

Sunday, January 17, 2010

WAS THAT TERABITHIA?

I think I was born in the wrong era. Seriously, I long for the days when things were simpler and much less scary. Where people weren't so blatantly disgusting and disrespectful and greedy to the degree they are now. I know there were different worries and battles in earlier days, but now...well, now we've become this sloth-like, "me-first" attitude gone astray, that have no peace or disconnection from life sometimes because we're always reachable by cell phone. There are lots of things that I appreciate in this day and age, however there are many things I absolutely cannot stand. People are becoming creepier because of the anonymity of the internet to be whoever they want to be. I can't stand that video games and internet suck the brains out of people who stay on them all day long and never experience what has always been in existence...air. I hate, hate, HATE that people text talk. Seriously, it drives me batty. I know my text messages turn into 2-3 messages long, but I have a very difficult time texting someone, "NBD. Talk 2 u l8er." Have we really become that lazy? Unfortunately yes.

With the advancement of technology, this has made people so lazy that some are on the verge of being flat out immobile. Do we really need to drive two locks? Do we really have to do EVERYTHING online? If a store is within an hour of you, can you not go to the store and buy a purchase there rather than ordering it online? In a day and age where people are in dire need of employment, can we maybe eliminate those stupid robot menus for customer service when you call a company? Could we not employ a receptionist to direct your call? I find it so sad that it's so rare to actually get a live person when you call a company nowadays. And now they have all these voice activated menus when you call a company which are the death of me. So now we've become too lazy to press buttons? I understand that if you're on a cell phone and driving, this works to your advantage to have it voice activated, but can we not improve that technology a bit then?

This is where the whole point of the story begins...my issue with voice activated phone menus. I suck with them. Why? Well, on a good day they can't understand me. Perhaps it's my slight lisp? Or that I speak too fast or too slow? On a bad day it's likely that I sound like I'm in a zoo. A zoo? Yes, a zoo. I'm realizing that I'm a very vocal person without meaning to be. I often growl when I'm pissed. I will make what can only be described as a noise similar to that of a Skeksi from The Dark Crystal when I'm frustrated beyond belief or am trying really hard to clear my throat. I make a fart noise with my mouth when I screw up or get confused. I give an overexaggerated sigh when I'm bored or impatient. I make some foreign animal noise when I give a big yawn, and when I laugh really hard...actually, I can't remember what it sounds like to laugh really hard so never mind that one. Add all this to making sound effects instead of words, and add in my bizarre sneezing sounds, and we have a zoo in a Heather. Now picture this zoo in a Heather trying to maneuver her way through a voice activated phone menu. It's not pretty.

Too many times, have I had the following misfortune...

PHONE MENU: Please say your credit card number.

ME: 4-8 (Skeksi noise)7...

PHONE MENU: I'm sorry, I didn't get that. Let's try this again. Please say your credit card number.

ME: 4-8 (big yawn) 7....

PHONE MENU: I'm sorry, I didn't get that. Let's try this one more time.

ME: (frustrated now) Grrrrrrrrrrr....

PHONE MENU: I'm sorry. I'm having a hard time understanding you. I'll transfer you to a representative that can help you.

It gets really frustrating! Why not just send me to an agent in the first place? On the rare occasion they give you the choice of typing in the information or saying it, I always type it in because I know what awaits me. Sometimes the phone menus get a bit aggressive. When I lived in High Point and I'd visit my friend in Charlotte, I was driving back home one Sunday and was stuck in standstill traffic right outside of Charlotte, which rarely exists...especially on a Sunday. So I call 511 to see if there's an accident.

PHONE MENU: Welcome to the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Information Line. To get started, please say what freeway you're on.

ME: I-85

PHONE MENU: I heard I-85. Is this correct?

ME: Yes.

PHONE MENU: What city are you in?

ME: Charlotte

PHONE MENU: I heard Charlotte. Is this correct?

ME: Yes.

PHONE MENU: Please state what part of I-85 you are on in Charlotte. Gastonia to Charlotte? Charlotte to Concord?...

ME: Charlotte to Concord.

PHONE MENU: There is an accident at Exit...

ME: ACHOO! AAAAACHOO! AAAAACHOOOO!

PHONE MENU: ALERT! ALERT! ALERT!

ME: AAACHOOO! ACHOO! Shit! ACHOOO! Fuck! ACHOOOOO!

PHONE MENU: ALERT! ALERT! ALERT!...Good-bye.

I was disconnected before the sneezing rampage even finished. At least I knew there was an accident somewhere between where I was and Concord. But the irritation at having, "ALERT! ALERT! ALERT!" shouted at you by the voice of Rosie the Robot, is not the most calming moment amongst a sneezing attack. Plus it's a bit disturbing to know that your sneeze can set off some phone menu alarm. Luckily I have not been faced with many voice activated phone menus in quite some time until last month. And this one...this one just confused the hell out of me.

It was supposed to be a simple call to IKON to order toner, but instead I think I ended up the recipient of what I think was a joke created by some fan of 1970's children literature who set up IKON's phone menu. After I say our Equipment ID number, which went through fine, I am given the next option.

PHONE MENU: What can I help you with today. Please say "service call", "order supplies"...

ME: Order supplies.

PHONE MENU: Okay. First, let me get your name please. At the tone, please say your name. BEEP.

ME: Heather.

PHONE MENU: Was that Terabithia?

What in the hell? I'm about to laugh, but know this will destroy my voice activated possibility of getting through to actually place an order. I cover my mouth and wonder how it got Terabithia from Heather? And WHY Terabithia is even a possibility baffles me even more.

ME: No.

PHONE MENU: Okay. Let's try this again. At the tone, please say your name. BEEP.

ME: Heather.

PHONE MENU: Was that Hillary?

ME: NO!!!!

I'm about to make my frustrated Skeksie noise, but realize this will get me into further trouble.

PHONE MENU: Okay. Let's try this again. At the tone, please say your name. BEEP.

ME: (Slowly) Heea-therrrrr.

PHONE MENU: Was that Heether?

ME: NOOOOO!!!! No it's NOT!!! Shit! AGENT! AGENT!

PHONE MENU: Okay. I'm having difficulties understanding you. I'll transfer you to an agent now.

And of course in less time than convincing the robot that I was Heather instead of Terabithia, I was done. Seriously, in a world that has become so impersonal why do we have to add illiterate robot women and men to the mix? Of course I could learn a thing or two from them.

GRUMPY SUB: When in the hell are we getting paid?

ME: As soon as the job gets funded.

GRUMPY SUB: Well, this is ridiculous! You say...

ME: I'm sorry I didn't get that. Please repeat your complaint.

GRUMPY SUB: I SAID this is ridiculous! I have to...

ME: ALERT! ALERT! ALERT! I'm sorry. I seem to be having trouble understanding you. Good-bye.

Posted by Heather Duffin in The Chronicles at 06:57

Hi Heather,

Again, nice post. I agree completely. I tell myself that we go in cycles, ever quickening cycles and that we will swing the other way at some point.

The other thing that has help me more that almost anything is the Shambhala Buddhist perspective of a 500 year plan. Yep, one of the views of SB is that we aspire to slowly work towards creating an enlightened society. It wouldn't be one without conflict and there would still be room for people who felt they needed phone robots but exploring the great depths of humanness and particularly the human heart/mind would be a centerpiece of relating with all the displays that arise around us but, I digress. The thing I find helpful with the 500 year plan is that whatever world leader is pissing me off, or when congress passes some crazy law, or an off-kilter ruling is handed down by the Supreme court, the perspective of a 500 year plan takes the edge off. In fact it seems to fundamentally undercut extreme perspectives that tend to lead the fundamentalists of our world to get so harsh, without letting me off the hook completely like some yogi meditating in a cave.

All the best,

Bruce

Anonymous on Jan 25 2010, 23:26