*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Woodchuck war heats up again**

If my long-running battle against woodchucks were a Hollywood sequel, I think we’d be at “Groundhog Strikes Again Chapter XXIV.”

Longtime readers may recall I have written several times about my struggles to keep the critters out of my garage and garden. They dig large holes and destroy crops with voracity.

Recently, I walked past my parked skid steer and noticed the earth had been disturbed underneath it. Knowing the vehicle hadn’t been moved for several months, I became suspicious that it was more than a gopher mound.

My suspicions were confirmed later that day when my wife, Sherry, spotted a woodchuck near the skid steer. My old nemesis was back.

Since the skid steer is parked close to our vegetable garden, I didn’t waste time; I brought out my live trap. The last time I trapped a woodchuck I had success with a tip given to me by a fellow trapper to use cantaloupe.

A strategically placed slice of cantaloupe resulted in success in just a few hours; a young woodchuck fell for the ploy. It may be called a live trap, but that doesn’t mean the nuisance critters come out that way.

The good news is the garden produce seems to have escaped the hungry predator. The bad news is there are more woodchucks where that one came from.

Speaking of the garden, harvest season is upon us. Aside from the challenges of a late freeze and some dry weather, so far we’ve been enjoying beans, kale, swiss chard, cucumbers, zucchini and summer squash. Tomatoes and peppers will be ready soon.

Some of the veggies took a hit when our livestock escaped a few times. Our Scottish Highland bull was the instigator of the breakouts. He became adept at using his horns to lift up gates and wires, and then crawling underneath.

Chasing livestock twice a day can grow old in a hurry and having a free-ranging bull carries some risk. We held back the bull for future butchering when we sold the rest of the cows this past year; we thought he might breed our last remaining heifer.

The future became the present and our freezers are now filled with more than 450 pounds of hamburger. No steaks or roast; my teeth aren’t what they used to be.

If there’s a moral to the story — don’t mess with our garden.

Speaking of the skid steer, along with being a temporary shelter for the woodchuck, it has now been the nesting location of two hatches of robins. Earlier this year, I wrote about the first nest. During exhaustive research into robins that included at least three website clicks, I discovered that while robins have as many as three broods per year they build a new nest each time.

Apparently, I have lazy robins or some other pair put in a quit-claim deed on the nest, because another three fledglings were raised in that nest.

There is now one egg in the nest — perhaps a leftover that didn’t hatch? Or round three? We’ll see.

And speaking of the skid steer again, Sherry has not been happy about where I parked it, but I have deferred to the robins. After the first nest, I was going to move it behind our storage building — which is precisely the same spot where the oak branches came down at the end of June. Score a minor victory for procrastination!

Speaking of procrastination, I finally cleaned up the branches and debris. I cut and hauled eight pickup loads of brush, cut the limbs, split the wood and stacked it — not enjoyable work on an 85-degree day.

Now if the skid steer will start …

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***Photo cutlines:***

072921-agrv-life-hardie-1: The disturbed ground under the skid steer is where a woodchuck burrowed into the ground.

072921-agrv-life-hardie-2: Blooming sunflowers are an attraction for pollinators like beers.

072921-agrv-life-hardie-3: A bumper crop of basil is ready for picking.

072921-agrv-life-hardie-4: The Hardie garden includes purple basil.

072921-agrv-life-hardie-5: Flowering dill plants grace the Hardie garden.

072921-agrv-life-hardie-6: A pile of wood is what’s left of tree branches that came down near the Hardie storage building.

072921-agrv-life-hardie-7: Here’s what the branches looked like when they came down.

072921-agrv-life-hardie-8: The tree branches are now drying for firewood.