**6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more? [New]**

The Bell System, known as Ma Bell to many, was the telephone system ran by American Telephone and Telegraph from the days of Alexander Graham Bell to January 8th, 1982 when the Supreme court ordered the breakup of the Bell System under the antitrust laws.

The idea that communications skyrocketed from coast to coast because of Alexander Graham Bell’s invention fascinates me. I remember reading Wikipedia pages when I was 16 and realizing that it was 11 pm by the time I stopped. I watched many old Bell System information reels on YouTube and thought about all the different components of the telephone, and the amount of progress that we have made in the last 50 years.

One of my many fascinations with the Bell System is the subject of operators. Operators were mostly used in the early days of the Bell System and were continued to be used until the early 90’s. Hearing a human voice on the other end of the line seems unreal to someone who is my age. The fact that a human connected the call instead of simply pressing a bunch of numbers into a cell phone is much different than seventy years ago. To see that we have made such a leap in this aspect of communications is rather surprising, given that operators were used as recently as thirty years ago.

The sounds of the Bell System also interest me. Every area had its own sound up until the late 80’s. A person dialing in New York would hear different noises on the phone line than someone dialing in a small rural area. The amount of different technology in each area was so different that different parts of the country progressed towards better communication at different rates. Larger cities were able to dial long distance whereas smaller areas still had party lines. Nowadays, depending on the type of phone a person has, the dial tone and call process all sound the same, and long distance calling is no longer an expensive issue. The progress of communication today has also allowed the majority of the country to be equipped with the newest technologies while very few areas lag behind. In this sense, it is easy to see that the progress of the Bell System has allowed people today to experience faster telephone use, and I believe that studying the Bell System allows me to understand how communication works today.

The Bell System continously captivates me as I dive deeper and deeper. The time and engineering that hundreds of people have put into the Bell System is astonishing. When people work together, the exchange of information is increased substantially which allows us to make progress in not only communication, but in other areas like engineering and technology.

Because not many people are interested in the Bell System, it is hard to find a person who knows as much as I would like to know. Lots of people can tell me their old phone numbers which included either two or three letters in the first group, but they cannot tell me about how central offices worked. As do many people when they are interested to learn more about a subject, I turn to the Internet for recordings of phone calls such as those made by Evan Doorbell, a man who spent hours on the telephone line recording the sounds of the telephones in different areas. The recordings give me an idea of what making a call sounded like back then. I am also planning on attending as many telephone events as possible in order to get a better understanding of how the Bell System worked. Without the Bell System, we’d still be stuck in the age of long distance calling being expensive.