

What Used To Be Normal

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Before computers, there was more time. How many minutes, or probably hours, do you spend every day reading email or blogs, going to meetings on Zoom, getting the most current news or watching lectures? All that used to be “free time” that was up to you to structure. Granted, the computer was preceded by television, and before that, radio, but I don’t think they sucked you in like the computer screen does. With television, and especially radio, folks were not just sitting focused on a screen to the exclusion of everything else. You were also simultaneously engaged in another activity – cooking – cleaning – art projects – games with the kids. Your attention could easily be divided or, in the case of TV, the experience could be communal often leading to all of those aside comments about the show. I recall working on ironing while Bob read aloud to me. The book I remember was “The Call of the Wild” which I was hearing for the first time. What a pleasant way to spend an evening.

My mother recalled her parents reading to each other in bed at night. I’m sure she was supposed to be asleep, but she could hear their quiet voices from down the hall. Can you imagine a child of today creating that kind of memory?

Let’s face it. The computer screen is not a shared experience.

Granted, there is much to recommend our current technology. What I would have given for a cell phone when I was traveling around the state for work back in the ‘70’s. Then, there was no way to contact the

people we were scheduled to meet if we were running late, or to call for help if we ended up in a snow bank. I used to have nightmares about losing my small daughter, based, I'm sure, on the reality of not being able to contact the daycare center to say that we were delayed on the road. When that happened, some kind teacher would take her home with them, leaving a note on the door to tell me where I could pick her up. No wonder I had nightmares!

As the kids got older, one spent time in England and another in China. Keeping in touch was hard as overseas phone calls were expensive. What a difference when the lad in China could find an internet café.

So, would I choose to have our current technology disappear? I suppose not. But there should be a balance in there somewhere between email and time.