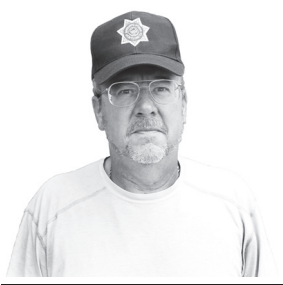
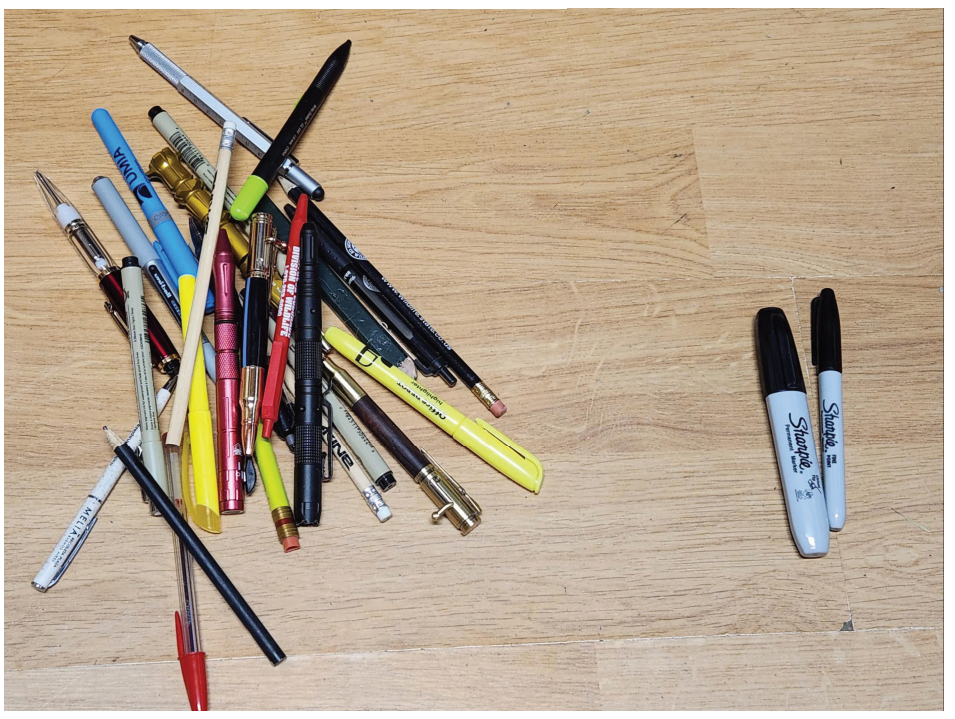
Dead forms of communication



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



With computers, cell phones, email, and iPads, even writing instruments like these are becoming obsolete. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

During my elementary school years, I served a two-year sentence in a Catholic School. My least favorite class was Latin. Latin is a dead language, and the Nun who taught the class harangued me as though I was the one who killed it. I had enough trouble with English, and the last thing I needed, was to learn a language that died, probably of natural causes.

There are some 7,200 languages spoken throughout the world. About 90% of them are used by less than 100,000 people. I thought I was doing pretty good with English, and a little bit of Polish, Shona, Spanish, and Swahili, but I have a long ways to go. As for dead languages, the number of fully extinct ones now number at 573.

The same can be said about other forms of communication, especially among some of the forms used in rescue and the outdoor world. Several forms of signaling and communication that were once common have become obsolete due to advancements in technology.

For example, there once were individuals called town criers, who carried a bell or placard, and announced news, emergencies, and general information in a town square. Anyone running around town like that today is probably going to be looked at with great suspicion and probably wind up in a police car.

Before town criers, there were cultures that used drums for communicating with distant tribes, or even their own tribe, over vast areas. Drumming would also signal events, messages, and even warnings, over distances.

One device that saw prominent military use during the 1800s was the heliograph. By redirecting beams of sunlight at distant points using mirrors and a keying system to interrupt the signal, flashes corresponding to the Morse Code could be sent at up to 15 words per minute. Downed flyers during WWII used them to signal their position to rescuers. The U.S. Forest Service also used the system in remote lookout stations to relay wildfire reports.

Morse Code, used with the heliograph, was invented by Samuel Morse and Alfred Vail in the 1830's. It was used to transmit messages over long distances using telegraph lines. The form, known as the International Morse Code, was adopted in 1865. The code assigns unique combinations of dots and dashes to letters, numbers, and punctuation marks. These can be transmitted through use of flashing light also.

Everyone can probably remember watching Westerns on television, and the town sheriff checking in for messages at the local telegraph office, and the impending doom when the telegraph wires were cut by the stage robbers.

The Morse Code played a crucial role during WWII, especially in the Navy. Code was the preferred method, especially using signal lights, for ships in a convoy to communicate with each other while observing radio silence. It is still used and taught, to a certain extent, in today's military, especially the Navy. HAM radio operators use Morse Code to communicate with HAM operators around the world, so Morse Code is not dead yet.

I learned Morse Code back in the late 60s but have forgot much of it from nonuse. There are flashlights that are sold to outdoor folks that have a mode that uses Morse Code. When that mode is selected, the light will flash SOS in code until the battery runs out. This is only useful if the person on the receiving end knows that flash is SOS in Morse Code.

The Semaphore Flag signaling system is another form of communication, once popular in outdoor circles, that has gone by the wayside. The semaphore tower was first implemented in 1792 at 556 stations over France for the primary source of communication for military and national applications.

The design of the structure had two large towers with a single crossbar between them on which there were two pivoting arms. The combination of positions between the crossbars and arms equaled 196 characters. Those characters could be combined to create thousands of codes.

Semaphore eventually found its way to the Navy and was used there for hundreds of years. The signaler used smaller flags in his hands and could deliver messages to other ships. The downfall to the system was that it offered no secrecy, and it was invisible at night or in fog or heavy rains.

I remember learning it back in the 1960s in several survival manuals. The Boy Scouts also taught it to scouts as a method of signaling and was required for achieving certain ranks. I found it very difficult to learn all those arm positions, and whenever you made a mistake, there was a wave-off you had to give to start over. I was so bad at it that I looked like a drunk Pterodactyl trying to fly backwards. Another problem was finding someone who could read the signal as fast as the person could send it. It is still in use in the U.S. Navy now, but I will be glad to see it finally go away.

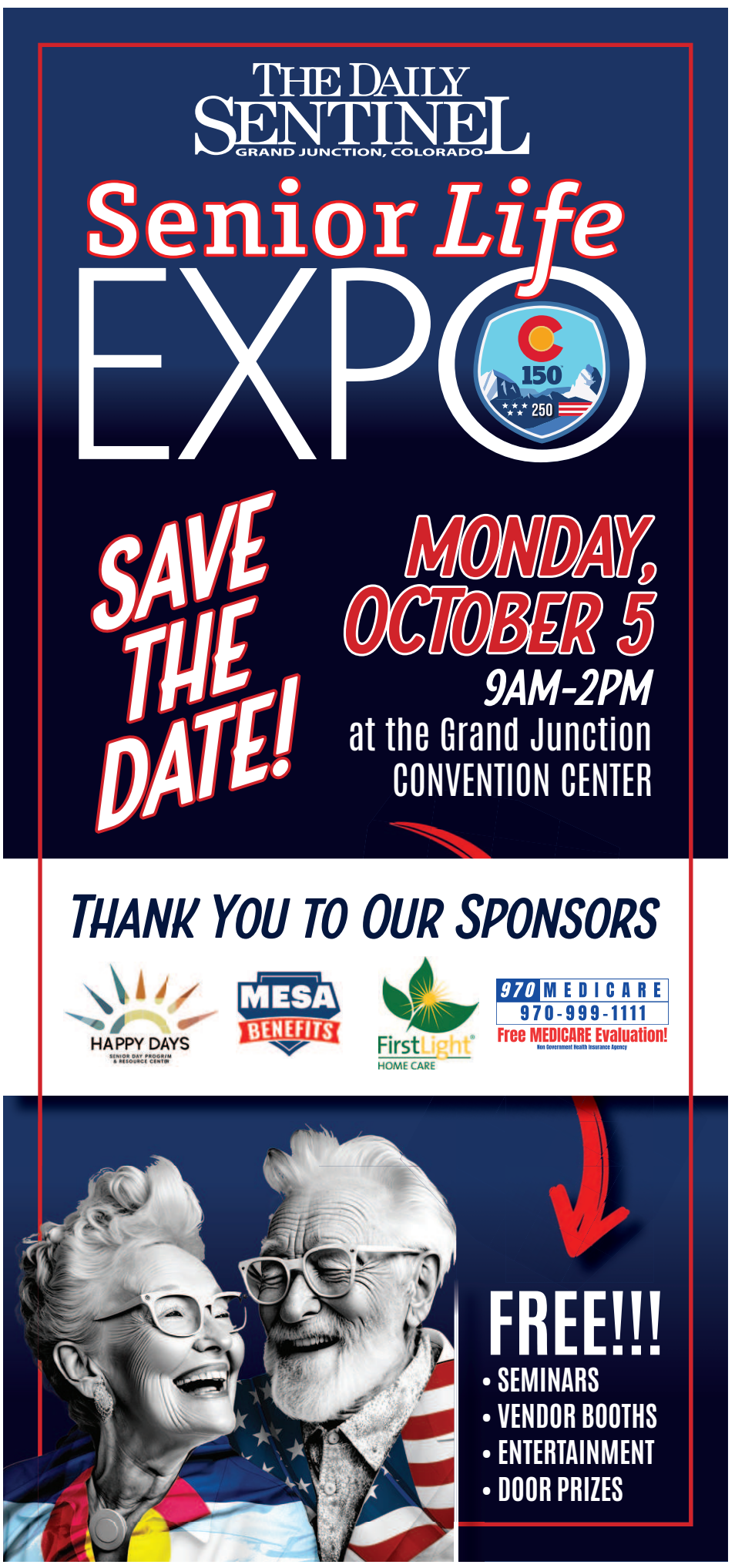
Somewhere in my book collection, I have a survival manual that teaches how to use smoke signals when you are lost, and how to build them in a line of three separate fires, the smokier the better, for being seen by search and rescue people. There is a good use for that today, but with all the fire bans and red flag days, a lost person is probably more likely to cause a million-acre forest fire than to get the attention of rescuers.

Many of us grew up with a rotary phone in our home. Ours was a party line, and there were some eight other households that shared the same line. You had to make sure nobody else was talking when you needed to make a call. That has gone by the wayside and now everyone carries a cell phone.

The newer cell phones are currently testing a satellite phone feature. When you are in an area without cell service, the phone will automatically connect with a satellite so you can complete the call. The call will come with a cost, so at least for now, it is best to save the feature for emergencies.

As hard as those Nuns were on me, I still remember some of that Latin they tried to teach me. I wound up using it some during my days in the legal business. Latin might not be completely dead yet, but I am ready for it to go.

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What in the world happened to my produce?



Gardening From A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

I don't know about your garden, but I think this was an extremely difficult year for growing. We had such a warm early spring. Then we got hit with cold temperatures. Then it got hot, dry, and windy. And when that horrid smoke rolled in it wasn't a lot of fun to be in the garden. But regardless, we gardeners are tough and managed to power through.

I have to say that my garlic was one of the best crops that I've ever grown! I planted it last fall and it sprung up in the spring and thrived. I was off to such a good start. I thought it was going to be the best year ever. Then reality hit and much to my chagrin it was the only thing that really did well this year. I'm going to blame my garden problems on the weather. Why not?

When I get together with my gardening friends the conversation usually goes something like, "my green beans really did well this year" or "my carrots didn't do anything this year". It's kind of funny, but I don't think I remember anyone ever saying "the entire garden did fantastic". Most times, what didn't do so well this year may do great next year. Nonetheless, most of us blame the seed company and move on assured it that it wasn't anything that we may have done wrong. This year I'm going to blame the weather.

Since tomatoes are the most popular backyard vegetable that gardeners grow, it makes sense that they're the crop that we see the most problems with. Right now many people's tomato plants are struggling from cracks that may have been caused by the hot growing conditions, over-watering or too much nitrogen.

If you find, or found, your tomato plant leaves yellow, rolling upwards, with tan spots and purple veins, it could be a disease called curly top virus (CTV). It was a pretty common problem with tomatoes this year. This virus is usually transmitted to the plant by a beet leafhopper. If you have Russian thistle (tumbleweeds) or mustard weeds nearby, the hoppers may have moved from the weeds to your tomatoes, and even to your peppers. This is a serious virus because there's no cure for it. I'm sorry to say, but the only thing you can do if the plant has the virus is pull it up and throw it away. Cover your crops next spring with a floating row cover to prevent leafhoppers from moving to your plants.

Fusarium wilt. This disease begins with the older leaves turning yellow, wilting, then turning brown or black and eventually dying. The disease gets into the vascular system of the plant. So if your plant shows little to no signs of hope you could pull it up and carefully slice the stem open and check for brown streaking. If you see brown streaks look for plants that are disease resistant indicated by an F on the tag when you buy seeds or tomato starts next spring. The disease will remain in the soil so plant something different in that area next year. This disease is often confused with drought stress but the streaks in the stems are a dead giveaway. (Pun intended)

It's best to throw any produce with disease or virus into the trash, rather

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