Talk is Cheap.

After four long years of waiting, my wife and I have finally acquired iPhones, thanks to Verizon. A friend fondly refers to hers as "The JesusPhone" and I concur. If I believed in God, I would be certain that S/He had something to do with the miracle that I now carefully cradle in my hand at all times, often staring at it like a pretty darn cheap. new mother waiting to see what her baby may do next. I'm fairly sure I've spent the equivalent and friends on the East Coast. Keeping in of my next paycheck downloading apps, songs, books and ringtones; luckily my paycheck isn't home. I would write letters but it was more that large and I have a wife who keeps the family in groceries or the children would have to skip a few meals this month.

Now that Verizon and AT&T are both carrying the most amazing device known to humankind, I suspect the commercials will get quite interesting—maybe even someday lifting the contract of indentured cell-vitude that's enslaved me and bringing down costs.

tually talking on the phone. When I was a smoker, I started each morning with coffee, a cigarette and a call to someone—usually my best friend at the time. I would puff away, sipping my cuppa and gossiping or laughing about AT&T and Sprint, fought for customers. something or someone, catching up or making plans. It was my ritual and even after I quit tobacco and had to take care of babies, I kept my program—a plan that offered cheaper per mincall as a part of my daily routine. I'm not so ute calls to people who had MCI as their carriold, but today we live in a different culture— er—40 cents a minute on weekdays, later com-

living out loud BY KATHRYN MARTINI

and although iPhones and applications aren't ing down to 25 cents a minute. I remember and forth hundreds of times. free, the communication aspect has become

I moved to Oregon in 1992, leaving family contact with them was my only connection to important to me to actually talk to them, which I did quite often, even though the long-distance phone calls were often cost-prohibitive.

During the 1990s, it was a common occurrence to receive solicitations from long-distance companies offering incentives to switch carriers. This new competition was due to the break up of "Ma Bell," which virtually controlled U.S. telecommunications for more than Before iPhones and cell phones I loved ac- 100 years. Bell Communications could no lonforcing consumers to have a local service (a "Baby Bell") and a long-distance provider. The three main long-distance companies, MCI,

I convinced my mother and grandparents to switch to MCI for their "Friends and Family" watching the clock, counting my quarters as I chatted, not looking forward to what I knew would be (still) a huge phone bill.

who worries about long-distance calls anytheir 4Gs (fourth generation cell phones).

I honestly don't remember when my morning coffee and call ritual came to an end but somewhere along the way AOL stopped charging for Internet service by the hour, cell phone plans included unlimited texting and my ger legally monopolize long-distance service, morning routine was replaced by blog reading, emails seem a bit tedious these days unless I'm trying to avoid a difficult face-to-face conversation with someone generally unpleasant.

> Including our two JesusPhones, we have five that just may be the next thing to go. Jo devices on our plan and share 1,400 minutes each month with unlimited text and data us- KATHRYN MARTINI is a freelance blogger and talk time. We did, however, use more than com/kathrynmartini or @KL.Martini.

20,000 text messages and 360 megabytes of data, with 12,000 of those text messages made by my 12-year-old daughter, all of them consisting of one or two word messages sent back

A few years ago, I would have surpassed 800 minutes myself, but even with my lack of actual vocal conversation, I don't feel as though I've My research on the Intertubes found that become disconnected with people. If anything WorldCom acquired MCI, Verizon acquired I feel more entangled and less autonomous WorldCom, AT&T became AT&T and, really, than ever. I'm expected—and I expect—to return an email, text message or phone call immore? It's included in most cellular and home mediately because I know the other person service plans, and those who still want to speak knows that I have it in my hand. There's no with friends and family far away can just use more hiding behind "the answering machine must have erased your message." And most people don't even leave messages anymore (the JesusPhone shows who left the message, eliminating the need to even retrieve it—brilliant.)

I can't imagine what's next—but I do know that, today, it's a busy world out there filled with lots of rapid-fire information. I no longer talk Twitter and Facebook status updates. Even on the phone with relatives on Sundays or dread the long-distance bill. Twitter is free, Facebook is free, Scrabble is free and talk is definitely . cheap. Unfortunately, data plans are not-but

age. Last month, we used only 800 minutes of writer. Find her at kathrynmartini.com, facebook.

The buying and selling experience

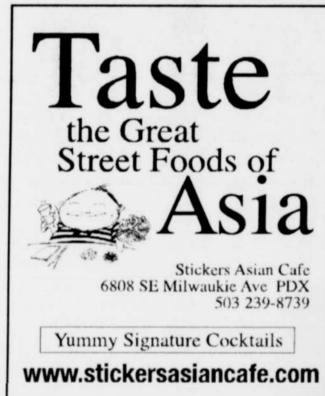
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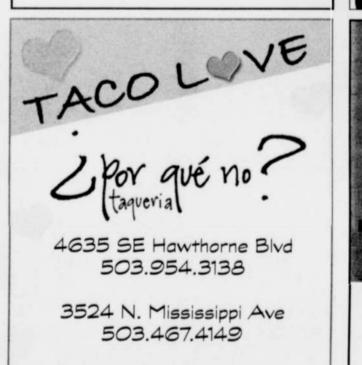
should be a positive one.



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