

Rachel LaBarbera recorded and shared her Wisconsin turkey hunting success via her pink Blackberry smartphone and social media.

iPhone, iPad, iSurrender

TECHNOLOGY ON A TURKEY HUNT.

Story and photos by Mark LaBarbera

Like other Wisconsin hunters who have more adventures behind us than ahead of us, I cherish time afield more than ever, especially when my only child, Rachel, now in her 20s, is at my side.

When she was very young, she learned the basics of firearms safety during backyard target practice, but other priorities in her teens stole the majority of her time and attention.

When terrorists attacked France right before Thanksgiving 2015, Rachel was boarding a business flight to Paris at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport. Friends texted news of the bombings to her. TV monitors at the gate aired CNN coverage as French police were responding. On the plane, Rachel and other passengers heard updates from the airline as it delayed the flight and kept the jetway open, eventually offering passengers the option to disembark.

Rachel's cell phone kept her in touch with loved ones, and I was relieved

when she called my iPhone with news that she had decided not to make the trip. As parents, we assume that we will be the first to depart this earth. In reality, anyone at any time can be taken.

All of this rekindled memories of hunting excursions with young Rachel. One particular turkey hunt was especially meaningful because of the lesson learned. Memories of that hunt include letting go of a long-held perception. On that Wisconsin hunt, the mentor reluctantly became the student.

Throughout the trip, she was sending text messages on her pink Blackberry smartphone. Her friends knew when we arrived at camp, how late she stayed up, how early she had to get up, which iTunes files had turkey gobbles so they could hear at home what she was hearing for real in the wild, and what she was experiencing along the way.

At the time, I thought it was rude. We had had similar discussions years earlier about tuning out others when she put on her iPod headphones. Again, I thought she was bored and disinterested. It didn't seem like she was focused 100 percent on the hunt and the experience.

I didn't know what she was typing. To me, it was like being some place with someone who is whispering to another person right in front of you.

Late one morning, when gobblers started responding, Rachel made a great

shot on a nice tom. Her emotions poured out. It was all hugs and happiness. We tagged the bird, took pictures with her pink phone, and, before the bird had cooled, she had updated her Facebook page, tweeted enthusiastically, and sent the photos of our fun and success, plus more detailed text messages to her friends.

This is the same social media butterfly who surprised me when I hiked through the snow to her deer stand one year to see how she was holding up, and her thoughtful response was about how peaceful it was in the winter woods alone with the falling snow, birds, squirrels and her thoughts. She discovered the inner peace that time in nature can bring.

That is the dichotomy we all face in our recruitment efforts.

As we try to hook newcomers with the excitement, adventure and action, we also try to explain that some of the top motivations for spending time outdoors are to get away from it all, to escape the rat race, enjoy the peace and solitude, and reconnect with nature and our inner being.

Mentoring Rachel, I was the one who learned the most valuable lesson that technology and outdoor adventures can peacefully co-exist. Eventually, I admitted to her, "First it was an iPod, iTunes and then iPhone and an iPad. Now, I surrender. I give up."

She put away her iPhone and hugged me.

"Thanks, Dad."

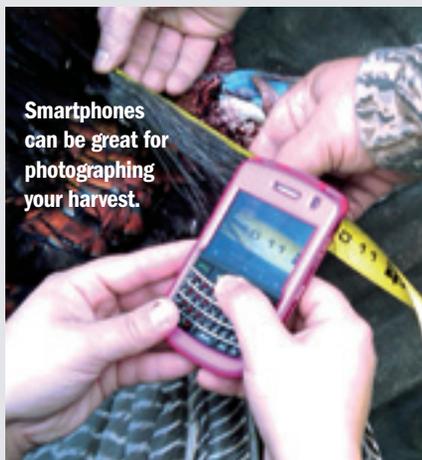
Now, when I mentor young hunters and anglers, I don't mind if they bring their mobile phones. Let them text. Let them tweet. Let them update their Facebook pages in the middle of the mentored experience, as long as there is no safety risk.

Heck, I'll help them by using their smartphone to take the picture or video with them having fun in that outdoor setting.

It no longer bothers me, because I realize now that they are spreading the good word about being outdoors. It's not rude or exclusionary. No, it is inclusive of her friends and followers. Call it "digital word-of-mouth" peer communication among trusted sources, with a certain credibility or believability that is far more likely to lead to action, or at least acceptance of hunting, than we could generate without them.



Mark LaBarbera is founder of the Outdoor Heritage Education Center and Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo, May 18-19, 2016 at the DNR's MacKenzie Center, Poyntette.



Smartphones can be great for photographing your harvest.