*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Grandpa still loves the future, 10 years on**

As I grow older and memories fade with each passing day, the ones that remain clear are those with family. I also still remember lyrics of obscure songs from the 1970s, but I guess with each blessing there’s a curse.

Recently, our two children’s families and my mother gathered with my wife, Sherry, and me to celebrate the 10th birthday of my oldest grandson, Jameson Benrud. Like each of my four grandsons, he is special. He’s scary-whip-smart; he already knew the names of most of the rocks, fossils, agates and stones in the kit we gave him as part of his birthday present.

As we gathered around our dining-room table, there was one chair noticeably empty. The presence of my father is still keenly missed at our life events. He still has a large place in our hearts. He would have been right there with Jameson identifying all the rocks and minerals.

Many loved ones are no longer a part of our world, but I remember writing about the day Jameson came into it. As we were driving March 5, 2011, through La Crosse, hundreds of protesters lined the streets to counter a pro-Gov. Scott Walker event. Polar plungers raised $165,000 for Special Olympics.

That day — like all others — offered some of the best and worst in our imperfect world. In the same hospital where Jameson Robert Benrud took his first breath, his great-great-uncle breathed his last. Within minutes our family had birth and death — and all the heartache and joy between that we call life.

It isn’t perfect but it’s our world.

I remember feeling that Jameson was in great hands and that Jessica and her husband, Josh, were going to be wonderful parents.

I remembered when Jessica came into the world. Suddenly, two became three and we were in the midst of sleep deprivation and frequent diaper changes. We had become a family.

Two more sons followed and within a few short years came the shock of the food bill to feed three teenage boys. I said back then they would be far-better parents than me if they made even half the mistakes I’ve made.

So far, so good.

Jameson was less than a day old when I gently gathered him in my arms. He was as light as a feather. I could almost feel the arms of my father, his father and the generations before lifting our progeny.

“You are a blessed child,” I whispered in his ear.

The spirits of my ancestors nodded in agreement; Jameson slept in swaddling bliss.

Winter is fading now, even though its icy grip is evident by the dirty remnants of snow that cling to the north sides of buildings and in sheltered valleys.

But nature, like time, is relentless. The sun’s rays advance. The days grow longer; soon the trees will bud. We’ll wipe away the cobwebs of winter and dance to the tune of another season.

The world is indeed far from perfect. It seems less perfect today. But only The Almighty knows what happens from here.

A decade ago I held the future in my arms.

It felt good.

It still feels good today.

*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:*

031821-agrv-life-hardie-1: Chris Hardie’s oldest grandson, Jameson Benrud, holds some of his birthday gifts – including a selection of rocks and minerals.

031821-agrv-life-hardie-2: Jameson Benrud, center, celebrates his 10th birthday along with his younger brothers Elisas, right, and Judah.