

phone's little space, wild emotion had howled.

Once, when I was living in Brooklyn, I read in the newspaper that a South American man suspected of dozens of drug-related contract murders had been arrested at a pay phone in Queens. Police said that the man had been on the phone setting up a murder at the time of his arrest. The newspaper story gave the address of the pay phone, and out of curiosity one afternoon I took a long walk to Queens to look at it. It was on an undistinguished street in a middle-class neighborhood, by a florist's shop. By the time I saw it, however, the pay phone had been blown up, firebombed. I had never before seen a pay phone so damaged; explosives had blasted pieces of the phone itself wide open in metal shreds like frozen banana peels, and flames had blackened everything and melted the plastic parts and burned the insulation off the wires. Soon after, I read that police could not find enough evidence against the suspected murderer and so had let him go.

The phone on the wall of the concession stand at Redwood Pool, where I used to stand dripping and call my mom to come and pick me up; the sweaty phones used almost only by men in the hallway outside the maternity ward at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York; the phone by the driveway of the Red Cloud Indian School in South Dakota where I used to talk with my wife while priests in black slacks and white socks chatted on a bench nearby; the phone in the old wood-paneled booth with leaded glass windows in the drugstore in my Ohio hometown—each one is as specific as a birthmark, a point on earth unlike any other.

It's the cell phone, of course, that's putting the pay phone out of business. The pay phone is to the cell phone as the troubled and difficult older sibling is to the cherished newborn. People even treat their cell phones like babies, cradling them in their palms and beaming down upon them lovingly as they dial. You sometimes hear people yelling on their cell phones, but they almost never yell at them. Cell phones are toylike, nearly magic; when I see a cell-phone user gently push the little antenna and fit the phone back into its brushed-vinyl carrying case and tuck the case inside his jacket beside his heart, I feel sorry for the beat-up pay phone standing in the rain.

And yet I don't think that pay phones will disappear completely. Probably they will survive for a long while as clumsy old technology still of some use to those lagging behind, and as a backup if ever the superior systems should temporarily fail. Before pay phones became endangered I never thought of them as public

spaces, which of course they are. They suggest a human average; they belong to anybody who has a couple of coins. Now I see that, like public schools and public transportation, pay phones belong to a former commonality our culture is no longer quite so sure it needs.

I have a weakness for places—old battlefields, car-crash sites, houses where famous authors lived. Bygone passions should always have an address, it seems to me. Ideally, the world would be covered with plaques and markers listing the notable events that occurred at each particular spot. A sign on every pay phone would describe how a woman broke up with her fiancé here, how a young ballplayer learned that he had made the team. Unfortunately, the world itself is fluid and changes out from under us; the rocky islands Mark Twain was careful to avoid in the Mississippi are now stone outcroppings in a soybean field. Meanwhile, our passions proliferate into illegibility, and the places they occur can't hold them. Eventually pay phones will become relics of an almost vanished landscape, and of a time when there were fewer of us and our stories were on an earlier page. Romantics like me will have to reimagine our passions as they are—unmoored to earth, like an infinitude of cell-phone messages flying through the atmosphere.

[Lyrics]

I SING THE BODY DYSPEPTIC

From a series of songs by Carl Winter designed to teach food safety. Winter is a food toxicologist at the University of California at Davis. His most recent CD is Sanitized for Your Consumption: A Menu of Musical Morsels.

"We Are the Microbes"
(to the tune of "We Are the Champions,"
by Queen)

We are the microbes, my friend
And we'll keep dividing
Till the end
We are the microbes
We are the microbes
No time for chlorine
'Cause we are the microbes
In your food
We'll mess up your kidneys
GI damage we'll do
We go by clostridium, E. coli, salmonella
Just to mention a few

We like sprouts and lettuce
Salami and stew
You'll find us on chicken, soft cheeses, fruit
juices
and hamburgers too.

We are the microbes, my friend
And we'll keep dividing
Till the end
We are the microbes
We are the microbes
No time for chlorine
'Cause we are the microbes
In your food

"Stayin' Alive"
(to the tune of "Stayin' Alive,"
by the Bee Gees)

Well you can tell by the way I choose my food
I'm a worried guy, in a cautious mood
Food safety scares, they're everywhere
And they're telling me I should beware
There's pesticides, Mad Cow Disease
Sure don't put my mind at ease
Biotech, and MSG
Messin' with my sanity
Don't want hepatitis or that gastroenteritis
I'm just stayin' alive, stayin' alive
Scrubbin' off my veggies and I'm heatin' all my
burgers
Up to one-eighty-five, one-eighty-five
Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive, stayin' alive
Ah ha ha ha, stayin' alive

"They Might Kill You"
(to the tune of "We Will Rock You,"
by Queen)

Buddy you're a young man, dumb man, careless
And you're gonna make someone quite sick
someday
You got spores on your plate
They'll incubate
There's trouble if you cross-contaminate
Microbes: they might kill you
Microbes: they might kill you
Toilin' with the fast food, bad mood, careless
It don't matter if those burgers stay pink inside
Servin' up a storm
With coliform
O157's deadly if it don't get warm
Microbes: they might kill you
Microbes: they might kill you

"U.S.D.A."
(to the tune of "Y.M.C.A.,"
by The Village People)

People, there's no need to despair
If you're worried 'bout your food, land, and air

I can tell you, there are people who care
There's no need to be unhappy
People, there's a place you can go
Where there's research on how to make your
plants grow
And some programs that pay the growers some
dough
Even when they don't plant nothing
It's fun to work with the U.S.D.A.
It's fun to work with the U.S.D.A.
They are everything
An agency can be
They look out for you and me
It's fun to work with the U.S.D.A.
It's fun to work with the U.S.D.A.
They are everything
An agency can be
They look out for you and me

[Policy]

MONSANTO'S FEEDING FRENZY

From a statement by Granada Food Services Limited that was posted last fall in the cafeteria of the Monsanto corporation's United Kingdom headquarters in High Wycombe, England. Monsanto is the world's leading purveyor of biotechnology and genetically modified foods. A subsidiary of Granada operates Monsanto's cafeteria.

In response to concern raised by our customers over the use of genetically modified (GM) foods and to comply with government legislation, we have decided to remove, as far as is practicable, GM soy and maize from all food products served in our restaurant. We will continue to work with our suppliers to replace GM soy and maize with non-GM ingredients without impairing quality or performance.

To maintain customer choice, we will sell retail products, such as confectionery, that are packaged and labeled by the manufacturer as containing GM soy and maize, where appropriate.

We have taken the above steps to ensure that you, the customer, can feel confident in the food we serve.

Mike Batchelor
Quality Systems Director