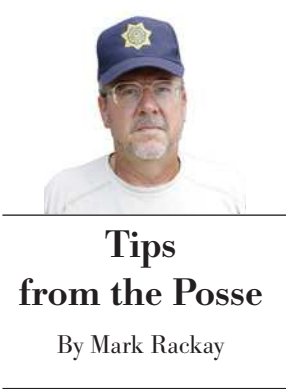




An outdoorsman living in Western Colorado has a lot to be thankful for, he just needs to take the time and reflect. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

An outdoorsman gives thanks

I have never been a fan of the telephone. Whenever it rings, there is a huge chance it is: a) someone I don't want to talk to; b) someone selling me something I neither want nor need; c) more bad news; or d) a call because someone is lost, hurt or made a mistake that earned them an aromatic pine box.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

All of this has been even worse with the invention of the cell phone. This evil device is akin to a ball and chain, never allowing anyone to really escape. It has gotten so bad that we can't even drive our cars anymore without using the cell phone to talk and text.

Perhaps I am so pessimistic about all of this because of my chosen professions over the past decades. Ask any first responder about pessimism, and you will get an ear full. You start with a call for mischief or public nuisance and watch it escalate to a capital crime before the hour passes. It is difficult to be optimistic about all that.

I realize my attitude could get me blackballed by the "Book of the Month Club," and despite my efforts, I can't seem to become more optimistic. I really need to reflect on the positive and be grateful for what has gone well in my world. Maybe my attitude is because of my constant and ever-present partner in all things outdoors, the erudite Mr. Murphy. We all know he does not really exist, but somehow, he is always there.

This year, I took a long and hard

look at my time in the outdoors and realized that I truly have a lot to be grateful for. In reality, more seems to go "right" than we think, and we seem to take all the good for granted. We outdoor people, no matter what your chosen discipline, have one thing in common; we have a great deal to be thankful for.

As I look back on the past year, I am thankful for the laughter of friends afield, evenings around the campfire, the camaraderie of the hunting camp, the silence of the woods and the beauty of all the animals. Mostly, I am thankful for the vast amount of wild, public lands here in Colorado. These lands are owned by you and I as Americans, and are there for our use and enjoyment.

I must give thanks to the good folks of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management who manage, patrol, and work tirelessly to maintain and keep open "our" lands. And while we are at it, let us stop and thank all the wildland firefighters who gave so much to protect our homes, land and forests during this most horrid dry season. We truly watched the fires from hell, and these people put themselves between the fire and us.

Thanks go out to all the members of the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse, and all the search and rescue people of our state. These volunteers spend incredible amounts of time and resources helping the lost, hurt or stranded. Sometimes they provide closure to families when their loved ones paid the full price. Knowing these folks are out there, waiting by a phone, while we recreate outdoors is very reassuring.

Being a member of a search and rescue team can be mentally exhausting. You start out full of hope and

anticipation that you will find the lost person "safe and sound" and return them to their loved ones. Sometimes, as the search duration grows, that outcome no longer seems possible. The long search ends in a recovery and the delivery of the sad news to the awaiting loved ones. I assure you, those are the outcomes the search and rescue people grieve about, each member in their own way. I am grateful these folks are there when we need them.

While we are at it, we must include all our first responders, police, fire, EMS and all the sheriff's deputies. They come to our rescue when we screw up, or when something goes bad. In fact, while you enjoy that turkey dinner, these people are on duty, just in case.

I am grateful for all the animals we have in our great state. From the majestic elk and deer all the way to the hummingbirds and fish. Without the wild kingdom, Colorado would not be a place for me.

Special thanks need to go out to the stewards of our wildlife, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife people. Without them and their efforts, we would have no animals left in Colorado. Many species were near extinction in our state before CPW got involved. Now, thanks to them, many of those previously endangered are thriving. Some that we thought were gone forever have been reintroduced.

One of the things I am truly thankful for is you, the readers of this column. I receive an ever-increasing amount of phone calls and emails, with comments and questions about things outdoors related. If this column prevents just one person from arriving in paradise a hair ahead of schedule, then it was all worth it.

Thanks are given to my wife of

many years, for putting up with my career choice and outdoors lifestyle. Without her blessing, love and support, none of my successes would have been possible. My lovely Mrs. keeps the home fires burning while I am away. She makes sure I have my water, food and equipment when I leave on a callout, and that my hunting gear is in order, when I leave for a fun trip.

Speaking of trips, I am thankful for the great trips I have taken this year, making new friends and seeing new lands. These trips were all successful in their own way. I am also thankful for the trips I have coming up. In the near future I will be off to Argentina, followed by Africa, and again returning to Canada.

As I wrote this, I realized I have so much more to be thankful for, that I could not possibly list it all. I think most of us, who have our health and family, have everything to be thankful for.

I guess I will continue to answer the phone whenever it rings. Chances are slim that the caller is Murphy; it might be my buddy wanting to line up another trip or my kids wanting to chat. We need to remember that when the phone rings, it is not always a collect call for you from Murphy.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving and I hope you have a lot to be thankful for. I am going to try and be more optimistic in the future.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcs.pi.org.

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