*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Seasons are just a guideline**

I learned a long time ago that we don’t live in a black-and-white world and the choices between right and wrong or good and evil are often veiled in shades of gray – no matter what the political ads say.

The same can be said about nature and the seasons in Wisconsin. Aside from a date on the calendar, there are really no clear-cut dividing lines between our seasons. That is especially true in the shoulder months of March, June, September and December and any month on either side of those months.

For those doing the math at home, that’s every month of the year. For example, the only months in the La Crosse area where it has never snowed are June, July and August, according to National Weather Service records. The earliest snowfall was on Sept. 23, 1928 and the latest was on May 28, 1947. That’s darn near June.

A little further north and winter-like weather is closer to year-round. Rhinelander has had snow every month except for July and August. Trust me, I combed through 179 pages of weather data to come up with that meteorological gem.

In my neck of the woods near La Crosse the first snowflakes of the season usually occur in October but measurable snows normally don't develop until November.

I do remember that the fall of 1991 was snowy. It was Oct. 10 of that year when the official measurement at the National Weather Service office in La Crosse was a trace, but northern portions of the county had an inch or two.

Why do I remember that (other than the fact that I am a weather nerd)? We lived in Mindoro at the time and I worked the night shift at the La Crosse Tribune. I stopped between Mindoro and West Salem and stopped to take a photo of the snow, which was published in the next day’s paper.

Yes, it was in black and white taken with a manually operated 35 mm film camera. Somewhere I still have a copy of the print, which showed snow atop the road sign for Walker Road.

The official earliest inch in La Crosse was eight days later on Oct. 18 when 1.2 inches fell, which was just a dusting compared to 6 to 10 inches that fell across the area on Nov. 1, 1991. It was part of the record-breaking winter storm that dropped 28.4 inches of snow on the Twin Cities and pummeled  Duluth with  36.9 inches of snow. Those totals remain a single-storm record for the Twin Cities area and the Duluth total is the largest single storm in Minnesota history.

All of this long preamble is to explain that I was not shocked when we had a trace of snow that was enough to cover the ground on Oct. 14. It created a colorful seasonal juxtaposition  as the mix of white blended in with the peak fall colors. The same thing happened four years earlier with snow in the middle of October.

This cruel seasonal mixing thankfully only lasted for a few hours. It may be months before the real snows set in. But it was a reminder that more wood needs to be cut and the snowplow needs to be put on the truck, among many other fall chores.

So I will again remind you of one of the favorite sayings of my great-grandfather.

Winter will be here before you know it.

*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**

Holly: A holly bush looks festive with this green, red and white.

Maple: A snow-capped maple leaf.

October 2018: Snow also fell on Chris Hardie's farm in mid-October 2018

Snow on hay: Fall colors with a blending of white.