

Exploding The Phone

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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title	I like to whistle up my friends long-distance
Date	1970-00-00
Author(s)	Glass, Ian
Abstract	Description of Joe Engressia and University of South Florida psychology Professor Harold Hawkins' investigations of his abilities.
Keywords	Joe Engressia; Harold Hawkins (Professor, University of South Florida); University of South Florida
Notes	Date unknown but after Joe's troubles with the police at USF. Article mentioned Joe as 20 years old, so date estimated as 1969-1970 from that.
Source	Alan Rubinstein

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I like to whistle up my friends long-distance

Joe Engressia never gets a wrong number. For this amazing blind boy has only to purse his lips to make a call anywhere in the world. And he's always smack on the dial

IAN GLASS REPORTS FROM MIAMI

EVEN as a boy, Joe Engressia could tell what denomination of coin had been flipped by its sound as it hit the floor. He could also tell in which year it had been minted by recognising the silver content.

Now the incredible sensitivity of 20-year-old Joe, who has been blind since birth, is being investigated by Psychology Professor Harold Hawkins, of the University of South Florida.

Joe's speciality is the telephone. He probably knows more about it than anybody since its inventor, Alexander Graham Bell.

When a phone rings, he can tell from which exchange it is coming. He can tell by the feel of the instrument what year it was made.

He knows how to make a free call to anywhere in the world. Given a couple of days of research, he reckons he could work out how to contact anybody — including President Nixon on his bedside phone or the Pentagon's highly-secret hot line.

FBI trouble

Said Dr. Hawkins: "I'm trying to find out what is the limit of Joe's skill and whether it is an inherent, undeveloped trait others could use."

Joe's talent landed him in trouble with the university and the FBI two years ago when he was temporarily suspended for making free long-

distance phone calls for his friend by imitating the dialling equipment.

He did it by whistling a sequence of tones into the mouthpiece. The long-distance relays reacted to the particular frequencies he made, for Joe has perfect pitch.

He can reproduce any sound frequency impeccably, no matter how long it has been since he heard it.

After Joe promised not to do so again the FBI ruled that no Federal statute had been violated and an astonished General Telephone Company offered him a job. But Joe turned it down, preferring to study for a degree in mathematics.

Built-in radar

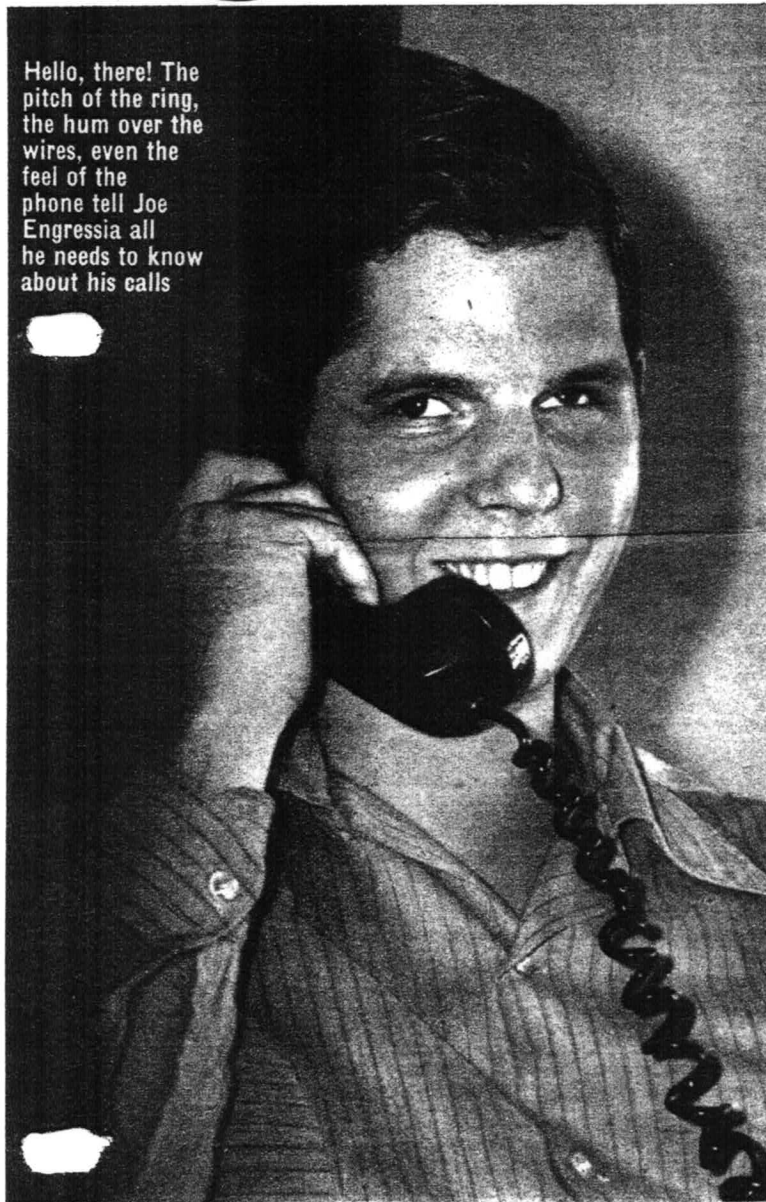
Joe said he discovered his talent when he was eight by accidentally whistling into the phone and cutting off the operator.

His blindness is of little handicap for he also has a built-in radar instinct which prevents him from bumping into things. He will board a bus by himself, go into the city and ask to be shown round the local telephone exchange.

Often he can warn phone company officials of impending problems in their equipment by listening to the electronic tones.

"I'm not trying to beat the system when I accidentally get an overseas phone call free," said Joe. "I'm just trying to learn and to help. Eventually, I'd like to start my own phone company."

Then he was off to keep a promise to a friend that he would balance his stereo equipment.

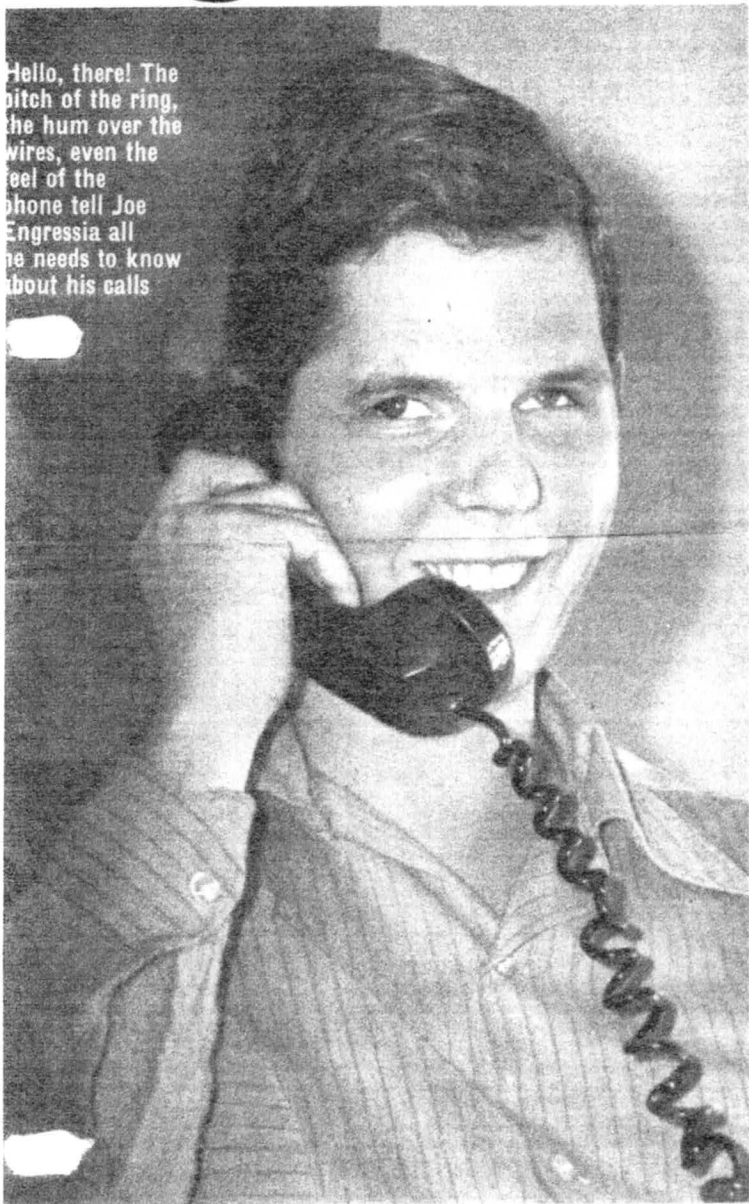


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