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PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING & HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ENGLISH

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THE ESU ROLY SUSSEX SHORT STORY COMPETITION  
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Highly Commended in the Open Division

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*Who Do You Call When You Don't Have a Phone*

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*Who Do You Call When You Don't Have a Phone*

This incident happened during my Dry July

It all began when my mobile phone (which had slowly and against my will become akin to a pace maker for the heartbeat of my interactions with the outside world – I live alone) had a blank screen where I was accustomed to being greeted with the 100% charged logo. The scientific method that I had obtained at UWA and further enhanced with years of problem solving sprang into play “!@#%&\*that Charger”. Moving to step 2 of the aforementioned process I noticed that the end of the USB cable proximate (scientist use terms further up the food chain than the average citizen’s verbiage) showed signs of open circuit (I also studied electronics).

The bank balance was in its customary *4 days short of my next donation from the Commonwealth*: negligible. Time for the Economists hat to be dusted off: Bunnings: what had I purchased there recently which I could deem to be not suited to purpose by way of getting a credit note? Yes! The wonderful tape which professed to stick even under water, part of which now hung loosely above an ever-growing small lake at the far corner of my yard adjacent to a rapidly emptying above ground pool.

On arrival I fronted the “Refunds Desk” took a breath and waited to be asked for my drivers’ license. Should I or should I not present the one with my photo DOB and address with an expiry date of last year? I never cease to smile when it is seen as “not an adequate proof of my identity”. I often hand it over in the hope that someone will see fit to presume that even 12 months later I am still me. A quick glance at the ever-extending que and I thought better.

Credit note in hand I sought out the lady who actually knows where things are and chose a USB lead. Time to check that it is the correct one. I scanning the various orifices of my ex-army clothing .....“Damn I had left it under the non-locking seat of my scooter.” Yes, you picked up on the none to subtle hint ... Returning to my mode of transport I was to find it had become a phone free zone.

Returning to the information desk I reported it as lost and was given a form where I was able to ... wait for it ... give them a phone number to call if my phone was handed in. The irony. I carefully squeezed my email address into the allotted space.

So, having had my mobile phone pilfered, I (being unable to afford to replace it) arranged with my service provider to add a landline to my NBN.

I had a handset attached to a fax printer so I eagerly awaited the “between 24 and 48 hours” to elapse. After 72 hours I decided to dash off an email requesting an ETA for the landline, but sadly, my NBN had crashed. Surprisingly it worked on an old laptop that I use to make my TV smart (I love iview). Thus, the problem was (yet again) with my desktop.

I slept on it and then did a windows update. Looking back this was the highlight of my fortnight ... it worked.

Slightly under 96 hours and I had my new landline phone number. I plugged in the phone ..... nothing. Handset not registered .... base station not identified .... base station not registered. I astounded myself with just how many times I followed the instructions on registering each part of the now much less attractive phone fax roadside pick-up. Not to worry, my mate Ward (techno-genius) was due to visit Friday (day 14 of no phone).

I guess I felt admonished of the shame under which I had buried myself over the intervening two days, when he too was unsuccessful. So off we went to buy a new you-beaut (bound to work) phone. Checked the remaining pension balance. As long as I did not eat and left my first soirée into the wonderful world of alcohol for an additional few days, I could afford it.

With Ward in tow we headed into the computer nook, new phone in hand....time passes. I get a feeling of *de ja vous*. This phone was different only in as much as the error messages varied from the phone-fax. As with the previous attempt: repeating the same instructions ad infinitum did not convince the associated electronics that it should work. Ward went home, I climbed into bed and dreamed of the wondrous sound of a dial tone.....

Woke in a sweat 2.00am. Decided to hack my modem set up. Having found the IP address, I followed the pathway suggested by google to access the machinations of modem variations. It was all to no avail - yet again the repeated application of the process had no effect on the stoic will of either the phone or the modem. The IP Address was able to open the Optus Modem portal, which was kind

enough to let me know that both possible phone outputs were disabled. Maybe Optus could explain.

A chat eventuated with a very kind resident of the subcontinent. I shared all but my DNA profile in an attempt to convince him that I did indeed have an Optus Modem. 45 minutes later he announced that he could not help me get a phone line because Optus was no longer my service provider. I had actually opened with that particular revelation. He did however give me a suggestion as to how I might get a phone line ... wait for it ... he gave me a phone number to call. Sigh.

Before returning to bed (with a radically accentuated desire for alcohol) I dashed off an email to Aussie Broadband, my much-loved new service provider. I awoke to a reply: "We may have neglected to tell you that when you have an Optus modem and you change to another service provider Optus BLOCK access to the modem set up. You will either need a new modem or buy a Cisco SPA100 Analogue Telephone adapter."

I opened my bill paying account, hijacked my gas payment and headed off to purchase the aforementioned Cisco SPA112a.

In my absence, my next-door neighbour was removing the cladding stacked between the fence and the collapsed side of the large pool (the other side of the newly established lake. I went to great lengths to tell him that the side gate does not click shut unless you close it very gingerly (I presume you know where this is going).

Arrived home, fed dogs. Put them in back yard for post feed poop and set about connecting my new gadget. On page 73 (actually pages 6 – 8) of the instructions it has 23 codes that you are asked to enter depending on ..... stuffed if I know. The first instruction is to enter \*\*\*\* you are then instructed to enter a code - but which code? I tried each. The elusive dial tone remained but a faint memory.

So the new gadget communicates with the hand set up to \*\*\*\* but nothing beyond. Sigh again.

So back to the saga of the gate ....As you will have predicted (not a huge leap of the imagination), having availed himself of the \$500 worth of cladding, my neighbour slammed the gate and heard a "clinking" noise which he presumed was the catch falling down to secure the gate. It was of course the catch flying up into the wait for a puff of wind or a curious puppy position.

After calculating the seconds until dry July is over I decided to call in the dogs for the evening, not realising that this would involve an extended tour of Kwinana, Medina, Rockingham, Wellard, Orelia, Parmelia and Bertram.

I did my best, but (may not have mentioned: scooter with no indicators also has no headlights) ran out of daylight.

Only 365760 seconds until I can have an alcoholic drink

UPDATE: Puppies are back very thirsty and ready for bed. That's good, because the weather forecast was a *two-dog night* (our combined body heat should be sufficient homeostasis - ever the scientist). Due to bank account funds shuffling I won't be using the gas heater.

With my enthusiasm to share Saga Saturday, I did omit one section of its story:

As I went back and forth between Optus and the IP address attached to their modem via innumerable Google Searches, I did meet *an old friend*:

Some months ago, I had ended up talking to a “help” line which appeared in the AVG homepage leaving me to believe that my ever-faithful long-term provider of a virus free spam would be an eminently suitable platform for solving the issue at hand; silly me.

I began one of those ever so friendly chat exchanges (to their credit the Optus chat was an especially pleasant way to spend 40 odd minutes NOT solving a problem and only to be told that they would supply me with a phone number to call so that I might be able to connect my phone). The albeit tiny photo at the top left of my chatter box was of a lady named Ellen and she was rather cute. I posed my question – and told her that I had a computer problem:

“How can I help you”.

**“I have a computer problem”**

To which she replied (no fooling this call centre genius) “So you have a computer problem?”

Eliminating my first three response options I answered. “Yes”

She explained that I needed to chat with a computer “expert”. Pearl Wilson (equally cute thumb nail) asked how she could assist.

The reply came: “Is there anything else the Expert should be aware of?”

My previous experience with “Just Answer” meant that I would now be asked to tell them .... “I have a computer problem”. Which would give me the link below:

Many a critic might suggest that I then paid \$5.00 and exposed my bank to a series of withdrawals, up to and including (30 days later) a fee of \$43 for my monthly membership of “Just Let Us Rip You Off”

Fool me once .....

Next morning Aussie Broad Band emailed

Dear Michael I appreciate the lengths you have gone to, to inform us of your inconveniences I suggest going onto our website live chat support, they can assist you to **setup your SPA**

Regards,

Bryan (no thumb nail probably looks a bit like me

I located Daytona (lovely name nice thumb nail) and she was fantastic. (I bet you didn't expect that).

Sadly, nothing that she did allowed my SPA to communicate with the much-maligned Optus Modem. She found the IP address for my SPA, she made the changes, updated its software/Firmware (whilst I updated my underwear – as expected this whole episode was having a diaphoretic effect on me). She really was wonderful, empathetic, even sympathetic, and was nice enough not to leave me with a phone number to call.

I emailed Austin Computer's and asked if the SPA122 (as opposed to my mate SPA112) might do a better job. They replied promptly that the 122 was different from the 112 and gave me a web site to check. In truth the difference in model number had served successfully to give me the hint of some difference between the two other than nomenclature.

I have a philosophy, the origin of which I am not sure which is: “measure twice, cut once” I have expanded this to: “give your problem some serious thought before a knee jerk response makes it worse”.

I had been too quick to ignore a thought that replacing the !@#%0^& Optus Modem was a viable option. Online I found on EBay a VOIP (that means you can attach a phone; I am learning heaps of stuff from this exercise) modem for sale in Mount Pleasant.

It costs only \$25, which (not always, but this time) I happen to have. The postage was listed as an additional \$14.76 (which even this time I do not have).

Contact Seller: "I will pay full asking price if I can pay cash and pick this up on Wednesday"

"OK after 5.30 is good for me"

"Cool, what is your address?"

"I don't want to put it into the EBay site, what is your email"

[mike\\_omeara@hotmail.com](mailto:mike_omeara@hotmail.com) ..... EBay Red Alert: You have included an email address or phone number in your message and so this message cannot be sent" (Meaning: so you think you can bypass our system do you smart arse – no way)

"Give me your phone number and I will text it to you"...Sigh again.

Last word goes to Just Answer .... I have left the link open ... they are still waiting for me to Just Answer

The address was sent to the phone of my son. I bestrode the deadly scooter and with my new best friend (who had seriously let me down) - the Analogue Telephone Adapter under the seat (safe from light fingers while you are sitting on it) I headed for Cannington.

At Austin Computers there were two staff members: one fully engrossed in selling a tower substructure by substructure, periphery by periphery; the other on a phone call. It was the telephone man who had sold me the ATA. He went to great lengths to disavow me of this fact. He actively sought to leave me to his partner in crime (the accuracy of this nomenclature was to be come apparent shortly). I insisted that he deal with my refund. Sheepishly he mumbled that there would be remuneration required so that they might re-list the item. That fee would be calculated as 20% of the purchase price (criminal!). I trust that my acquiescence did not leave him in any doubt that this would be the last time my considerable frame would darken their doorway.

From here I headed to my son's gym where I finally had an address from which I might pick-up the required VOIP friendly (a new BFF) modem. As time was an issue I had him print me a Google Map and hit the road. As I headed north, I became ever more conscious of the setting sun. I made it to Mt Pleasant with the sun all but over the horizon. A "No Through" road appeared right where it should not have and the map my son printed was not much help as it also had no street names.

I looked for the sun ... it was gone. In my rush to attack the plans for the afternoon I hadn't donned my hi-viz jacket. It was now that I realised, I was in fact dressed in black ... on a black scooter ... with no lights. I had the feeling that the sooner I was not on the road, the better. A short Leach Highway run, then a select backroad or two would have me at Emma and Dino Tandy's place. The way my luck had been running (out was how it had been running) I was delighted to arrive unscathed and unarrested.

Emma welcomed me in, but Dino was in New Guinea. I shared my plight with Emma.

"I am sure that Dino has a modem with VOIP that you can have. He keeps all the bits and pieces from the various businesses where he services, maintains and upgrades the computer systems. I will phone him"

Dino did indeed have several options from which I could choose and having read part one of this tale of woe, he was sure that he could solve the mobile phone issue as well. By this time Emma had seated the brood at the family dining table with a significantly large serving dished up on a plate at the head of the table. I joined this beautiful family (I guess that these two beautiful human beings were more than likely to produce similarly beautiful progeny, both nature and nurture being top quality). By the time I had enjoyed this yummy repast with a second serve (I wanted Emma to be convinced that I had enjoyed my meal) Emma had packed the modem into a carry bag with a container full of even more yummy food plus fruit and a loaf of bread.

With significant spring in my step I undertook the walk to the station, the train, the bus, and the 3 km walk home. People like the Tandy family make the world a better place.

Next morning, I woke refreshed and took the time to check my bank balance. For reasons known only to them, NAB decided that I could not access my online banking and needed to update my password. Well I as sure as eggs would not



be using phone banking, set about changing my password. It was with a wry smile that I read the screen which brought the exercise to a grinding halt.

If nothing else; this rambling oration has identified the seriousness of the incursion which the mobile phone has made into our everyday living.

Before I sign off, I need to insert a disclaimer:

I am (finally) not a heavy drinker and I certainly don't resort to the bottle as a panacea to stress.

July ended 3 days ago and I had yet to have a tippie, but I visited the local bottle'o so that I might check if my credit from Austin Computers had arrived. I decided to have a nice dry red wine to landmark my month off alcohol.

The reader might imagine, have established my frugal approach to living that a goon bag would be my choice of snifter:

Wrong! My wine of choice was a Gold Medal Red. - at the Gidgegannup Pony Club Sausage Sizzle and car boot sale of 2014 it was awarded Gold .... as the most palatable wine less than or equal to (the mathematician in me raises its voice) \$3.00 per litre.