A Father's Day flood

*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

When it rains, it pours; especially when you push your luck.

This mashup of adages is what popped into my mind when I discovered water pouring across the floor of our basement. It wasn’t raining outside but our water heater was spraying streams like a sprinkler.

The perfect way to begin Father’s Day.

The water heater is an expensive quick recovery, 100-gallon commercial unit that was installed in 2006 when we opened our bed and breakfast. It is designed to crank out lots of hot water when guests are filling whirlpool tubs.

Expensive can be a relative term, so here’s some perspective. In 1986 I bought a brand new Ford Escort car for $6,500, which is the same price we paid for the water heater. Both of them lasted about 15 years.

We knew we were pushing our luck, as the average lifespan of water heaters is 7 to 12 years. But we had hoped that the Cadillac water heater would keep percolating along and not blow a gasket.

I shut off the main water valve to stem the tide before locating the valve that feeds the water heater. The circuit panel on the heater was flashing all sorts of lights and codes that could be translated into “you are totally screwed”. I turned off the power switch in case the unit was going into launch mode.

I then spent the next hour vacuuming up the water, which amounted to about 25 gallons, and realized that we were pretty lucky.

Lucky that we were home. Lucky that we discovered the leak after only a few minutes. Lucky that we hadn’t just left for our three-week trip to Scotland. A little bit of damp is nothing compared to what could have been a serious flood.

After setting up a fan and the dehumidifier, I sent a text to our plumber with a photo and a request to get on his Monday morning schedule. Even I know that my usual duct tape or twine repair will be futile and there are times when you need experts.

“10-4,” he texted back. “See you tomorrow morning. Happy Father’s Day!”

This could be my last Father’s Day with all of my organs intact, as I may need to sell off a few to pay for our new water heater.

Summer memory gets warm reception.

We recently had our first big-time taste of summer heat with a temperature hitting close to 100 degrees. I posted on social media part of a column that I wrote a few years ago and in a few days it had more than 4,400 reactions, nearly 700 comments and more than 850 shares. This is part of what I wrote:

“Yep, it’s hot today. Before you complain, think of what it would be like working in 100-plus degree temperatures for eight hours and then squatting for more than two hours between a bunch of bovines.

Baling hay and milking cows were chores that continued despite the weather. And it always seemed like the hotter the day, the more hay to bale.

Our family did not have air conditioning. We also had only three TV channels and we didn’t have dangerous weather alerts that make it seem like you’re going to die if you step outside. We drank lots of water and dealt with it.

Sometimes we’d gather with our cousins and build dams in our spring-fed creek or go swimming in our neighbor’s pond. In later years my cousins had a small above-ground pool and we couldn’t wait to finish the night milking and jump in the water.

Yep, it’s hot today. But I’d gladly take a day of sweat to take a trip back 50 years.”

I clearly struck a chord with many folks who shared similar memories and stories of haying in the summertime, as the comments poured in.

Mike Thom of Markesan summed it up nicely. “I’d have to say all of us that experienced the joy of being in a haymow or on a wagon in the sweltering sun and then took a break to get out of the sun between the cows for milking all turned out to be pretty darn good humans!”

Gary Towner of Trempealeau added: “The greatest thing grown on family farms, not the crops or the livestock … it’s the people. Honest, hardworking, respectful, neighborly assets to our communities. This is what we will miss the most as farm families dwindle in number.”

Good old-fashioned hard work didn’t hurt us any.

Cutlines:

Haying: Putting up hay into the barn the old-fashioned way.

Water heater: This water heater sprang a leak on Father's Day morning.