

# Where have all the cowboys gone?



I noticed these “fellas” years ago at a friend’s party. These compadres truly adored their smartphones. They shined them. They held them up to the light. They showed them off to each other and wore them on their hip like a trusted six- shooter.

I recall a party I attended when all the men greeted each other with hugs and slaps on the back, then they all sat down at a big round table on the patio next to a freshly remodeled pool. The flagstone fireplace lit up their faces and in unison the men slid their phones out of their pockets and laid them on the table directly in front of them.

One guy pointed at another man’s phone and asked, “May I?” Getting the nod from him to examine his phone, he picked it up and tossed it lightly from hand to hand. He then quickly slipped it into his ~~holster~~ short’s pocket, quickly taking it in and out a few times. “Smooth,” he complimented, pursing his lips. “iPhone?... nice,” he nodded his approval. Next came the questions: “How’s the reception? Easy to use the keypad? How

is it with a Bluetooth?"

Here, at the very mention of the word "Bluetooth," all the men perked up even more. "Yes, it works great, but I still pre-ordered – *fill in whatever the latest release was back then* – just in case I like the camera better." All the men "Ahh'd" their approval at the very idea of having two smartphones at once and then simply choosing the one they prefer. The phone with the better camera, or the best keyboard, or the easiest screen to see in the scorching sun while riding your horse out on the open range, ur, um, I mean waiting for your margarita out on the patio of Javier's.

I got the impression that these men, if left in the wilds of Orange County without their trusted smartphones by their sides, would be rendered helpless, unable to mosey their way through traffic without their GPS app or decide which watering hole to go to without being able to check Yelp's recommendations.

They would surely perish in the harsh wilderness of disconnection. Cell phone cowboys needed their ~~guns~~ phones to survive in their frontier.

But do these men know how to use a Thomas Guide to find their way? Probably not. My dad still has his in the back of his car. It's like his own version of Custard's Last Stand. He's doesn't have a smartphone and promises he never will. He's a real man afterall! To my dad, the idea of GPS is downright disgraceful.

You might think that having access to all the conveniences and pampering that technology provides has changed what it means to be a man? Are these men who are constantly checking their basketball bracket apps while picking the right filter for their Instagram photo of their lunch and updating their status on Facebook really still "real" men? Yes. You know why I can say that with stanch confidence? Because I'm raising a young

man.

My 10-year-old son is a classic nerd. A geek. A technology junkie! He has pictures of the creators of Minecraft taped on his bedroom door, not an athlete or rock star. His best friend, a fellow geek, dressed as Steve Jobs for his historical character book report, complete with black turtleneck, jeans and white tennis shoes. He got the “coolest costume” nod of approval from all the boys. And though Markus Persson and Jens Bergensten (the creators of Minecraft) and Steve Jobs might not have the swagger of Steve McQueen or the grit of John Wayne, they are idols to these young boys. They’re pioneers, rebels, hard-workers and smart on top of it all.

When I told my son I was going to write this column I asked him (as I always do when I write about my kids) if it was okay to for me to call him a nerd and geek. “Oh, yeah!” he replied instantly. “I’m a geek! That’s cool.”

We’re going to be okay. These young men know who they are and I believe so do their dads, uncles and teachers. They’re not Googling “How to be manly” (though that is a thing I found online and I would pay money – cold hard cash – to know someone who has looked that up), they have just replaced their spurs, lassos and sweaty bandanas with convenience.

Back to the cellphone cowboys at the party. After these men had finished admiring each other’s phones, they all sat back deeply in their chairs and looked up at the stars, clear and bright in the San Juan Capistrano sky. The night was quiet and still. Only the crackling of the fire and a random ringtone every so often broke the silence.



Published in my column at OC Register on April 15, 2014