



# ***Exploding The Phone***

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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

**Title**            **Transcript of "Time for Youth"**

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**Abstract**        Transcript of radio interview with Joe Engressia. Engressia says it's about engineering and exploring design trade offs. Babe Howard of Millington says that Engressia should be in a lab inventing equipment. Mentions his arrest and suspended sentence.

**Keywords**      Joe Engressia; Millington; Babe Howard

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PROGRAM Transcript Of "Time For Youth"

STATION WCBS Radio

DATE October 10, 1971 10:55 a.m.

CITY New York

Steve Young: As long as there's been a phone company, there have been people trying to cheat it, often high school and college kids. And in recent years, a new phenomenon, the phone phreak. He's usually young, and his goal often is not so much to cheat Ma Bell as it is to outwit her.

Raised to the highest level of sophistication, phone phreaking involves the so-called "Blue Box." That's an electronic device which makes it possible not only to make free calls, but also to control the paths they take, even to establish complicated inter-city or inter-country conference calls. For example, collegiate phone phreaks have connected their phones at campuses in New York, California, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania with, say young people in Saigon. No charge to anybody except Ma Bell. The smarter ones can route a call from hypothetically, California to Moscow, through Berlin to New Delhi, London, and back to New York.

Perhaps the smartest is 22-year old Joe Engressia, the penultimate of phone phreaks until the police arrested him and he was almost thrown into prison.

Engressia: For me, at least, it's not really so much outwitting anybody, it's the know how it work. In other words, you know, why is it this way? Why do they do it? Why couldn't they do it some other way" And if they did do it some other way what would be the advantages, you know, is it purely economical or, you know, technical? In other words, I am more interested in the engineering aspects. I mean, you can only try to outwit them for so long, if you really, you know. Do all these things. If you're really illegal and against the law, it's only a short term thing. Sooner or later they're going to, you know, catch you.

Young: So you think that college kids, for instance, around the country who are fooling around with it, are fooling around with something really dangerous.

Engressia: Yeah, they're playing with jail, really, because this stuff is not something that, you know, that you might be able to get away with it for a while, but sooner or later, if they catch up with you it's prison. You know, it can be a federal offense and felony and all that that entails with the police record and everything, and you just have to decide, you know, when you're doing it, you have to realize that you are playing with fire.

Young: You, yourself, are blind...

Engressia: Yeah, I'm totally blind.

Young: ...and many phone phreaks apparently are. Why is that?  
I'd say a lot of blind people are lonely, and it's a door. In other words, it opens the world right into your little room that you're sitting in.

Young: Being blind has its compensations. Joe's hearing is extremely acute and he has perfect pitch. That was a valuable asset when he was a practicing phone phreak, considering that calls are routed with those little beep-like tones. Can you give me a thousand cycles?

Engressia: (whistles)

Young: Well, nothing happened. I guess that's not a magic frequency.

Engressia: No, it isn't. The only thing that will do anything is 2600 cycles.

Young: You just did it?

Engressia: Yeah, I just did 2600, right.

Young: You have perfect pitch?

Engressia: Well, within one percent accuracy. It's more accurate than like a three hundred dollar -- we have a three hundred dollar signal generator and my pitch is more accurate than that.

Young: After he was arrested the judge gave Joe a suspended sentence. And Babe Howard, President and owner of the Millington Tennessee Telephone Company gave Joe a job.

Babe Howard: Actually, the boy shouldn't be working. He should be inventing equipment. He shouldn't be maintaining it, which is what I have him doing. He's just trouble shooting. He's got too much brains to be wasted in a small company and in the maintenance field. He should be in somebody's lab inventing equipment.

Young: Jolin Engressia has become a celebrity of sorts since he was prominently mentioned in an esquire magazine article on phone phreaks, but so far, Bell Labs hasn't called.

Time For Youth, CBS News, I'm Steven Young.