*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Tart apple brings sweet memory**

I had a ghost memory the other day that took me back nearly 50 years.

Also known as involuntary memory, precious fragments, mind pops or a host of other names, ghost memories occur when the sight, smell or sound of something takes you back to a past memory or experience.

Often it’s a song, photo, movie or a book that triggers the memory. They frequently come to me as I live in my great-grandparents house that is full of memories. But this memory was triggered out in the yard when I looked at the green apples on our trees.

There’s a series of fields across the top of a ridge on the farm that is aptly called “the hill.” My great-grandfather and others cleared the trees with horses and a stump puller long before my time.

There were two roads to reach the hill, including one that went through the cattle pasture, following the valley as it climbed and narrowed until it reached a steep incline that led up to the fields. The other road was steeper and both were inclined to washouts.

It was the summer of 1974 and we were haying on the hill, which in those days meant stacking small square bales on the hay wagon as they came from the baler. The loads were hauled back to the farm and stacked in the barn.

My brother Kevin was driving the tractor and the hired hand Wayne and I were riding on the wagon as we descended the steep hill. A cousin was coming up the valley with an empty wagon so Kevin pulled over to the side of the road under the shade of a tree to make room for the oncoming tractor.

The shade was welcome under the hot late July sun. Then I noticed that the tree was heavy with green apples. I climbed to the top of the hay wagon and picked a few. I polished one up on my shirt and took a bite.

Yes, it was sour. I can still feel the tang on my inner cheeks. But I liked apples – sour or not – so I finished it off.

Wayne saw what I was doing and chuckled. “Don’t eat too many of those,” he warned.

“Why not,” I replied.

“Because you’ll get a tummy ache.”

Wayne – who was probably in his early 60s at the time – lived just down the road from our farm in a small mobile home. He lost one arm in a car accident years before, but managed with a prosthetic that included a metal hook. Mechanically inclined he was not, but hand him a fork or a shovel and he would work as hard as the next man.

I was your typical 10-year-old who loved to challenge.

“Why?”

“They just do,” Wayne said.

Wayne may not have known the physiological reason as to why eating green apples can make you sick, but he was right. Eating too many unripe apples can cause stomach pain because of an excess of ethylene gas.

I took a few more bites and then stopped eating. My stomach felt fine, but I didn’t want to take any more chances. There was hay to unload and more to fetch and I didn’t want to feel sick.

Earlier that spring my great uncle Leland died. He and Dad farmed together. It was that year – Dad claimed – that his hair turned gray because he had to farm with a “bunch of teenagers and a one-armed hired man.”

Dad was prone to exaggeration at times, but in this case, he was right.

The apple tree, Wayne and Dad are now memories. But when this memory came back to me, I plucked a green apple from the tree in our yard and enjoyed a few tart bites.

I believe sometimes ghost memories revisit us for a reason.

As sure as God made little green apples

Cutline: Eating too many unripe apples can cause digestive discomfort.