



December 2006

zoom

in on america

A Monthly Publication of the USA Mission to Poland. Warsaw • Krakow • Poznan

Volume III. Issue 32.

TECHNOLOGY & FRIENDSHIP



Imagine a world without the internet, computers, mobile phones, planes, cars and trains; a world without e-mail or even snail mail. How many friends could we have on a planet inhabited by a sheep, a single rose, The Little Prince and shoots of evil baobabs, which

need to be destroyed anyway ("The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint Exupery)?



The history of humankind is long, yet the history of friendship outside man's closest surroundings is comparatively short. This is by no means to say that before the invention of the wheel people were immobile creatures restricted to the place of their birth.



Quite to the contrary. Migrations were not unknown to *Homo erectus*, who walked out of Africa some one million years ago. However, prehistoric as well as later migrations had to do more with a wish for expansion

and economic improvement than with discovering the world or meeting other people.

That is not to say that friendship must go beyond the boundaries of our closest surroundings. Though little is known of feelings and emotions of our early ancestors, it is not difficult to believe that they cherished trust and devotion in a friend in the same way as we do today.



Finally, a claim that true friendship depends on some sophisticated means of communication would be pure nonsense. It is enough to read ancient Greek epic poems or dramas to see that no stone was left unturned in order to help a friend who was in trouble.

The December issue of 'Zoom in on America'

focuses on the relationship between friendship and technology. Without aiming at defining the former or exploring the intricacies of the latter, we are going to look at the history of some of the inventions that seem to have helped develop ties between people and see how technology helps or hinders these ties.

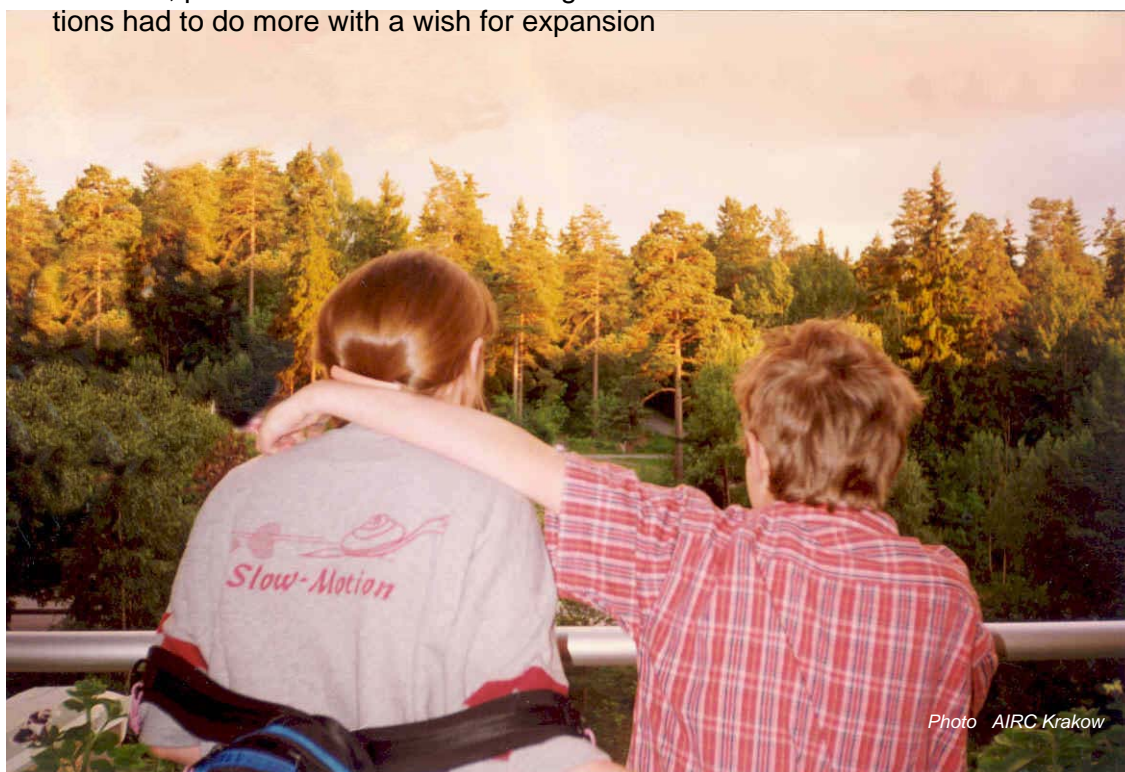


Photo AIRC Krakow

Text by AIRC Krakow

Rolling along the way of progress

Consider the **wheel**, which is commonly considered to be one of the most important inventions of all time. It was first used in Sumer in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) as a potter's wheel about 5,000 BC. In



The Bronocice pot was made between 3491-3060 BC. The motif of a four-wheeled cart is repeated five times on the vase and alternates with a tree and, possibly, houses and fields

Photo courtesy of professor Janusz Kruk of the Polish Academy of Sciences

Bronocice, a small place in Poland, archaeologists found a pot on which the oldest known four-wheeled vehicle is depicted. It took humans more than five thousand years to successfully weave a much improved version of this ingenious invention into a complex, self-propelled piece of machinery called a **car**. But since the first car was invented in 1885 (please

note it was 'just' 121 years ago), the progress in transportation gathered an unparalleled momentum. It is true that **steam engines** had been on the rails for more than fifty years before and **bicycles**



Classic Model T Ford vehicles parade down a road in Park Rapids, Minn., July 19, 1999. Henry Ford delivered the first Model T on Oct. 1, 1908. The four models ranged in price from \$825 to \$1,000.

Photo ©AP Images

had been on the roads and even the first **flying machines** had taken off, but with the advent of the mass production of cars humankind entered a completely new era of moving around the globe.

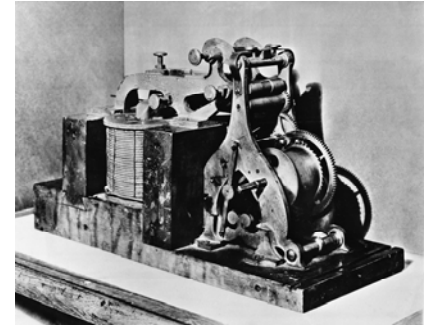
Never too far

The development in transportation influenced the social sphere of man's life as much as it changed the world's economy. Fears that the speed of forty kilometres per hour might have a bad effect on our health soon gave way to appreciation for travelling fast. After driving home from work and doing errands along the way, people now used the car as a tool for socializing. They were now able to visit friends near and far. With the advent of jumbo jets in the 1970s, people were able to visit far away friends in record time.

Words can travel

"That's not that easy," some will say. Air tickets cost money and gas prices are going up. And we have more and more to do, to see, to read and we have less and less free time... Perfectly true. And it's not a new issue, either. Let's go back in time

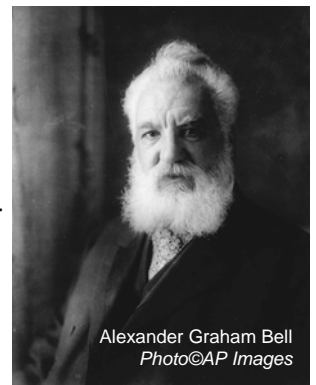
again. Instead of travelling all the way from Washington to Baltimore (40 miles) Samuel Morse, an American professor of arts and design and the inventor of Morse Code, sends words encrypted in dots and dashes along a single wire. The year is 1844 and friends who live far away from each other do not need to wait for the snail, or should we say, horse or steam engine mail to have a scented envelope delivered to their doors. A little more than ten years later this prototype of the present **fax machine** will receive the message in the form of a punched tape, which will be 'translated' by a machine into a readable text.



The first telegraph Photo ©AP Images

Right invention at the right time

The greatest invention in the field of distance communication - the **phone** - is connected with the name of a Scottish inventor who emigrated to Canada - Alexander Graham Bell. The 1876 invention proved its immediate usefulness to its inventor at the time of testing. The great man accidentally spilled some acid from a battery on his trousers. He cried into the receiver: "Mr Watson, come here. I want you." Countless times since then, the telephone and now the **mobile phone** have gotten us help and assistance in time of need. And as for friends, the phone has been an invaluable means of keeping up-to-date on how they are doing. Alexander Bell may be cursed by some who, looking at their phone bill, discover that their spouse or children are in fact much more talkative than they appear over the dinner table at home, but he is praised and blessed by the majority.



Alexander Graham Bell Photo ©AP Images

Wherever, whenever

At the beginning some of us were annoyed passing absent-minded looking individuals in the street with little antennas sticking out of their hair talking loud to themselves, as it were. Now blue glittering, flickering 'teeth' in the ears of passers by are a standard. We're using our mobiles on the train, tube, bus, in shops, on ...



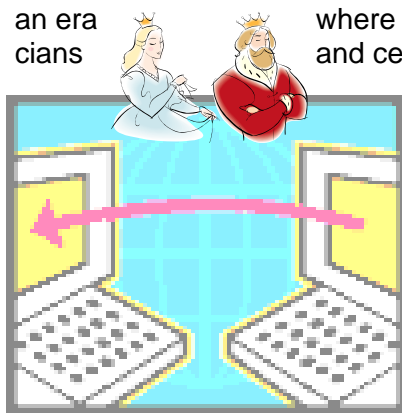
Nick Rodrigues of Boston wears one of his art creations as he talks on a cell phone Photo © AP Images

Where in fact are we not using them? On the plane, but this, too (as can be seen from TV commercials of some airlines), is changing.

Technological revolution

Its Highness COMPUTER entered our households to take complete control over our free, as well as not so free, time. The computer revolutionized our life. The whole world opened up for us at a magic click of a magic mouse. We held our breath and watched in amazement at first, but our new sovereign soon invited us to take an active part in its rule.

From passive observers we have evolved into active creators. Web 2.0 offers countless opportunities for tech savvy people to express themselves online to a worldwide audience. We have entered an era



where not only stars, politicians and celebrities, but all of us can have our own fifteen minutes of world fame.

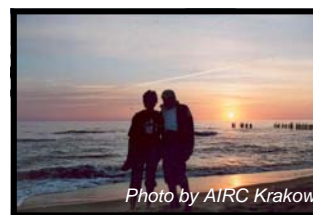
Anyone who has access to the internet can now create a web site, write a blog, display photos, upload videos, and rate products

and services through online rating systems. We use more and more online social and professional networking sites, such as My Space, LinkedIn and Friendster. It has never been easier to meet new

people, make friends, exchange opinions, get help or advice in professional matters, see the world, and shop. At the same time, however, it has become more difficult to verify the information that flows to us through all channels, tell precious stones from imitations and check the real value of internet friendship.

Same Old Quest

In one of the most beautiful passages I have ever read about friendship, which you can find in the pages of "The Little Prince", Antoine de Saint Exupery puts these words into the mouth of the Fox: "Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend, tame me... ." Remembering that by 'taming' the fox means 'establishing bonds', we should now ask a question: "Is the new, splendid and breathtaking technology giving us an opportunity to come closer and deeper to the nature of friendship?" There is no answer yet, I guess. Technologies are only a tool in human hands. What we do with them is up to us.



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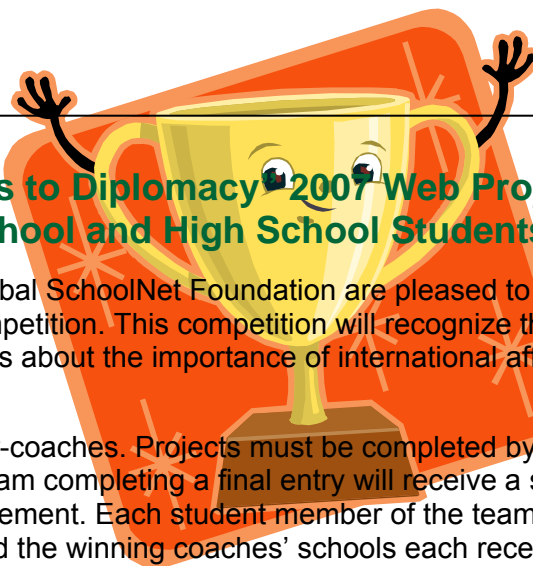
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CONTESTS



■ State Department Announces “Doors to Diplomacy” 2007 Web Project Competition for Middle School and High School Students



The U.S. Department of State and the Global SchoolNet Foundation are pleased to announce the 2007 "Doors to Diplomacy" award competition. This competition will recognize the student-created web projects that best teach others about the importance of international affairs and diplomacy.

Students work in small teams with teacher-coaches. Projects must be completed by **March 15, 2007**. Winners will be announced in May 2007. Every team completing a final entry will receive a special "Doors to Diplomacy" certificate recognizing their achievement. Each student member of the team winning the "Doors to Diplomacy" receives a \$2,000 scholarship, and the winning coaches' schools each receive a \$500 cash award.

For a complete description and information about eligibility and judging criteria, visit <http://www.globalschoolnet.org/GSH/doors/index.html>.

■ Zoom Cover Pages 2006 — Please have a look and decide about your favorite one

This time the Zoom contest is a special one. Please let us know which Zoom cover pages from 2006 you liked best and send your answers to zoom@usinfo.pl. Beautiful books on American nature are waiting for three winners. Deadline: January 8th.

The full list of titles and images are on:
<http://www.usinfo.pl/zoom/past2006.html>



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■ Something for our younger colleagues, sisters or brothers KIDS PAGE !!!

We are pleased to announce the newest addition to the Embassy's website – a Kids Page. The Kids Page is designed as an avenue for youth to obtain information about the U.S. Embassy and American government, society and culture. The page includes interactive games and puzzles as well as links to educational web pages for youth.



Please have a look at
<http://www.usinfo.pl/kids/>

Help us develop the site by taking our survey: <http://www.usinfo.pl/kquestionariusz/>

Win a Prize!

Answer to "Win a Prize" in the November 2006 issue is "New Orleans". Congratulations to the winners of November contest: Małgorzata from Krakow, Wiktor from Warszawa and Renata from Częstochowa. Book prizes will be sent to you by mail. This month we send special gifts - calendars for 2007- to our faithful readers: Maya and Sebastian.