

Life After Technology

by Michael S. Lopato

When I am old, I will have the rare privilege of being able to tell my grandchildren a story of my youth which will seem bizarre and otherworldly: when I wanted to use a computer, I needed to walk to the library. Of course, I anticipate the need to explain the concept of a library (and perhaps a desktop computer). But I was born in unique historical period: an era in which I am one of the last people to not be native to technology.

Technology has reshaped our world in profound ways, and one could justifiably say that the internet promoted social change on the scale of the printing press. It has made production and distribution of goods more efficient and has allowed us to easily look up almost any piece of information we desire. However, there is one manner in which I sincerely believe this technology represents a loss: the social sphere. While technology is efficient, friendship, by its very nature, is often the opposite of efficiency. A friendship is not a contract for mutual advantage to progress one's work; rather, it is a bonding between people--a connection in which concern for another person exists, and one in which we do our best to understand the other person in the very uniqueness of that person. There is a certain sacrifice in friendship--the knowledge that one could be doing absolutely anything else but instead chose to spend his time and attention on his friend. Technology cheapens this connection. A true concern for a friend can only be expressed through effort. A text or a Facebook message may be easier, but it is missing two core elements of friendship: the understanding one can only gain through face-to-face contact and the honor of knowing that one has another's undivided attention. As one of the last non-natives to technology, I have always thought that I will be one of the last ones to explain what we've lost when we discovered the internet. But in practice, this is untrue. There are three groups which I envision will be able to teach us about life without technology long after non-natives have come to pass.

The Amish: According to University of Akron professor David Giffels in his memoir *The Hard Way on Purpose*, the Amish use telephones, but only public, community telephones that are shared with neighbors. Giffels writes that "the phone can be used as a tool, but its use should be considered" (206). The Amish instead focus their energy on bonding with their community in personal and direct ways, and long after landlines disappear, they will be able to teach us the value of true friendship.

The Midwestern Punk Rocker: "The Amish code is the closest thing I've ever encountered to the punk ethic" (206), writes Giffels. This comparison, however, is valid not due to sociality but due to work-ethic. The punk ethic values doing things the hard way. Instead of going to the store to buy a guitar or ordering one online, a hardcore punk rocker may build his own using

driftwood from the lake. Long after libraries have gone the way of the video rental store, punk rockers will teach us that the easy way is not always the best or most satisfying path.

The Jewish People: Every Friday night, devout followers of the Jewish faith turn off their phones, close their shops, and stop using technology in anticipation of the Sabbath. This tradition preserves one of the most fundamental capacities of the human being: the opportunity to reflect on one's life and ponder upon the direction one is headed. Long after munching on morsels from news feeds has made our brains more obese than a McDonald's regular, the Jewish people will always teach us that a constant stream of communication inhibits our ability for genuine reflection.

Disclosure: This Op-Ed was typed (but not sent) on my Windows Phone.