

The Story Behind

by Rob Swanson

I called Bonnie on the phone yesterday to get the inside dirt, and mid-way through our conversation she said, "Who am I speaking with?"

My momma would be horrified.

It's not that I expected Bonnie to recognize my voice, but that I unconsciously assumed Caller ID would take care of introductions for me.

"Technology never excuses bad manners," my mother once told me. It was during a discussion with my folks about the evils of text messaging and e-mail on the literary talents of teenagers, in which everything is abbreviated to incomprehensible code.

"U R 2 \$, LOL" which translates to "You are too rich, lots of laughs." I think this is wrong. So does my father, who doesn't believe it's possible to be too rich, but that's a different story. "Write like this and our language will be destroyed!" I complained.

"I used to write like that, and my language is just fine, dear," my mother soothed. "It was back in the '40s and '50s. We'd right telegrams to our friends in just that same code. They charged by the letter, you know." Mom was a young lady of privilege back then; my Dad less so. I looked to him for support.

"Don't look at me. My friends and I used the same thing for our Morse Code sets. Tapping out letters was easier and quicker than words."

"I didn't have anything like that when I was a kid," I harrumphed.

"Short memory," replied my Dad. "CB Radios, remember? 10-4, What's your 20, 4x4... If that isn't code, what is?"

"Okay, Okay," I said.

"World War II," Dad said, and noticed my raised eyebrows. "O.K. was short for Zero Kills, meaning no one in your troop was lost. You'd ask your returning buddy how it went, and he'd say, 'O.K.' Now it's part of the language. English is pretty flexible, son; don't worry about text messaging and e-mails."

"But remember," Mom said, "Technology never excuses bad manners."