*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Recovery from COVID-19 brings hope**

A damp smell filled my nostrils as a full moon lit my path across the crusty snow.

I paused on a quiet morning at the end of February to admire the Snow Moon, a brilliant yellow orb in the pale-blue dawn sky that overlooked a dark tree-lined hill. In the distance, I heard the sounds of turkeys beginning to stir.

I wanted to walk a little further but needed to conserve my energy for other daily chores. It seems like I haven’t had the energy I once did, a product of aging and my body’s response to recovering from COVID-19 this past fall.

It seems much longer than 12 moons ago when a virus forever altered our world. Shutdowns, lockdowns, protests, masks, sanitizers, isolation, desperation, sickness and death came in its wake. It’s brought out the worst in us, in those who have warped and twisted a worldwide crisis by making it political. It’s brought out the best in us, as we’ve adapted, changed and cheered courageous and heroic men and women who help feed us and care for us.

The virus doesn’t care. It goes on looking for new hosts — adapting, changing and spreading. It doesn’t care if its victims are rich or poor, what the color is of their skin, what their political preference is or their ZIP codes. It’s relentless.

We wear masks. We sanitize. We keep our distance. We avoid crowds. We voluntarily limited capacity in our business. Despite all those precautions we still caught COVID-19 in mid-November.

My wife, Sherry, caught it first. We suspect she caught it from a customer who coughed directly on her. The viral load was more than a mere mask could stop. The eyes are more than windows to the soul; they are also portals for viruses.

Sherry had a headache, sore throat, tightness in her chest, and she lost her senses of smell and taste for a few weeks. A pneumonia shot she had this past year may have helped avoid serious breathing complications. I felt like I had a bad sinus infection. We monitored our oxygen levels. We slept, ate a little and slept some more. It was pretty much all we could do.

And our cases were considered mild.

We shut down our business for two weeks. We were isolated. We avoided hospitalization. And we prayed that we hadn’t infected my now-83-year-old mother.

That prayer was answered. Mom is scheduled for her second immunization.

The best science tells us we are probably still immune or carry some strong immunity. We are still not on the vaccination schedule. Maybe one shot is enough. Maybe we need two. Maybe we don’t need them.

So we wait.

We wonder.

We pray.

Now is not the time to become complacent. We can get the upper hand with vaccination and continued masking and distancing. The virus continues to mutate. It will continue to spread.

Yes, the virus is real. Yes, it’s deadly. To think otherwise is dancing on the graves of more than 2.5 million victims worldwide — more than 500,000 in our country alone. There are 114 million worldwide who have had COVID-19.

Just as the virus doesn’t care who it attacks, it affects its victims differently. The worst symptom and its after-effect for me is fatigue. Even now simple chores like carrying a bag of chicken feed takes more effort than it should. It’s more than physical. Some days it seems like I need to punch through a heavy mist to start my mind moving.

This morning my mind was as clear as the cloudless sky. A pale-golden light from the rising sun started to fill the valley as the waning moon slipped beneath the western horizon. It was the start of another day.

Perhaps by the time spring finally does arrive and garden season calls, I’ll be back to full strength. Or perhaps this is now the best that I can be. Whatever the hand I’m dealt, I’ll play it the best I can.

*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 cutline:*

031121-agrv-life-hardie-1: A Snow Moon lights the early-morning sky in late February on the Hardie farm.