*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**A moment of reflection as spring arrives**

I said goodbye to winter on a bright and crisp morning with the sounds of geese flying overhead.

Life seems to be a series of busy moments linked together by the relentless onslaught of time. It’s those moments that seem to dominate my life, but they are rarely the ones that I remember the most. For me, it’s the rare quiet times in between the rush that stand out from the noise.

The waning hours of winter on the first day of spring was one of those quiet times, a chance to take in fresh air, solitude and imagine the spring that is to come. The eternal optimist in me always sees spring as a season bursting forth with promise.

My destination for contemplation was a walk through the bottomland that surrounds Little Creek, a spring-fed stream that runs through our valley and originates on our family farm.

A walk through the bottoms along the murmuring stream is always quiet medicine for my troubled soul; a retreat from the noise of hatred and rage. A place where no political party is right or wrong all the time and character — not color — is the basis of judgment. A place where solitude and reflection pull out the poison and provide perspective.

With dozens of springs that feed Little Creek, the land is quite boggy most of the year. Even though the ground is still frozen, nature provides. Already, dozens of skunk cabbages poked through the ice. These remarkable plants have the ability through a chemical process to heat themselves to 59 degrees, pushing through the ice. By mid-spring, they will be up to 3 feet tall and turn the wetlands into lush dark green.

The sand and clay along the creek display the tracks of deer, turkeys, coyotes and other animals that use the bottoms. Early mornings I hear the sounds of the turkeys gobbling as they prepare for the upcoming mating season.

I also looked for antler sheds, as the bucks are dropping their horns. One early spring day, my wife Sherry and I collected a shingle shed next to a pool of water filled with watercress. No sheds this day, but lots of tracks and rubs from last fall’s rut.

I paused for a few moments on the streambank and listened to the murmur of the stream. In a few hours, the sun would shine directly over the earth’s equator. The vernal equinox gives us a day of 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness.

This creekside place of peace and solitude is an escape from the ugliness of the world, where we continue to squabble and kill each other through senseless war and over differences in religion, color and belief.

Yet at the moment of spring, true equality comes from mother earth. Light and darkness. Darkness and light. Yin and yang.

Nature speaks.

If only we would listen.

I prayed.

My morning sojourn ended in a grove of pine trees planted by my great uncle some 60 years ago. It was a perfect spot for playing hide and seek and other games when I was a boy and the world seemed so much simpler.

I smiled at those memories and felt a warmth in my soul as the sun climbed higher into the nascent spring sky.

Spring was here.

*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***

Creek: Little Creek during the last few hours of winter. The stream is fed by dozens of springs along the valley on Chris Hardie’s farm.

Emerge: Skunk cabbages poke through the frozen water. The plants can generate their own heat.

Frosty plant: A layer of frost on the last morning of winter.

Skunk cabbages: A colorful skunk cabbage pushes through the frozen ground.

Tracks: Deer, turkey and other animal tracks are captured in the soft sand and clay along Little Creek.

Trees: This grove of pine trees was planted more than 60 years ago by Chris Hardie’s great uncle.