*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**New year brings needed hope**

“Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul

And sings the tune without the words

And never stops at all.”

* Emily Dickinson

“But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.”

* Martin Luther King Jr.

“Hope

Smiles from the threshold of the year to come,

Whispering ‘it will be happier’…”

* Alfred Lord Tennyson

“It is often in the darkest

skies that we see the

brightest stars.”

* Richard Evans

Writers love to use metaphors and similes to create analogies. So with all due apologies to grammarians, here’s how I creatively describe the year 2020.

It’s been as pleasant and productive as trying to stomp out a burning bag of dog feces thrown into a refuse container overflowing with other burning bags aboard a ship fully loaded with similar cargo that’s part of a like fleet sailing up the stream of effluence without a means of propulsion. And there are more ships on the horizon.

Please forgive that unpleasant verbal vomit, but with a new year just ahead we somehow need to find a way to put the awful year behind us — even if we’ll carry its baggage well into 2021.

I’m writing this piece on the eve of the longest night of the year. The dark days are depressingly aligned with the resurgent pandemic that will prevent families and friends from celebrating the holidays together. For hundreds of thousands, these are holidays without one or more family members, victims of the virus.

The tunnel is long and dark. Some days we feel there is no end. We are masked marchers trudging forward in the darkness. Sometimes the burden seems too heavy. Our exhaustion makes us stumble or fall.

But we get up to walk forward. There’s a glimmer of hope in the darkness; vaccinations to combat the pandemic have begun. The economic and emotional pain of shutdowns will subside.

Sometimes hope is before us — if we look for it. The darkest day of the year was brightened by the appearance of the “Christmas Star,” the alignment of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. The last time the planets appeared this close was in 1623. The sun will begin its slow journey north and the days will become longer. The message of the star that shone over Bethlehem is needed more than ever this year.

Jan. 1 is a popular time for resolutions. January was named after Janus, the Roman god of change and beginnings. His two faces allowed him to look into the past and forward into the future, a transition from one year to the next.

Robert B. Thomas, the founder of the “Old Farmer’s Almanac,” called it a time “of leisure to farmers … settle accounts with your neighbors … now having been industrious in the summer, you will have the felicity of retiring from the turbulence of the storm to the bosom of your family.”

My resolutions for 2021 are a reflection of the turbulent reality of 2020, with the perspective of the challenge ahead. I want to be a better husband, a better father and a better person.

For those who need additional motivation, remember Jan. 1 is the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. So goodbye and good riddance to 2020.

*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.*

***Photo cutlines:***

123120-agrv-life-hardie-1: A colorful morning sky surrounds North Beaver Creek Lutheran Church in rural Ettrick, Wisconsin.

123120-agrv-life-hardie-2: Sometimes there is light in the darkness.