid I looked? But, upon learning of my dilemma, she kindly went and found one of her scarves – which she managed to tie around my head, clamping the phone securely to my ear.

Yes, I know. It wasn't a good look. And my wife (who couldn't stop giggling) insisted on taking a photo. But I didn't care. My problem was solved – I was hands-free at last! – and an hour later I got the information I'd been waiting for.

It was a triumph of man over machine – and Kiwi No.8 wire mentality had won the day!

I slept well that night ...



JOHN (GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER/EDITOR) ADMITS THAT, IF HE'D HAD SOME NO.8 WIRE, HE WOULD'VE USED THAT.

THORT



Sometimes I get the feeling the whole world is against me. But deep down I know that's not true. Some smaller countries are neutral.