

THE TELEPHONE LINE

By John F. Hall

In 1964, I was a soldier living in a two—story wooden barracks on Fort Campbell. On the first floor was a pay phone. You would drop in a quarter and the phone company operator would come on the line. You would tell the operator the telephone number that you wanted to call. She would tell you to put in additional coins: quarters, dimes or nickles. Once the required amount of money was deposited, she would dial up that number and



wait until the party answered. Once the allotted time for the call was up, she would come back on the line and tell you to deposit more coins. One time the operator forgot to come back on the line and I talked to Paula Oakley in Golden Pond for over an hour, at no additional charge.

AT&T decided that they wanted to get rid of all telephone landlines in Kentucky by 2020. Their lobbyists achieved part of that goal in the Kentucky Legislature in 2015 by getting the deregulation it needed. AT&T acquired DIRECT-TV, a satellite provider. They began using aggressive tactics to get its customers to bundle their phone, internet and satellite TV. Fifteen years ago, I tried to get AT&T to come less than one-tenth of a mile up my road so I could have internet service. I was told that they were full to capacity and they would put me on a waiting list. I went to Peoplepc.com for dial-up internet. At one time I was using Hughes satellite internet. A few years ago, AT&T sent a three person team to get me to go with their internet service and Direct-TV cable service. I politely informed them that I would sign up for their internet service, but I would keep my phone landline and I was satisfied with Dish TV because this is what my wife, Paula liked.

A few weeks ago, the background humming sound on my telephone landline became so loud that I could barely hear the party calling me. I called AT&T repair. I was informed that repairs would be made in about three weeks. This has happened several times in the past. The main problem is in their switching box located two miles from my house. I kept my landline for several reasons. During the 2009 ice storm, power outages caused the cell tower to cease operating within four to six hours when the back-up generator ran out of fuel. My landline continued to work because power is sent to the phones through the phone lines from the power company. The power company has battery back-up and back-up generators so that their operations can continue for well over a week during a power outage.

Most people don't read the fine print on AT&T'S contracts. This is what they miss reading: "AT&T wireless home phone is not compatible with home security systems, fax machines, medical alert and monitoring services, credit card machines, IP/PBX phone systems, or dial-up internet service." When lightning hit my brother-in-law's transformer pole, which is located about 25 feet from my deck, it destroyed his satellite receiver, his modem, his big flat screen TV, and his electric stove. His wife, Marsha, has a second phone landline that was not damaged. When the AT&T repairman came out to replace

the satellite receiver and U-Verse modem, he told her that if she ever disconnected service on her telephone landline for more than 30 days, she could never get it back.

I guess that AT&T thinks that everyone can be bought for a price. Like Judas betrayed Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver. Every week, I receive a letter from AT&T for me to save money by bundling my services. Once a month I receive a letter with an offer of \$300 if I would switch. One month their offer went up to \$400. I'm not for sale. One time they said I would save money if I would have on-line billing for my home phone and my internet. I said "no," and for them to continue to send the billings in the mail. Lord Acton, a British historian in the early 20th century, observed that a person's sense of morality lessens as his or her power increases. He wrote, "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." AT&T is a monopoly with too much power.

I suspect that copper telephone landlines may be extinct in five or ten years. It's dinosaur technology that is going the way of the telegraph pole. I have two antique glass insulators on my front porch. They were used on the telephone poles that came up to my old house. Their purpose was to insulate the electrical wires that carried the telephone calls so they did not leak into the pole and then into the earth.

In 1976, Jeff Lynne wrote the song, "Telephone Line." The song was very popular as he sang with his band called Electric Light Orchestra (ELO). It reminds me of my teenage days when I was dating Paula. These are some of Jeff Lynne's lyrics: "Hello, how are you? Have you been alright through all those lonely ...nights? That's what I'd say, I'd tell you everything if you pick up that telephone yeah...yeah. Hey, how are you feelin'? Are you still the same, don't you realize the things we did? We did were all for real, not a dream. I just can't believe they've all faded out of view, yeah...yeah, ooh. Okay, so no one is answering. "Well, can't you just let it ring a little longer. Longer, longer oh, I'll just sit tight. Through shadows of the night, let it ring forever more, oh. Blue days, black nights, doo wah doo lang. I look into the sky (the love you need ain't gonna see you through) And I wonder why (the little things you planned ain't comin true). Oh, oh, telephone line, give me some time, I'm living in twilight...".

You can watch Jeff Lynne's ELO concert at Wembley Stadium singing the song, "Telephone Line." It was posted on YouTube, November 3, 2017. It is an amazing video with a spaceship overhead with lights that lasts for four minutes and 52 seconds. It was performed before a capacity crowd of 60,000 people in London, England. Young and old alike attended the concert. In 1977, I was doing my student teaching at Hopkinsville Community College. I was still in law enforcement, and in the Army Reserve. Christian and secular songs are a part of everyone's life. I would listen to that song over my car radio going to the Murray State campus; patrolling the highways in my police car, or driving to Army Reserve drill. Pay phones that were such a critical part of my teenage life, are now antiques that are rarely seen. AT&T wants to abandon my telephone line. It's something I still enjoy in the twilight of my life. I'll end this story with Romans, Chapter 15, Verse 13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

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