

POINTS OF VIEW

Long distance runaround can be real hang up

Recently state Attorney General Frank Kelley took department stores to task for scanner errors that overcharge unsuspecting shoppers.

I'd like to see Mr. Kelley and his investigators take on another burgeoning area of consumer fraud: the long distance telephone companies. The mess left in the wake of phone deregulation has consumers confused, overwhelmed by all the pitches made by solicitors, junk mail and advertising. And often feeling cheated.

I'm on my third long distance carrier in as many years. This one promised the lowest rates to Canada, the destination of 99 percent of my long distance calls. I chose this plan on its promise of 10 cents a minute to Canada on weekends.

Everything went according to plan the first month. But on the second

billing, I was charged more than 20 cents a minute for weekend evening calls to Canada. Doesn't sound like a lot of money, but my long Sunday night chat with a friend I hadn't seen in months turned into an \$11.42 charge.

For that price, I could have driven from my house in Canton to her house in LaSalle, just south of Windsor, sprung for a dozen Tim Hortons donuts and coffee, and still had money in my pocket.

At 51 minutes on the line, the call should have cost \$5.10. Other calls to Canada on the same bill were similarly overcharged.

I did what any irate consumer should do. I called the 800 number on the bill "for questions regarding charges." And I called again. And again. For six hours before I got something other than a busy signal or a recorded message



MARY RODRIGUE

saying "All circuits are busy. Please try your call later." Thank goodness for automatic redial.

When I finally connected, I had to listen to a 10-minute long automated message that instructed callers to press a corresponding number for help. Of course, there was no corresponding

number for my problem. Exasperated, I tried pressing 0 for operator during this spiel, but all I got was "You pressed 0. I do not understand." Neither did I.

Finally, a real live person came on the line. When I started to explain my problem, she interrupted with "That's a long distance matter. I'll have to patch you through to an international operator." Arghh!

Five more minutes on hold. Then, finally, six and a half hours after I began my quest for consumer justice, I was connected with the right person. She verified that I was enrolled in the 10 cents a minute to Canada plan, and she couldn't explain why I was being charged more than double that rate.

She credited my account for almost \$14, which is a lot more cash than I've ever been overcharged at the supermarket or department store. I watch those

scanners carefully to correct overcharges as they occur. But there is no visible meter clicking for long distance calls. By the time the bill arrives in the mail, I barely remember placing the calls.

Who has the time or the patience to pursue this type of fraud? How many folks just pay the monthly bill without looking at the breakdown of charges? I was telling a friend about my experience when she told me about her recent run in with another long distance carrier over calls to Hawaii.

So Mr. Kelley, how about it? Can consumers get more accountability from long distance phone companies? In the meantime, I'm going to be examining my bills very closely.

Mary Rodrigue is the Community Life editor of the Farmington Observer.

Shoemaker had a way with tying up loose ends

The father-in-law and I were a lot alike. Curmudgeons in our own way. He was stubborn. Taciturn. Even tempered, although nasty when he did occasionally boil over. We were both procrastinators, me more than him. He was a better handyman than I am, but not by much.

"I'm just a shoemaker," he used to say.

I didn't quite understand what that meant, but once, when he was visiting us, a headlight burned out on The Feminist's car. I told her to take it to the dealer to have it replaced, but she insisted that it couldn't be that hard to change a light bulb.

"Get my dad to help you," she said. He did. And about four hours later, covered with grease and nursing bruised fingers, we finally had the bulb in place and the rest of the car put back together.

That was the two of us. A couple of shoemakers. We didn't talk much, but over the years a kind of silent bond developed.

He was Polish and grew up in Hamtramck. I was a WASP from

Arkansas. An unlikely pair — the Polack and the Hillbilly. We teased each other about that.

When he'd come to visit, he always had a friendly greeting. Something like, "Jack, your grass needs mowing." Or, "Gee, Jack, when are you gonna trim the shrubs?"

And if he stayed for dinner, he always had something to say. "You burned the roast, Jack." Or, "Kathie, there's too much pepper in the kapusta." He was serious and teasing at the same time. He had a reputation as a complainer, and he intended to live up to it.

We were both in the Navy, although a few years apart. He was on a destroyer escort in World War II, and I stayed safely ashore in the Philippines during the Vietnam Era. He called me a shnavetail because somewhere along the line I got a commission as a lieutenant. J.G. I teased him about falling off the boat into the St. Johns River during "The Big One." (He really did, but there was more to the story than that.)



JACK GLADDEN

When he and the mother-in-law retired to Florida a few years ago, they built a house just off the St. Johns. I told him not to fall in again.

Before they moved he gave me his snow blower and garden tiller. He had no need for the snow blower any more, and he had no intention of using the tiller. That was not his idea of retirement.

But I think there was more to it than that. It was his way of saying something neither of us could put into words.

The only time he and I got close to

a show of affection came after The Feminist, The Eighth-Grader and I had spent a week visiting him and the mother-in-law in Florida. When we were getting ready to board the plane, I gave the mother-in-law a hug and gave him a handshake. Then each of us put both our hands together — the old double-fisted handshake — and pretended we didn't see the tears in each other's eyes. We said goodbye, and both our voices cracked just a little.

When he entered the hospital in October, The Feminist and The Eighth-Grader flew down to Florida. I told The Eighth-Grader to "give Papa a big hug and tell him it's from me. And then tell him I don't care if he likes it or not, it's still from me."

He couldn't talk because of the ventilator in his mouth, but when she delivered the hug and the message, he raised a clinched fist. I know what he meant. One shoemaker's salute to another. He was never very good with words anyway.

He died the Friday before Thanks-

giving and the next day we were all back in Florida. At the house near the St. Johns River, the latch on the door to the laundry chute in the bathroom was broken. He'd been meaning to fix it before he got sick, but just hadn't gotten around to it.

The Feminist asked if I would try to do something with it before I came back to Michigan. She figured it shouldn't be much harder than changing a light bulb. The door was taped shut by about a yard of cellophane tape. I looked at it and meant to work on it, but I got sidetracked.

The next time I'm down there, though, I'm going to work on that door. I could use some help, but this time I'll have to figure it out myself. It's the least one old shoemaker can do for another.

Jack Gladden is a copy editor at the Observer & Eccentric. He lives in Canton Township. You can leave him voice mail at 953-2047, ext. 2124, or send e-mail to gladden@econline.com.

WSU's retiring leader will be missed

Thoughts running through my head while unwrapping presents under the tree:

I'm proud to be part of an organization populated by fair-minded but stubborn pros like Tim Richard, whose work appears regularly in this newspaper.

When I went to Lansing a couple of weeks ago to testify on amending the Open Meetings Act to allow university governing boards a decent space in picking new presidents, there was Richard in the hearing room.

He was there to cover the hearing but also to present the case of the Michigan Freedom of Information Committee — testifying on the other side. We laughed about it at the start. But when Richard sat down to testify, he started off by saying something like: "I'm here sweating because my boss, Phil Power, is testifying on the other side."

He could have ducked his duty as he saw it. And I suppose I could have silenced him on the grounds that you don't contradict your boss in public. But he didn't, and I didn't, and we are better off for it. And so is the integrity of our newspapers and the spirit of our country.

Another person testifying at that same hearing was David Adamany, president of Wayne State University, who a week later announced his surprise decision to retire. Turns out that Adamany's deep — some say crucial — involvement lobbying OMA changes through the Legislature was partially to set the stage so the WSU Board of Governors could find a new president with less thrash than the University of Michigan Board of Regents went through in October and November.

I'm sorry to see Adamany go. It's fair to say he has become the single most effective university president in Michigan.

His influence on the Detroit delegation in the Legislature has brought WSU greater per-capita funding from Lansing than any other university in the state. His unflinching vision of Wayne as a solid, affordable, research-oriented urban university nationally has carried the institution from weakness to strength.

And his fierce determination not to back down when he thought he was right — not to the unions on campus, not to the Legislature, not even to his own board — has been a real study in courage at a time when many university presidents would rather run than fight. I believe David Adamany worked an 18-hour day, seven days a week; I never saw him unprepared.

I will never forget watching him testify in Lansing.



PHIL POWER

■ I'm sorry to see (David) Adamany go. It's fair to say he has become the single most effective university president in Michigan.

He handed the committee members his long, detailed and well-written testimony in advance, and I thought he was going to read the whole thing. Wrong. He sat back in his gray suit, fixed the members with a penetrating gaze and then talked off the cuff: eloquent, lapidary, effective, not a word out of place.

Adamany has made Wayne State an important part of the infrastructure of southeastern Michigan. Many suburbanites, unwilling to drive the distance or pay the freight at Ann Arbor, got their degrees from Wayne — and good ones, too.

I remember back in 1960, when I was editorial director of The Michigan Daily, the student newspaper at U-M. At midnight, just before we went to press, we got a call that the WSU Board of Governors and the U-M Board of Regents had agreed to merge Wayne into the University of Michigan.

After a lot of frantic telephoning on deadline, we found the report was false. But that suggested just how weak Wayne was at the time.

Today, after David Adamany's 14 years as president at WSU, that kind of rumor is wholly implausible. It's a neat way of measuring just how far the university has come under his leadership.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1880.

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