



OPINION:

How breaking my phone changed my life for the better

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BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY I've been trying to get off my phone for years. I've deleted Instagram more times than I can count. I've set strict time limits on all my apps. Once, in a desperate attempt, I even made my screen black and white to make it less enjoyable to look at. But nothing was working; I couldn't escape the doom scroll. I was left with no other option—I had to get a flip phone.

I was sick of the late hours I spent scrolling, filling my brain with useless information about the girls from my high school getting engaged and memes that were only funny if you understood four other specific references from 2019.

I was sick of my books gathering dust on my bedside table, sick of the constant

stimulation, the bleary eyes, the wasted time. I was scared of the habits I had formed. I couldn't sit with boredom anymore. Couldn't sit with silence, through stillness. Couldn't even sit on the toilet without consuming some form of media. A recent survey revealed that Gen Z spends a daily average of six and a half hours on their phones. This statistic was almost my final straw.

My actual final straw was my iPhone 12, which I found mysteriously broken one fateful morning after a particularly confusing Friday night. I took the green flashing screen as an omen. Before I could consider the full extent of my decision, I found myself inside Best Buy. I discussed my options with an employee who assured

me all I needed to do was switch out my SIM card.

Within ten minutes, the flashy Nokia 2780 was mine.

This particular flip phone promised quality calls, texts, a back-facing camera, and a simple array of applications. Calculator, clock, notes, the weather, even Whack-a-Mole—a classic arcade game where you literally just press keys 1-9 to whack a mole with a mallet. I'm sure it's nostalgic for many. "Anything else is an indulgence," I told myself. Any other apps and I'd be right back to where I started. This would do just fine.

With every great adventure in life, you must seek guidance from those wiser. So I sought out two flip phone experts—Dasha Tarelkine and Jameson Butler—to provide words of encouragement. Butler is the co-founder of the Luddite club, a Brooklyn-based club where the only rule is no smartphones at meetings. Tarelkine leads the Santa Barbara Luddite chapter. The club's aims are to spend less time on our phones, fostering community and creativity in the process. If you're reading this, you're officially invited to attend UCSB's very own Luddite club, launching as we speak. Jameson and Dasha would love to see you.

The words we exchanged would serve as a guiding light, illuminating my path throughout this new chapter of my life.

Day 1

I won't sugarcoat it. Day 1 was hard. Mainly for logistical reasons, but probably also emotional reasons. Let me paint a picture:

I'd just sat down at Old Town Coffee to fulfill my Sunday homework quota. Imagine a delightfully crisp cold brew on hand, sun beams flickering through the windows, and Canvas opened in front of me. And then BOOM—the Duo Mobile page flashes on my screen

and a horrible realization dawns on me. I can't do my homework without being dually authenticated.

I attempted to call the customer service number, only to find I was not within business hours. I wrestled with these thoughts, clicking on suspicious websites, calling random numbers, searching futilely for a solution. Defeated, I begged my professor for an extension via email and resorted to calling Duo Mobile first thing Monday morning.

I drove home listening to 103.3 FM on the radio, half Top Hits, half static. But I missed the freedom of my own music. Today was simply part of the adjustment period, I assured myself.

Day 6

Almost a week in. I've acquired a Duo Mobile hard token, a small object that flashes a code whenever I require dual authentication. I've created contacts, set a cute wallpaper, and learned how to type. Things are looking up!



The most striking change in my life so far has been all the time I have gotten back. All those liminal moments that used to be devoted to my phone—waiting for the bus stop, sprawling on the Arbor lawn in between classes, lying in bed before going to sleep—are now moments I get for myself.

“Your time is being taken away from you by these addictive algorithms,” Butler said. “We are being stripped of our agency!”

This phrase stuck out to me, reverberated in my head. It was true. Being addicted to my phone made me feel like I didn’t have control over the way I spent my time. I was on my phone all the time, and most of the time I didn’t even know why.

“The infinite scroll directly commodifies our attention spans,” Tarelkine said. It’s just like a drug; our reward systems are getting hijacked by algorithms. I felt I had become somewhat of a boring person. What were my hobbies? When was the last time I created something? I felt like my time was always slipping away from me.

But this week I made French onion soup. I finished my book and found another one at Paperback Alley. I went surfing and practiced roller skating tricks with my best friend. I strolled through the forest and snapped film pictures of bright-orange nasturtium flowers dappled with sunlight.

Best of all, I can hear myself think. My head feels quieter; there is less internal clutter. And what a great sense of peace this has all given me.



NOTE TO SELF:

**Don't forget
your wallet!**



Day 12

I keep forgetting to pack my wallet in my school bag. Today, I really wanted a slice of pizza from the Woodstock’s on campus, but after fishing around my bag for a few minutes, I realized I had no way to pay for it. I trudged back up to the 8th floor of the library, stomach growling. Apple Pay dependence is real!

Update from later: This will happen to you over and over again. And your friends will get sick of covering for you.

Day 17

Today I got lost on my way to work. I took a wrong turn trying to find the freeway, and all of a sudden, I was going east instead of south, driving through a neighborhood I did not recognize, and I was supposed to be at work in 17 minutes.

Anxiety seeping into my bones, I took various lefts and rights. “Damn this flip phone!” I thought to myself. “Useless piece of sh*t!” Usually, I’d pull up Google Maps and sort out the problem immediately. Stress morphed into frustration, which morphed into desperation, and then Jameson’s voice wandered into my head.



"We're treating this world like it's something to be mitigated rather than experienced," she said. "It's important to feel the resistance of the Earth as we move through it."

As in, maybe everything shouldn't be so effortless. As in, maybe I needed to get lost so I could finally construct a map of Goleta in my head instead of relying on a digitalized version of it. As in, perhaps facing these hurdles can add more meaning to our lives.

At that moment, I remembered how my iPhone had made my life so easy. And then—with luck, with effort, and a bit of patience—I found the freeway entrance. I merged, heading south finally, realizing that I could figure it out all along.

Day 23

Things I miss about my iPhone:

1. Music, music, music, music. Every song at the tip of my fingers, whenever I want.
2. APPLE PAY! This one is just incredibly convenient.
3. Fast texting. Every day I'm faster, but it's still a drag.
4. Scanning QR codes. There truly is no replacement for this one.

Day 35

Over a month in, and my relationship to my phone has completely shifted. My iPhone used to be an emotional clutch, an extension of me. Now my

Nokia is just a simple communication tool, with no power to change my psychological state.

This morning I woke up and got ready for school. I brushed my teeth and made breakfast, and my mind felt quiet. I drank my coffee while staring at the living room wall. I biked to class, hearing the sounds of Isla Vista unmasked by my headphones. I heard the birds chirping, a motorcycle revving, and the businesses opening their doors. I was there for all of it.

"I became a better human." Butler's voice echoed in my mind. "I'm better at being human because I spend more time being human—because I'm not on my phone."

Parting words? I'll be keeping my Nokia 2780 for as long as I can. Things aren't so easy anymore; after all, we don't live in a flip phone world. But my brain feels better, and life feels sweeter. Everything will be fine as long as I don't have to scan a giant QR code in a lecture hall to get participation credit. **w**

