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Cazzie David

## Going Cold Turkey

I accepted my phone addiction as something that automatically comes along with having a phone, like a charger, or anxiety. But it wasn't until recently that my symptoms became too bad to ignore. My brain had become so foggy that I accidentally got two flu shots this year. Yes, I got one, forgot, then got another.

5 At first I didn't know what the source of this hazy feeling was. Was I depressed? Can you just one day wake up with a new foggy personality? It wasn't until my daily screen time caught my eye that I made the connection: I had gone a week spending an average of six hours a day on my phone. I truly can't imagine a universe where God doesn't regret putting me on this earth, considering this information.

10 The screen-time app revealed to me that I spent most of these six hours on Instagram. I know, I am so brave for disclosing something so humiliating. But, really, who has time for this? I looked for more answers (on my phone). I checked the Instagram Explore page, as some might say, the Explore page knows you better than you know yourself.

15 If you showed someone my Explore page and asked them to guess what type of person it belongs to, they would guess a "horny 14-year-old boy." It's all butts and famous people with fake lips. A result of playing this really fun game where I look at a bunch of hot or successful people until I start thinking I'm an "ugly worthless loser."

It was this moment of clarity, plus a serendipitously timed writing assignment – to go a week using only technology that pre-dates my birth – that motivated me to get off my phone. With luck, I might even live up to my New Year's resolution of reading as many books as seasons I watched of *Love Island*<sup>1</sup> (all six U.K. plus one Australia).

20 It was unclear if *AIR MAIL*<sup>2</sup> asked me to write about a technology detox as a cover so I could maybe one day be capable of writing about something other than my phone. Regardless, I was grateful, as it's almost impossible to end any bad habit or addiction if not for a paycheck, sheer force of will, or vanity. This would be my juice cleanse, except instead of flushing out toxins I'd expunge the profiles, manipulative captions, and sunglasses trends clotting my system.

25 *AIR MAIL* sent me the essentials: an Alcatel (never heard of it) flip phone, a *Thomas Guide to Los Angeles* (now out of print), and a disposable Kodak camera. I took it upon myself to gather a calendar, notebook, flashlight, and alarm clock – everything else I rely on in my iPhone, but in analog form – plus a huge bag to carry it all. I consoled myself with the thought that I would basically still be in possession of an iPhone.

30 I wrote down my schedule for the week in my new calendar and opened up the *Thomas Guide* to figure out how to get to each of my appointments without Google Maps. I had every intention of taking this assignment seriously, but I'm not a cartographer. I was also not in a position to request a change of location

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<sup>1</sup> *Love Island*: a reality TV show

<sup>2</sup> *AIR MAIL*: the digital magazine in which this article was published

for these meetings. Therefore, I had no choice but to cancel everything. That's not cheating. It's my process.

35 On Sunday, the night before my digital cleanse, I binged until I passed out. So. Many. People. So. Much. Stupidity. To ensure I wouldn't look back, I scrolled through about 100 videos of five-second-long dance routines on TikTok<sup>3</sup>, including ones made by on-duty cops who are apparently known as the #copsoftiktok. Everything is insane. I sent my flip-phone number to my family and close friends, and then some less close friends, plus boys who would never text me anyway, and turned off my iPhone.

40 You know how people say there isn't enough time in the day? Well, those people are addicted to their smartphones. Because there is plenty of time when you don't have one.

My mornings were spent doing all of the things I normally don't have time to, like drinking a glass of water and peeing. It's possible that I usually do those things, but I can't remember because I was scrolling as I did them.

45 Most mornings I stare at other people's lives until I'm seven minutes late to wherever I need to go and have to run out the door unkempt. But for once, I made coffee. As I sipped it, I had nothing else to do but look around my room. Apparently, I have one gray wall.

Having a burner phone<sup>4</sup> was kind of like being on vacation, not because it's relaxing but because you don't know whether no one is reaching out to you because they know you can't hang out, or just because no one is reaching out to you.

50 I considered texting some of my contacts so they'd know that just because my texts are green doesn't mean I don't want to talk. But as I quickly realized, it does. You start to actively resent the person you're texting as you press through P-Q-R to get to S<sup>5</sup> because they have no idea the kind of maddening effort that is going into it. So I decided I didn't want to talk to anyone and I definitely didn't want anyone to talk to me, because I sounded super-sketchy texting back things like "wtsp btch."

55 It is simply impossible to sound nice from a flip phone. Whereas every tool on your iPhone is there to make you appear nice in as few taps as possible. The difference even "Haha-ing," "❤️-ing," and "!!-ing" have made for engaging without having to engage is huge. It's actually just as hard to sound mean from an iPhone as it is to sound nice from a flip phone, which makes you question every time you feel like someone is being distant on text.

60 The flip phone definitely had its advantages. Like, every single time you hang up it feels like a mike drop. Even if the last thing you said was "Mommy, I have a tummy ache." But the best thing by far was the way people looked at me. It's the exact kind of attention I've always strived for: not the look-at-me-I-have-a-puppy-come-play-with-it-and-ask-me-questions kind of attention, but the look-at-me-I-have-a-motherfucking-flip-phone kind of attention. I could hear people's thoughts as they passed me. What's her  
65 deal? I wonder what her story is ... That girl is different. Like I was a runaway teen, secret agent, or drug dealer.

I struggled most when I was waiting. Waiting no longer exists today because what you do when you wait is the same thing you do when you're not waiting, which is look at your iPhone. I did not anticipate that

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<sup>3</sup> a platform for short, digital videos

<sup>4</sup> *burner phone*: a temporary phone

<sup>5</sup> *P – Q – R to get to S*: older phones sometimes have four letters for each key

70 simply not having a phone would make me feel creepy. Without one, I had no choice but to look at the  
people around me to make the time go by. I literally felt like a Peeping Tom<sup>6</sup>. No one else was being creepy.  
They were all looking down at their phones like normal people.

75 The only thing worse than waiting without a phone is being in the car without a phone, because driving is  
really just another form of waiting. Honestly, after this experience, I now know that everything in life is  
waiting. Like how I was waiting for the week to be over so I could wait through the rest of my life on my  
phone. Waiting in the car, however, is the only time your phone is there to make you smarter. The only  
80 brain cells I've ever accumulated I got from listening to *The Daily*<sup>7</sup> while sitting in traffic. But here I was  
listening to radio ads and anything but Ed Sheeran<sup>8</sup>. After a few drives I learned that the only way to listen  
to the radio and not jump out of your own vehicle is to trick yourself into believing "Birthday Sex" by  
Jeremih<sup>9</sup> is something you would voluntarily put on by jamming out to it as if it's your favorite song. Like  
fake-smiling to trick yourself into real happiness.

I usually look forward to having time to myself, but this was before I discovered that I get through all  
moments alone by texting someone until I'm no longer alone or I'm asleep. The hours of 8 to 11 that first  
night were so boring that I made sure to have a friend over every night for the rest of the week to entertain  
me. When your friend has a phone, it's kind of like you have a phone. And when you can't use an Amazon  
85 Alexa<sup>10</sup>, your friend can become an Amazon Alexa, because asking a friend questions is definitely a  
technology that existed before my birth. "Nicole, what is the weather tomorrow?" "Nicole, what is on your  
Instagram feed right now?" "Nicole, play 'Birthday Sex.'"

90 By Thursday, my mental fog had cleared. My headspace remained as miserable as it always is, but now I  
was able to pinpoint why: I'm in a bad mood because I spilled a smoothy all over the inside of my car. Not: I  
think the reason I'm in a bad mood is because I saw that an old high-school classmate started writing  
Instagram poetry.

95 When my detox was over, I manically scrolled through a week's worth of content until I got the "You're All  
Caught Up" message and felt sick to my stomach. The only thing I was caught up on was every person's  
take on something called the "broom challenge." Some things hadn't changed: "Which \_\_\_\_ are you?"  
filters were still going strong.

I decided I was going to keep the flip phone. I'd use it all day, every day, except for the hours of 8 to 11 P.M.  
And when I need a map. Or when I'm in the car. Or anytime I'm waiting. O.K., I will use it only when I want  
to look interesting. At the very least, I'm going to try to make my Explore page resemble that of a healthy  
person: puppies and interior design.

(2020)

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<sup>6</sup> *Peeping Tom*: a person who likes to watch people secretly

<sup>7</sup> *The Daily*: a news podcast by *The New York Times*

<sup>8</sup> *Ed Sheeran*: an English musician

<sup>9</sup> an American rapper and singer

<sup>10</sup> *Amazon Alexa*: a virtual personal assistant