



# **Party Line**

*the signal lives in darkness*

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2018 Review Edition

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# The Apology Line: Alan Bridge Appreciation

Allan Bridge ran The Apology Line from the mid-seventies until his death in 1995. The Apology Line is one of several inspirations for Futel.

The Apology Line was essentially built around a telephone number and an answering machine. After hearing an introduction, callers could leave a recorded apology for whatever they had done wrong, or also hear a curated digest of best apologies, released weekly. The digest would often become interactive as callers left comments on the apologies, with some discussions spanning months. Bridge lived in Manhattan and would put up flyers to publicize it.

I experienced it in the early nineties, after reading an article about it in a discarded magazine. This was during a period when I had access to free long-distance phone calls, and I called in to listen to every episode, and perhaps to apologize.

The Apology Line is inspiring because a simple implementation created a large community impact. It was built around a basic technology that was part of urban life - a phone line, an answering machine, and photocopied flyers with those little tear-off number tabs. The constraints of that interface made it accessible to millions of people. The reason behind making and using it was basic as well, a human connection that all people need but isn't available

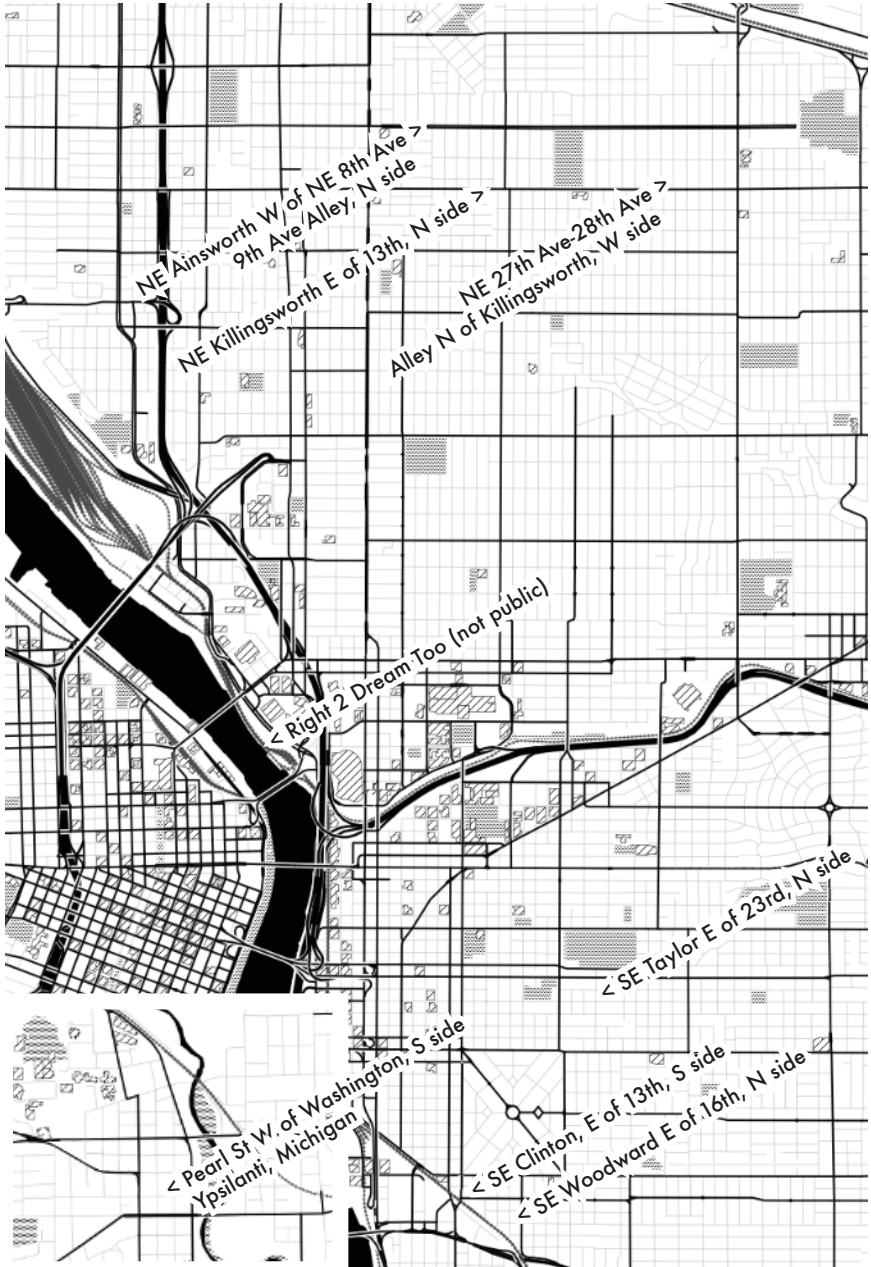
to everybody. Paradoxically, it was the very distance and anonymity of the medium that allowed the contributors to make an intimate connection.

The goal of Futel is to fill a similar role in creative communication. The foundation of the project is a simple one: to provide free telephone service to anyone, at any time. Fulfilling that requirement gives us the form factor of the payphone, an armored, weatherproof machine anchored to a solid object which can be left out on the street all night. Because the interface is the telephone, it is accessible to anybody with an ear, a mouth, and a finger. The natural habitat of our phones is the public, urban environment, not galleries or festivals. A Futel user does not need an account or even an identity, and doesn't need to be polite, washed, or in control of their emotions. If a user doesn't have a person to talk to, Futel can provide one.

Allan Bridge was killed while scuba diving by an unidentified jet-ski operator. His killer reportedly stopped and then left the scene. If so, they may still be carrying a heavy burden of guilt.

# Futel Service Map

Portland's Fastest-Growing Telecom Network



Map created with OpenStreetMap & Stamen's Toner tileset CC-BY-SA

# Year in Review

## **Wildcard Line episode 4 released**

Contribute to the Wildcard Line from any Futel phone!

## **Talks**

Futel staff brought the message to the people at Donut.js with “Futel: Telecommunications Colossus of the Modern Age”, at Teardown: Portland 2018 with “Futel: A Technology So Advanced We Leave It Out On The Street All Night”, with “Futel: The Payphone, Devolved” at The Circle Of HOPE, and with an interview on the Opposable Thumbs podcast.

## **Twilio.org Impact Corps Program Grant**

Futel’s operations have received support from the Twilio.org Impact Corps program. Thanks!

## **Party Line #3 published**

Find back issues of Party Line at Microcosm Publishing.

## **XXX Statistics XXX**

# 503-468-1337

# EXCLUSIVE LONGMONT POTION CASTLE EPISODES AVAILABLE FROM FUTEL PHONES



Futel is pleased to announce the release of exclusive Longmont Potion Castle recordings, available from any Futel phone! Select the "Longmont Potion Castle" option from the menu to immediately experience Longmont Potion Castle in the way it was meant to be experienced!



***STEP RIGHT UP FOLKS! THE  
ACCESSIBILITY OF THIS EXCLUSIVE  
CONTENT WON'T LAST FOREVER! THE  
CITIES WILL BURN ANY DAY NOW!***

***GET IT WHILE IT LASTS FROM ANY  
FUTEL PHONE! ONLY FROM FUTEL!***

# New Phones

NE Killingsworth Alley



NE Killingsworth St.



Landline Creative Labs  
Pearl St. in Ypsilanti



PAZ on SE Woodward





# 2018 Operator Log Excerpts

Seven operators logged over 83 calls in 2018, and as usual, they ranged from boring to exciting and amusing to annoying. Here is a sample of logged calls, with some sensitive and many less interesting examples removed.

**2018-01-08 15:36** Caller wanted to make a call. I told them to hang up and dial 1.

**2018-02-23 9:25** “I want to call, um, my father’s house.” “Do you know the number?” “Yes, it’s .....” “OK, hang up, dial 1, and call it.”

**2018-03-04 17:09** Caller refused to speak, pressed various buttons. I heard some voice mail recordings. Then I thought caller hung up, but no. I mentioned that they could make a call by hanging up and dialing 1. The line went dead.

**2018-03-07 17:09** Caller identified themselves as an operator with a voice-mail password but no account number, seeking a way to retrieve the associated account number. We decided that the unknown account should be abandoned. Caller was frustrated at the speed with which Futel computers read the password and account number. The call turned away from telephony and towards our complex relationship with permanence.

**2018-03-08 16:30** Caller wanted to know “the meaning” of the Futel

phone, and of the Fred Flintstones couch (sic) and loudspeaker next to it. I was able to describe the phone & summarize some Futel services. Deeper meaning was elusive. I encouraged caller to explore the menu system & call back with easier questions. Caller was very grateful, said Futel made caller’s day.

**2018-03-11 17:06** Caller had many questions re: this phone & Futel in general: who runs it, who am I, who are the other operators, are any of them women, how long has this phone been here, et cetera. I directed caller to the website & shared what trivia I knew. Caller lives nearby, expressed interest both in hosting a phone and in becoming a Futel operator. Caller is very happy to discover Futel. We agreed it is a lovely day today.

**2018-03-13 15:44** I answered & heard only touch tones. At first I



thought caller did not hear me. But I eventually realized caller answered each of my spoken questions with about as much touch tone pressing as I had used speech, and then waited for me to speak again. I got the impression caller did not actually need assistance. I encouraged them to call back when they did.

**2018-03-13 21:35** Caller told me that they finally found the phone and asked for a suggestion on what to try. I told them to call Sisyphus Gardens.

**2018-03-14 00:38** Caller asked for the time. Upon receiving the time and date, caller thanked Futel for our service.

**2018-03-26 16:20** Caller (a young person who gave the name of Taylor) wanted to know my name, what kind of phone this was, why it was there. Taylor thought phone was “cool”, but described the main menu voice as “creepy”. I encouraged Taylor to play around with the menu system, but I refused to give my name. Perhaps that was also creepy, but overall I felt we established a rapport and parted on good terms.

**2018-04-06 17:18** Caller asked if I remembered Taylor. When I said no, caller said, “ok. bye.” and hung up.

**2018-04-07 13:56** Caller said they wanted to make a call but decided to call the operator instead. We talked about Futel in general and she asked me how one would be “hired” by futel. I informed them that we do not hire people but we would love volunteers. Sent them to futel.net for more info.

**2018-04-18 20:22** Caller asked for advice. Advised caller to stay the course, keep chin up, exercise and eat vegetables.

**2018-04-21 12:55** Caller said they “wanted to know what all these messages were about”. I asked what messages they were referring to, they said nevermind and hung up.

**2018-05-08 20:44** Caller said hello, then I heard industrial music and maybe birds chirping? No response when I asked if they needed an operator, so I listened until they hung up..

**2018-05-23 09:05** Caller needed the phone number for People Ready in Hillsboro. Googled it.

**2018-05-31 20:39** Caller wanted the phone number of an individual, which I told them I was unable to look up. Well what can you look up? Well what do you want to find? Caller was able to provide a type of business and an

incorrect prefix of the number, allowing me to find the correct number in a popular search engine.

**2018-05-31 20:50** Caller was looking for an individual. Searching turned up a web page. I gave them the phone number listed on that page.

**2018-05-31 21:20** Provided the number for Multnomah County Pretrial Services.

**2018-05-31 21:25** Searched for a phone number for an individual.

**2018-06-01 7:59** Caller wanted the number for Multnomah County pretrial supervision, but decided that I was taking to long to find it and hung up.

**2018-06-01 15:39** Caller needed number for DHS, wanted to be transferred. Informed them that it was not possible for me to transfer them and gave them the number. They called back 1 minute later asking for it again because they forgot it.

**2018-06-05 09:55** Caller wanted to place a collect call. I informed them that all calls to the US and Canada are free. Caller was thankful and hung up to make a call.

**2018-06-06 18:42** Caller wanted to know if Futel was an “art project or a non-profit or what?” I told the caller that we are a non-profit that does telecom services and operates free telephones and puts art on them. The caller told me that they knew we had a website, and that they would look at it.

**2018-06-09 10:54** Caller requested

the local number for Ride to Care. Was able to provide that number.

**2018-06-09 14:19** Caller requested the local number for Tango Personals.

**2018-06-11 23:03** Caller requested the time. It was 11:03pm PST.

**2018-06-18 18:28** A child’s voice very quietly in the background: “Did it go off?” Then Ipanema.

**2018-06-18 18:28** A young caller asked an inappropriate question in a very bad attempt at a prank call. I informed the caller that Futel should only be used for good-natured pranks and hung up.

**2018-06-18 18:34** A child asked “Is this Pizza Hut?” I said yes and demanded a CC number, address and Social Security number. They hung up.

**2018-06-18 18:38** Same kid, different story. This time it was “I have projectile diarrhea. Can you help with that?”. No.



**2018-06-20 22:17** Caller told me they had been using the phone for a while and asked if I wanted to talk to their friend. I declined. Caller asked who they should call, I told them to call their mother.

**2018-06-25 20:42** Heard keypad buttons being pushed, then a child said hello and hung up when I responded.

**2018-07-15 12:45** Caller wanted the number for Rodeo Chat.

**2018-07-17 16:54** Caller wanted the incoming number to use for voicemail. Caller also asked what the other menu options did, I told them to try them out.

**2018-07-18 7:42** Two individual's passed the phone between them and each asked what Futel was, provided a short explanation.

**2018-08-06 13:30** Caller asked to be connected to Sissyphus Gardens, I told them to use the directory.

**2018-08-06 13:40** Caller asked for the number of the phone, I supplied it. Caller said they had a question about setting up voicemail, said something unintelligible, and hung up.

**2018-08-08 13:20** Caller wanted me to know they take limos, not cabs. They called back and requested some new releases from Hershey candies. I couldn't understand the requests.

**2018-08-08 13:40** Caller rambled semi-intelligibly about an air force base and sexual predators, asked if I was still there, and talked some more. They

ended with some kind of question, I replied I wanted to do what I could, they thanked me and hung up.

**2018-08-09 13:20** Caller was confused as to why they got me and not Pizza Hut. Caller hung up.

**2018-08-17 19:05** Caller asked for the number of an airline, but hung up before I could provide it. I called back, told caller they had hung up on me, heard their response, and hung up.

**2018-08-21 13:52** Caller was having

trouble dialing 211. I gave caller the full number for Oregon 211, 866-698-6155. Caller thanked me and hung up to dial.

**2018-08-24 18:45** Caller told me they were glad that the phone was working.

**2018-08-28 7:20** Caller wanted phone number for PeopleReady on Kelly avenue. Provided it.

**2018-08-28 21:15** After I introduced myself as an operator several

times, caller asked me what town I was operating in. I replied that it was not relevant and hung up.

**2018-08-29 4:37** Caller wanted the number for a hospital business center, which I provided.

**2018-08-30 11:24** Caller asked for an alternate 211 number, claiming that the menu option and dialing 211 from the dialtone didn't work. I gave them 866-698-6155.

**2018-09-01 13:51** Caller asked for

the nearest other Futel phone, I directed them to Taylor St.

**2018-09-01 20:38** Caller asked for the location of the Ainsworth phone.

**2018-09-05 8:43** "They say the cat's abandoned, is this the [mumble] hotline?"

**2018-09-05 15:23** Caller asked if I could look up a number, I said I could try. After some negotiation they said they wanted an insulation business in Washington. I replied that I could

search for that on the web. Caller was incredulous that I didn't have a listing, and asked me what happened to the yellow pages. I replied that I did not know. After a long and boring conversation about the regional nature of Futel, caller thanked me for my time and hung up.

**2018-09-08 13:20** Caller asked if this was Burger King, no the Coca-Cola company, and hung up when I replied that this was the Futel operator.

**2018-09-12 14:40** Caller asked for the number of the Department of Human Services food stamp office.

**2018-10-08 11:17** Caller asked for the number of a refillable credit card used for benefits, which I supplied.

**2018-10-08 17:06** Caller asked for the number of a bakery in Manzanita, which I supplied.

**2018-10-09 18:36** Caller asked how to place a call, I instructed them.

**2018-10-11 14:35** Child was playing with the phone.

**2018-10-13 18:01** Caller sought the number for Wilsonville Womens' Prison. I provided the number.

**2018-10-15 15:00** Caller said they "wanted to make a prank call". I acknowledged. Caller said a weak joke, I made a snarky reply and hung up.

**2018-11-01 11:04** Caller was seeking the Portland district attorney's office. I provided the number.

**2018-11-01 11:30** Caller who had previously called seeking the district attorney's office was now seeking a personal injury lawyer in a Portland suburb, but unsure of the spelling of their name. With search engine assistance I was able to identify the lawyer's name and number.

**2018-11-01 11:51** Caller wanted to thank Futel for our service, and had successfully reached their lawyer.

**2018-11-01 16:16** Caller asked for the number to Ride to Care. I supplied it and informed them that it was also in the directory.

**2018-11-18 11:54** Caller informed me that the Ypsi phone was fixed and had a new handset.

**2018-11-22 20:00** "I was wondering what this line was for." "You called the operator, do you need an operator?" "It depends on what this is for." "If you think of a reason, call back, maybe an operator can help you."

**2018-11-26 18:10** Callers had questions about what Futel was about and why. I explained aspects of Futel's ambitions for telephonic domination to several parties including impressionable youth.

**2018-11-29 10:09** Caller talked about the Israeli army and hung up mid-sentence.

**2018-12-03 09:39** Caller wanted to know who I was, I told them I was the operator. They didn't believe me at first. They said they were having all kinds of problems with the phone, were trying

to dial an 800 number. I told them hang up & dial 1 for outside line, etc.

**2018-12-12 12:05** Caller complained that their cellphone has been bolted to the ground.

**2018-12-12 20:00** Caller asked for a residential number, which I was unable to provide.

**2018-12-13 17:02** Caller asked for the number for Washington County Probation and Parole, which I provided.

**2018-12-23 09:29** Caller was seeking a nearby microwave to re-heat lunch. I informed caller that as a Portland resident I didn't have access to that information. Caller was understanding and wished me a merry Christmas.

**2018-12-23 11:41** Caller asked how to call Lance. I told them to hang up, enter 3 for the directory, and listen for his listing. Caller thanked me and hung up, after which I remembered that his listing was now "the Druid of Sisyphus Gardens".

# Support Futel!

Futel is made possible by volunteers and contributors, who we thank! Futel is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and contributions are tax deductible.

Support us by subscribing on Patreon, buying a T-shirt or button on Spreadshirt, buying Party Line issues 1-3 from Microcosm Publishing, or making a PayPal donation courtesy of Umbrella on our website.

Want to hack on Futel? See our repositories on Github. Creator of interactive audio art? We can help you implement your ideas in this exciting new format.

Dial 0 from any Futel phone, or speak to the operator at 503-468-1337, or email us at [operator@futel.net](mailto:operator@futel.net), or see our website at <http://futel.net>. Thanks to everyone who has supported Futel!

# Acknowledgements

## Operators

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At Futel, we believe in the preservation of public telephone hardware as a means of providing access to the agora for everybody, and toward that goal we are privileged to provide free domestic telephone calls, voicemail, and telephone-mediated services. We do not judge the motivations of our users, or who they choose to call; if they don't have someone to call, we can provide a presence on the other end. Denial of telephony services has long been a tactic used against undesirable populations, and our devices will counteract

## NO COIN NEEDED FOR ANY CALLS

that. But more importantly, we will help to establish a new era of communication, one in which reaching out is not only desirable, but mandatory. We are primarily driven by the basic needs that we see on the streets every day, by giving something away that is cheap for us but valuable to the recipient. But we hope that we can also build a tower of Babel on top of that, a monument of telephones and switching networks and cascading psychological structures which will give the community something else as well, something we may not appreciate until it has forever changed us.

503-468-1337



<http://futel.net>

## FREE CALL TO THE MAYOR OF PORTLAND

Redeemable for one free call to the Mayor of Portland. Redeem at any FUTEL phone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Expires Jan 1, 2084. FUTEL is not responsible for any unintended effects resulting from the use of telecommunications equipment. Unlimited use, valid if copied or transferred. Use code: **FUTELMAY**. This coupon has no cash value.

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