"Daddy, that's the funniest looking phone I've ever seen."

That was the reaction of my 4-year-old son James to the telephone in the beach house we rented for our vacation last week.

It was a much more modern version than the yellow rotary model that was on the wall of our kitchen for most of my life. But it had a cord, and it was plugged in to the wall. It occurred to me for the first time that these are things that James had never seen before.

Mom and Dad's phones fit in their pockets and have Internet access and email. Most of our friends have phones that are much more advanced than our outdated Blackberries. James probably knows more about touch screen phones than I do.

It took a while to convince James that the phone in the beach house wasn't a toy. That was an amusing reminder of how much things have changed in the last decade.

It was about 10 years ago that I reluctantly purchased my first cell phone. For about a year I left it at home just like it was a regular phone because I just couldn't stand the idea of not being able to be out of touch for a little while.

Eventually my job as a newspaper reporter demanded that I be accessible at all times. It took a while for me to get used to the idea, but now it has just become a part of everyday life. Now people get bent out shape if they can't reach someone immediately. With the addition of email capability, it's even worse. It's like being expected to check your mailbox around the clock.

All of these things offer some great advantages. I would have loved to have had a cell phone on the many occasions when my vehicles broke down in my younger days. It's going to be great as a parent to be able to reach my kids at any time when they're teenagers.

But it's easy to go overboard with the new technology. It's strange to see two people in a restaurant totally ignoring each other while they play with their phones. Their conversations have been replaced by posting photos of the meal to Facebook and texting others about what they're doing. Perhaps some of them are texting each other instead of talking.

But last week our beach house was in an area that got no cell phone service. A week with no phone calls, Internet or social media might seem unimaginable for some people today, but it sure was a nice change of pace for a little while.

I didn't miss any earth-shattering news, and all of the emails that piled up in my inbox did just fine waiting for my return. Perhaps we'll intentionally schedule future vacations in areas with no cell phone service.

Phones that plug in to the wall won't exist anymore when my son is my age.

So he probably won't understand what I mean when I tell him to "take it off the hook" while we're on vacation. At least he can look it up on his smart phone.