

## Phone Pests Get Stung

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The day of the anonymous harassing phone call by kids has passed. Ten or 15 years ago, if some kids chose to harass you, calling you repeatedly, there was almost nothing you could do about it. The phone company had a cumbersome, complicated procedure. It included keeping logs. It depended on a persistent pattern of calls, over and over again. Logging was almost more trouble than the calls themselves.

It happened to my family. As I learned later, it involved something I had written in a column. I don't expect everyone to agree with me. If the kids had called to discuss or disagree, I would have been happy to exchange ideas. Instead they harassed. The phone company helped, though reluctantly. I could understand the reluctance. The procedure was so awkward and cost them so much they probably wished it, and I, would go away. Police got involved. When we finally tracked down the culprits they turned out to be five neighborhood boys. I talked to one of the mothers. Her son was an angel. She offered no slightest regret or apology. She seemed to think I owed her son an apology. After all, if I hadn't persisted in getting my phone tapped, her son wouldn't have had to explain himself to the police. My other neighbor offered no apology or explanation. I never learned who the other three boys were. The calls stopped, but that was the end of it. The whole experience was frustrating.

Today kids are unlikely to get into a habit of harassing with the phone for one reason. Call Return. For \$3.50 a month, or less, you can harass the little darlings right back. If you get one of those calls with silence or giggling on the other end, simply hang up, press "Star" and 69, and you are calling them. From that point I leave it to your creative imagination. Don't swear, scream or threaten bodily harm. They might report you to the phone company or the police. But your demonstration might scare them. Or you could pretend to be a national TV rating firm. Ask them their opinions on the latest MTV offerings. Offer prizes in return for name and address. A complaint to your favorite police officer might then be in order, provided the calls had been repeated or obscene.

The beauty of Call Return! Everyone need not have it to stop most nasty phone calls. The knowledge it exists is enough. One return call by one victim will likely stop calls to many potential victims. Phone harassers spread themselves around. Call Return places a simple defensive weapon in the hands of those who, up to now, have been frustrated.

Happy as I am with Call Return, I am equally pleased that Caller ID has been stopped by the PUC. Caller ID, combined with a computer, puts your credit history or your life history in front of the store clerk you just called. In a time when personal privacy is eroding rapidly, Call Return steps up to the border. Caller ID goes over the line.