



I've mentioned that I have a longstanding love/hate relationship with Facebook. You could even call it a "codependency." I know those are unhealthy, but every time I try to break things off – or tiptoe out of the entanglement quietly – people start messaging to inquire about my health . . . or just to say they miss me. And then I remember why I fell for the big jerk in the first place.

I wish I knew how to quit you, Facebook.

As for the rest of social media... we have barely a passing acquaintance. I'm a twit who never tweets, who has zero interest in Pinterest, who couldn't Snapchat if her life depended on it. I kid myself that I'm just old-fashioned and loyal. A one-platform gal. In reality, what I am is a techno-dunderhead and borderline Luddite. If it's not super-easy (love ya, Facebook), I'm not super-interested.

This drives my teenager berserk. She's forever scolding me for letting perfectly good apps languish on my iPhone while doing things the hard way, "by hand." Typically, I don't even know the apps are *there* until she points them out and gives me a tutorial on using them.

"Mom, you know you don't actually need a *map* right?" She bugged me about this for at least a year. "Siri can talk you all the way from our house to your destination! Dad says you can't read a map, anyway." Her dad's right. I'm terrible with maps. They overwhelm me. But the prospect of figuring out how to have Siri navigate my drive was even

more

overwhelming . . . until I gave in and let my daughter – the little brainiac – show me how.

I highly recommend making good use of your teenagers. They'll be gone before you know it,

and you need their knowledge. (You have a right to it, too, after all those dirty diapers and dance recitals. They owe you.)

Those of you who are directionally challenged should make good use of Siri, too. Her guidance is precise and easy to follow, and she avoids those vague, confusing terms that husbands love, like “north,” and “east.” She’s all “turn left onto Depot Road”. . . and “turn right at Sea Island Parkway.” Siri is, after all, a girl.

But Siri navigators don’t come along every day for me. With my deep dearth of technology awareness – and, frankly, curiosity – they are the exception, not the rule. So it was almost shocking, and truly exciting, when I discovered an app on my phone the other day – all by myself! – that has truly enhanced my life.

It’s called “Notes,” and according to my smart kid, it’s been there on my smart phone all along. Who knew? It’s bundled up with some other apps and I’d just never noticed it.

“Notes” is exactly what it sounds like – an app that lets you take notes on your phone. But here’s the fabulous part: You don’t have to type with your big clumsy thumbs on a keyboard made for woodland fairies. You can just dictate your notes! It’s like voice texting, but your words end up on a bottomless sheet of digital notebook paper. You can say as much as you want, stop for as long as you want, and start talking again whenever you please. Then, when you finish, you can save your notes and send them to your email address as a text file.

Y’all understand what this means, right? It means I can work on this column – or any other writing project – whenever and wherever the spirit moves me. Same goes for all you other scribes out there. “Notes” effectively unchains writer from keyboard. This is epic! Free at last!

(It occurs to me that my dad, an attorney, acquired a similar freedom from his keyboard several decades ago. Her name was Linda and she typed 90 words a minute.)

I realize some of you readers – especially you millennials – are doing the scoffy eye-roll thing right now because you’ve been using “Notes” for eons. But give an aged Gen Xer a break. I was

cool once, too, and one day you will be me – except you might have actual robots nipping at your heels instead of just tech-savvy whippersnappers. It's the circle of life, kids. Have compassion for your elders.

Since accidentally discovering “Notes” a week or so ago, I’ve been making up for lost time . . . recording thoughts, musings and observations all over the Lowcountry, at all manner of odd hours. I often take “Notes” in the car, where I tend to say things like, “There’s a girl on the sidewalk in a pretty red dress,” and “Look, the bridge is opening.” When I take “Notes” on my porch at happy hour, I seem to get a bit more creative, expressing thoughts like, “Wow, the pollen on my car must be an inch thick,” and “Now I know why this Chardonnay cost \$5.99 at Publix.” I’ve even been taking “Notes” to bed with me, where I’ve recorded such midnight profundities as: “Was that the AC or the heat that just clicked on?”; “Did Jeff ever seal that grout?”; and “I wonder what my skeleton looks like.”

Reading that paragraph, you’ll notice that “Notes” has a downside, and that downside is this: When you start to record your every thought, musing and observation – in real time – you quickly come face to face with the awful truth of your own extreme banality. Think you’re a consistently deep thinker? Start taking “Notes,” and think again.

I’ve also found that I don’t “write” that well when I’m “talking.” The sentences and phrases that spill from my lips – instead of my fingertips – seem awkward and clunky when I read them over later. They’re just not very well-wrought. (Also, “Notes” sometimes misunderstands me, and a term like “well-wrought” shows up in print as “well Robert.”) In any case, there is always much rewriting to do. “Notes” is great for dashing out a rough draft of a rough draft, but the real work of writing – the art *and* the craft – still takes a keyboard and a quiet place. For me, anyway.

This seems especially true when I try taking “Notes” in (and on) the natural world, where I still think my phone is better used as a camera. Writing well about nature is tough – “Notes” or not. It’s just been done to death. Unless you’re a gifted poet, chances are you’ll end up sounding hackneyed. (I say this from experience.) It’s a shame, too, because nature is just about the least hackneyed thing there is.

I was thinking about this while taking “Notes” on the Cypress Wetlands Trail yesterday – about how nature is never trite. Never cliché. And you know what? Woe unto the writer who portrays it that way, because that writer is not telling the truth. Though old as time itself, nature is always new, always fresh, always surprising. If you can’t find words to do it justice – and most of us

can't, most of the time – you had best just keep quiet and enjoy it.

That's a note to self.

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