*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Butchering brings back family memories**

The original part of our farmhouse was built by my great-grandparents; it’s full of memories. One of my earliest memories dates to the middle-1960s when we were visiting on butchering day. My uncle Leland Clair had a herd of Herefords so there were always delicious beef dinners.

A cow or steer would be skinned and eviscerated outside and cut into quarters. The quarters would be taken into the basement where they were hung from the ceiling; they were cut into steaks and roasts.

I remember a big wooden table where the cutting was done. I still have two of the knives with oak handles that were used. The old pieces of linoleum that covered the concrete floor are still there.

I was only 3 or 4 years old at the time but that memory came to me recently when my son, Ross, and I butchered a deer in the basement. Ross and his wife, Lucy, went deer hunting Thanksgiving morning. They gave my wife, Sherry, and me the pleasure of watching our 4-month-old grandson, Samuel, for a few hours.

I stayed with Samuel for about an hour or so; I read a book while he was still sleeping. The kids told me he usually sleeps with white noise so I thought I could just turn on any cable-news channel. I was told that would give my grandson nightmares. They have an actual white-noise machine that doesn’t include talking heads.

Samuel is at that magical age when he can go from charming everyone with a smile to ear-piercing wails in the flip of a switch. From observation, I believe the former is triggered when he’s gazing at his lovely grandma and the latter when he looks at me.

Two diaper changes, two bottles and a short nap later — for him and his grandpa — the kids came back with a large doe that Ross shot. Our goal was to process it and put it in the freezer by late afternoon so they could spend the evening with Lucy’s family.

The basement was the place to do it. We have a small kitchen with an island counter perfect for cutting. The iron hooks used to hang beef quarters are still in the ceiling joists. I moved one to a more convenient spot. There was only one nail holding the joist, but I grabbed the hook and did a pull-up to test its strength.

“That will hold unless you have the world’s largest doe,” I told Ross.

It didn’t and he didn’t. We were hoisting up the deer when the nail pulled loose and everything came tumbling down.

I grabbed a hammer and another nail. I rummaged through my toolbox looking for a nail or a big screw. Instead, my left index finger located a utility-knife blade; we had blood even before the butchering began.

I held my finger under running cold water, wrapped it tight with some paper towels, found a couple of bandages and a plastic glove, and we were back in business. I returned to the unorganized box of danger otherwise known as my toolbox. There I carefully located a big screw that we used to shore up the joist.

We were also delayed by a few minutes when I tried to stream a football game to the TV in the kitchen. My slow connection forced us to give up; the internet was slow too.

The joist held. The skinning, cutting and wrapping proceeded without further incident. It went so well it was only a one-beer deer.

We had meat in the freezer and the kitchen cleaned. The kids were on the road in time. Despite the setbacks, it was a great day.

I have much to be thankful for indeed.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at*[*chardie1963@gmail.com*](mailto:chardie1963@gmail.com)*.*