

1-800 Will Run Our Lives

If you're doing summer vacationing via the automobile, you probably while away tedious hours on the interstate with radio entertainment, right?

Well, there's more than "easy listening" music on the radio menu these days. Have you noticed the staggering array of experts on every imaginable subject whose advice is now flooding the airwaves?

I spend a lot of time in the car at various hours of day and night, and I have discovered through the "news and talk" format of a Wilmington radio station that any problem, from the mundane to the crisis can be solved by strangers I can reach with a toll-free call.

It all began innocently enough with the call-in talk shows that depend for entertainment value on listeners calling to discuss whatever's on their minds.

This is pretty good therapy for lonely, home-bound souls who need someone to talk to, though it is not unusual for travelers like myself to stop at a phone booth and call in.

Discussions often deal with politics, foreign and domestic, and this kind of show gives opinionated folks a forum to let off steam. Probably it's a healthy way to vent one's spleen, better than yelling at the kids.

But now, around this folksy radio gabfest has grown up a whole battery of specialists who urge us to call them for advice ranging from car repairs to sex.

There's someone to monitor your gardening, a financial genius to steer you through insurance, real estate and business deals, psychologists who just want you to be happy, and psychiatrists and physicians, ready to probe body and soul.

Understand, now, that while some of these characters are introduced with great fanfare as Dr. So-and-so, there is no attempt to present their credentials. It's an extension of the human tendency to believe anything we read in a newspaper; we're also expected to trust anyone on the radio.

The more I've heard of these pseudo-consultations, the more bizarre it seems that an agonized woman would take the advice of Dr. Felicity Jones (not her real name) in handling a family fight, or that a man suffering kidney stones would follow Dr. Hugo Humphrey's dictums as to treatment.

Of course, the above-mentioned "doctors" frequently advise a trip to physicians and psychiatrists, thus getting themselves off the hook.

But they bravely tackle most problems presented to them. I've heard some pretty serious stuff handled by these radio experts (including sexual



Marjorie Megivern

matters that made me blush as I drove alone down the highway).

Also, I have noted the tone of adoration and respect with which callers speak to them. Why? What reason do these poor souls have to trust a radio doctor or psychologist or financial wizard? It is a little alarming to hear so many who are willing to put their lives into the hands of strangers about whom they know nothing at all.

I suppose it has something to do with economics. Here, in these inflationary times, when every service costs an arm and a leg, there are wonderful people handing out advice and help free of charge! You can

learn the remedy for your car's new rattle, find out how to start a business, get information about that chronic pain in your side, and know how to cure your teenager of lying, all with a twist of the dial and a phone call. And even the phone call's free!

Naivete aside, this is one more indication that we're getting out of touch with real people and face-to-face dialogue in our lives. We communicate through bumper stickers and t-shirts, bank via a machine, eat by means of a drive-through, and are entertained by television. Why not consign our problems, too, to faceless unknowns?

It's a far cry, isn't it, from the kindly old man who once came right to our bedside with healing in his touch? That was when "Doc" was a cherished friend, and so was Gus down at the garage. It was when family problems got discussed by the family and involved ordinary common sense. In today's impersonal world, we've replaced these real people with disembodied voices whom we trust to fix our bodies, our cars and our lives.

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