*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Finding and telling stories is not a science**

A regular reader and friend recently asked where I come up with story ideas and if I ever get writer’s block.

The answers are “I’m not sure” and “all the time.”

I would not presume to speak for others whose skill with words and stories put my prose on par with Dick and Jane. But for me, the world is filled with stories all around. They live and breathe with every person, every place and in everything.

Sometimes, I see them with immediate clarity and the words flow from my fingertips like molten lava, burning their way across the screen. It is almost effortless.

More often, stories are like trying to catch patches of the early morning fog that shroud the corners of my mind like pockets of mist in the valley. I catch glimpses of them here and there and they disappear unless I catch them at the right time.

Sometimes, I try my hand at humor because we all need to laugh now and then. I’m often reminded of a quote from the movie “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” when Captain Kirk quips with Vulcan officer Lieutenant Saavik and says that’s a little joke.

“Humor, it’s a difficult concept,” Saavik says. “It’s not logical.”

“We learn by doing,” Kirk replies.

Humor is also difficult to script because writing about what’s amusing to me — like having to deal with a tick embedded in a sensitive part of my anatomy — may not be logical or funny to others. I learned as a very young aspiring journalist nearly 40 years ago that it’s much harder to offend yourself, and your main risk is falling flat when you try to be funny instead of insulting others.

Kirk is right — we learn by doing. While there are certain roadmaps to follow while telling a story, you don’t get to the end without the journey. That’s the personal path that each writer takes. It could be a direct route with speed and efficiency or the winding way that comes with more detail and color.

The real answer to the source of my stories comes from who I am — a flawed person doing my best to get up each day and play the hand I’m dealt. It doesn’t help that I’m really not a good poker player. But I try hard to not overgrow my britches, to be genuine to myself and more importantly, to others.

A good story connects the past to the future, which is why I like to delve into history. My personal history often takes me back to events of my childhood and connections with friends and family that helped mold and shape the one-of-a-kind model that sits before you today.

My reflections often take me to my late grandmother Cecile Hardie, who was the champion of what she called visiting. That’s when the TV was turned off, the coffee pot was turned on and you sat around the kitchen table and talked.

Special occasions sometimes involved sitting on the davenport in the parlor, but there was always coffee — Grandma’s lubricant for socialization. She boiled it on the stove, so it was hot and strong.

After Grandma’s passing in 1979, the social epicenter in the family became the kitchen in Aunt Sara Clair’s house — which is where I now live. Aunt Sara also made strong coffee and her circular kitchen table — a beautiful piece of oak with feet of carved lion heads — was ground zero for visiting. There was also a super-sweetened pitcher of Tang in the refrigerator for the younger folks.

Coffee was also the time of the day when you gathered for some sweet treats between dinner (a large lunch) and supper right before the evening chores. Going hungry was not an option.

Whether it was at Grandma’s or Aunt Sara’s, I loved hearing stories. It should be no surprise that I was drawn into a career of hearing them and telling them.

So what about that challenge with writer’s block?

You stop thinking and let the words flow.

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***Photo cutlines:***

Corn.jpg: A late-summer sky above the corn is a pause for reflection.

Sky.jpg: An early-morning sky above the Hardie farm provides some writing inspiration.

*(Chris Hardie photos)*