

The Trouble with Celia

By Jeannie Serpa

George had been on his cell phone for hours. The latest call was winding down and the phone actually felt hot. He said his good-byes, did the "Have a great day" thing and moved the cell from his ear. It felt sticky. "Need to wash this damn thing", he muttered aloud as it rang yet again. Another business call. Another one of those days and with so many bills to pay he could not afford NOT to answer.

Actually, George loved his cell phone. He even had a name for his wireless friend: Celia Cell. Celia made him feel important, business-like, a man on the rise. And George loved to talk. He prided himself on glib conversation and what his mother Matilda called "a silver tongue". George was of small stature and though he was very average in appearance his voice was big---deeply rich and resonant and, quite frankly, George enjoyed listening to George! And so he talked and talked. He cajoled, wheedled and negotiated business deals with the skill and cunning of a politician. In between calls the silences became less and less comfortable for him.

Myrtle (Mrs. George) was the first to notice the physical changes in her husband as soon as he put Celia down. These changes were even more apparent when Celia was nesting and being recharged. His shoulders would sag, the Crest smile would fade and the glow would disappear from his face. Then Celia would ring, shoulders were suddenly soldier-erect, eyes sparkled like Venus and Mars on a clear night, cheeks pinked and words flowed as freely as an over-gorged creek in Spring.

So this was George and Celia, happy in a technological marriage of the times. Thinking his toddler son might be the blame for Celia's stickiness, he asked Quinn please not to play with Daddy's phone especially with peanut butter and jelly fingers. Myrtle drew herself up to full height (she was even six feet tall) and informed Daddy in no uncertain tones that she never allowed this and why didn't he clean Celia once in a while?

Well, dear Reader, our hero (feeling very much his five foot seven) trotted off in search of some Disposable Wipes and treated Celia to a bath that left her not just stickyless but germ free and smelling lemon fresh. She was allowed to air dry then pocketed next to George's heart.

He played golf that morning, taking calls with Celia nestled between chin and shoulder, a position he was sure was keeping chiropractors all over the world in business. He was drinking the nineteenth hole and completing a deal with his most important client when Celia started to heat up and again, she felt sticky. As the morning wore on and the temperature rose and the phone was in full throttle, George actually had to pull her away from his ear. What was happening here? This was, after all, a simple problem and like all simple problems, solvable. Perhaps the fault was with the plastic or vinyl or whatever cell phones were made of. He was fairly certain Verizon phones were of top grade material, but could continued use result in overheating from ordinary body heat thereby softening the plastic and causing stickiness?

A call to Verizon disclosed the problem to be a common one and, yes, continuous use would cause overheating. This, combined with body heat could result in a softened sticky plastic. The

solution? Allow cooling time between calls.

George tried. He really tried but there was little time for these cool down periods. He had a business to run and most of it was conducted via Celia. Things were getting worse by the day and on the afternoon of August 21, 2009 with a record temperature of ninety-nine degrees and humidity approaching steam, he simply could not extract Celia from his ear. He yanked; it hurt. He tugged; she painfully tore at his skin. No longer just annoying, the problem was now downright serious. He no longer had to hold Celia in place. She was attached. It WAS rather convenient. With both hands free he could type on his laptop, guzzle his Starbucks and sway his clients all at the same time. This gave him some measure of comfort until he had to make the next call-He couldn't get at the key pad to punch in the numbers! His spare phone was somewhere, but where? Panic time. Find a telephone booth and call Myrtle. A telephone booth. Were they still in existence? Back in the 60's and 70's there was one on nearly every block. He hadn't noticed but somewhere between then and now had they been torn down? Perhaps moved to museums to be preserved as part of history? Celia was ringing but he couldn't pull her away to answer. More panic. Where was his Valiums? Was he having an anxiety attack? His heart was banging in his chest. What to do, what to do?

Time to see his doctor.

Dr. Quickpill revealed that he had extracted phones from no less than thirteen ears since the present heat wave had engulfed southern New England in its unrelenting, simmering atmospheric stew. George's problem, however, would need more drastic measures and Dr. Quickpill

recommended a surgeon who specialized in removing cellulars from ears.

A surgeon? Oh, come now!

George lay on the examining table in the surgeon's office, Celia locked in place, his hands folded in a knuckle-white clench and, like many patients so positioned, he was counting ceiling tiles.

The door opened. Dr. Justin Paine plodded in, caffeine in hand, eyelids drooping. He stifled a yawn. "Another one", he muttered as he sank heavily onto a castored stool and rolled himself over to Celia.

Can you get off her?

Not today, I'm afraid. Need some sleep. Been in cell phone surgery ever since the heat wave started.

Dr. Paine noted the look of fear and worry on George's face and weakly apologized for his less than bedside manner.

I can remove the phone with just a few incisions and get your ear back good as new.
Stitches?

Hell no, fourteen staples should do it.

You've got to be kidding. I need to think about this. Any alternative?

Certainly. You can leave it in place. It will become more comfortable in time. You'll hardly notice it. The newest models are offered in skin tones; they blend in.

But I can't get at the numbers. You don't understand. It's impossible to punch in the numbers! I'm having to use a second phone and my other ear. Soon the same thing will happen and then what?

Verizon and Nokia are already on this. There's a new model with an Audio Response. In addition, an even better one with the key pad on the outside of the phone. Both are feather light and, of course, come in skin tones as I mentioned earlier. There's a color chart in the waiting room---choose from Scandinavian Light, Mediterranean Medium, Sensuous Suntan or Afro Dark. You can order one from my nurse-she's also an Avon lady.

As he was leaving, our hero victim noticed several teenagers lined up in the waiting room. Each had one ear padded and bandaged. They were chatting excitedly, having fun sharing CPR (Cell Phone Removal) stories. They were back to have the dressings removed. Most had "cells" at the ready, clipped to their belts. They seemed happy in this modern day Twilight Zone. Had the situation become the norm for the current generation?

"Bye for now", chirped the cheery Avon nurse. "This pamphlet will explain everything. It's difficult for older people to absorb and accept everything but it helps if you understand the whole anatomical process. Now, would you care to schedule your surgery?"

-NO!

-Get home

-Have a drink

-Stop shaking

-Calm down, read the damn pamphlet

The pamphlet was short but not sweet, its language lawyerly. The fault, it seems, lay not with cell phone manufacturers but rather with our anatomies.

-Heat and moisture may encourage growth to the degree that our skin starts to receive

softened plastic in the same manner as our bodies accept an artificial organ.

-A recent survey indicates that to date as many as 3,000 patients have consulted their physicians regarding the situation.

-Studies show that as many as 2,000,000 people will experience the problem in 2009 and by 2012 the American Medical Association and the AARP will request Health Insurance to cover surgery.

October arrived with cool temperatures and low humidity. Celia was still in place. Dr. Paine had installed an Audio Response device and punching in phone numbers was no longer a problem. George spoke, Celia responded. Taking a shower had been tricky, but with a few snips and stitches clever Myrtle had altered a shower cap that fit over Celia. At night she was plugged into her charger and George learned to sleep on his left side. She was programmed to wake him with a little soft Mozart---no need for an alarm clock any longer. If he had an early plane to catch, he'd be hit with a blast of the 18th Century Overture.

George's barber skillfully trimmed around Celia---he was now charging an extra ten dollars for customers like George. Myrtle had started an at home business sewing shower caps for cells. They were available in several colors and patterned in every print from Scotch Plaid to Dainty Rosebuds. Her new sports line included golf and tennis motifs. On a recent trip to Manhattan, she returned to report hundreds of pedestrians sporting telephone ears hurrying along Madison Avenue, hands free for toting PC's and Starbucks. A local entrepreneur agreed to finance her New York branch aptly named Cell Shower Caps II and a new chain was born.

Both Vogue and the New Yorker were now advertising the latest featherweight cells designed especially for implants, and in Rhode Island, Don Bousquet had just finished

cartooning Volume I of Earmania.

And Dr. Paine? Well, he was still over-worked but these days he was implanting phones for those who couldn't wait for the natural growth process. The latest models were geared to teenagers who regarded his skin tone colors with disdain and opted for Hot-Hot Pink, Shameful Chartreuse and Pop Art Purple.

George was content. His self-help book entitled Adjusting to Earphonia in the 21st Century was in the hands of a publisher and a novel, Go With the Fone Flow, was in the works. Were he and Celia to be together forever? Herein lies the sad, though inevitable, ending. After many years, outdated and overweight, her time had come. She passed away with dignity and to this very day can be viewed under glass at the South County Museum in Narragansett, R.I.