



Exploding The Phone

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Title **A Toll Thief's Tale**

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Abstract Open letter to individuals considering toll fraud by 19-year-old phone phreak. Tells his story and warns others not to engage in toll fraud including blue or black box fraud.

Keywords phone phreaks; blue box; Southwestern Bell (SBTCo); Ron Crainshaw (mgr SBTCo); black box; FBI

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The use of electronic devices to defraud telephone companies isn't new, but recent coinage of the term "Phone Phreaks" to describe people who commit these crimes has focused new attention on the problem.

The term usually refers to people who operate "blue boxes", electronic devices designed to place long distance calls and bypass telephone equipment which records billing information, according to Southwestern Bell Manager, Ron Crainshaw.

It costs the customer money because he's paying for the 'free ride' the person committing toll fraud is getting, and it could cost in terms of service quality because we're losing dollars we need to expand and improve telephone service.

Below, in his own words, is the story of an Oklahoma "Phone Phreak" who was caught and convicted. The open letter to others who might consider toll fraud was written by 19-year-old

who was studying for his masters degree when he was charged on four counts.

A Toll Thief's Tale

"To whom it may concern:

"I am, or was, a college student just like you. I have always been a good student. In fact, by the time I was 19 I had completed a five-year electrical engineering course and was one year into the master's program. School was easy for me and I had plenty of spare time. I had an inquisitive mind, and among other things I became interested in the telephone switching network. It occurred to me that with a little study, I could beat the system. That was my first mistake.

"I experimented until I developed a device commonly called a 'black box' which allowed me to receive free incoming Long Distance calls. From there I progressed to a 'blue box' which allowed me to place calls and never be billed. Throughout my experimentation I felt I was really putting something over on the telephone company. I talked to others around the country who were doing the same thing. We all thought we had a good thing going.

"Then it happened. A knock on my door and FBI agents with a search warrant confiscated my 'black box', 'blue box' and other equipment and records I had relating to my fraudulent phone activities. I was scared. The realization of what was happening left me completely shocked.

"I was not arrested, but I soon found out why; that was coming later.

"I was indicted by a Federal Grand Jury, arrested and put in jail because I couldn't make a \$5,000 bond.

"After 11 days in jail, my father was able to raise the money for my bond and I was released pending trial, but my troubles weren't over.

"I went through an arraignment before a federal judge and a trial date was set. I was frightened, confused and wondering how I could have gotten myself into all this trouble.

"I entered a plea of not guilty which I later changed to guilty. I knew I didn't have a chance.

"I was guilty and the case against me was overwhelming.

"I was still free on bond to await sentencing. It was a terrible time, not knowing if I would go to prison or just what would happen. Then six weeks later I was sentenced.

"I was lucky. I was sentenced to five years' probation. This means I cannot afford to get into any kind of trouble or I go to prison. I must report to a probation officer every month and I must have a job and keep it.

"I am writing this letter on the chance that my experience will prevent others from making the same mistake I did. Not only with electronic devices but by using fraudulent telephone company credit card numbers, placing calls and charging them to third numbers or any other type of fraud.

"I know it looks easy but you will get caught. Look at me. My college days are ruined at least for now. I have lost money on bond and other expenses. Plus the anxiety and fear. I hope you don't make the same mistake. I can only hope you value from my experience and don't do as I have done because I am sorry."

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I know it looks easy but you will be caught. Look at me. My college days are ruined at least for now. I have lost money on bond and other expenses. Plus the anxiety and fear. I hope you don't make the same mistake. I can only hope you value from my experience and don't do as I have done because I am sorry.