

Column

Each new year brings a new start and shining possibilities and therefore should be welcomed. At the same time, the turning of the calendar invites reflection.

To that end, I invite you to imagine a boat leaving the harbor and moving steadily farther and farther out. If you think about it, this scene mirrors life. With each passing year, the world into which we were born and knew as children recedes from our eyes and grows dimmer.

Recently, in a spare moment, I thought about things in my own life that have vanished as the boat has moved farther and farther from the shoreline. Three such items are:

Telephones with dials. I remember my grandmother teaching me how to make a call on one of those heavy, hard-rubber black instruments. She put my tiny finger into the slot of the desired number and instructed me to move the dial to the right, all the time cautioning me not to move it too quickly

lest I bumfuzzle the system and cause the call not to go through.

A few years ago, two young fellows showed up on my doorstep from the Watchtower Society. Of course, I was not interested in their heterodox views, but I did invite them in. No sooner than they were inside and began to look around, they spied one of my old black rotary phones. From that point on, they largely forgot about Jehovah, and we talked about my phones and other period appliances.

Coin-operated phones, the early ones likewise having dials, have likewise gone the way of the cuckoo bird. Not many years ago, they could be found almost everywhere, in grocery stores, filling stations, hotel lobbies and on street corners in enclosed boxes. Many fathers gave their daughters a nickel, dime or whatever the going rate at the time was when they went on a date . . . just in case they needed to call home. Today if you see a pay phone, it is an oddity.

Typewriters. From the time I was born up through my college years, these machines were

ubiquitous in the world of business and education. Some were manual, likely Underwood Standards in high school classrooms. Others were electric. These modern marvels made the typist's job easier and produced a more even impression on the page. It would have been inconceivable that a decade or so later these workhorse machines would have disappeared.

Televisions in wood cabinets. Some of these had other components as well, including a radio and a turntable. The latter were often referred to as entertainment centers. Fifteen or more years ago, I remember walking through the electronics section of a department store and realizing nothing looked familiar. Instead of roundish screens in a finished cabinet with protruding picture tubes in the rear, these were slim, square and much larger. I now understood how Rip Van Winkle felt when he awoke out of his 20-year sleep.

As we begin 2026, it is okay to reflect on from where we have come and even to wax nostalgic. We also do well to remember the brevity of life. “We bring our years to an end, as it were a tale that is

told,” says the psalmist (Psalm 90:9). In the case of the latter, reflecting on the shortness of life is an incentive to be about the Lord’s business with the rising of the sun each day.

But there is also a reason for confidence as our boat moves farther and farther from the point of origin. Tennyson captures this reason very well in his poem “Crossing the Bar,” when he concludes: “I hope to see my Pilot face to face When I have crost the bar.”

2026 is upon us. We are not where we started out, nor are we at our destination, but we are closer to that point than when we began. Take courage and go forward.

O Eternal Lord God, who hast brought thy servants to the beginning of another year: Pardon, we humbly beseech thee, our transgressions in the past and graciously abide with us all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (English

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