*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Ladies and gentlemen…the beetles**

It’s as certain as the trees changing colors and the inevitable decline towards winter – the annual invasion of the Asian lady beetles.

A warm day after the first hard frost is usually when the Harmonia axyridis invade. They are also called the harlequin, but don’t mistake these bugs for romantic fiction. Hordes of the stinky bugs fly in from the soybean fields and infiltrate every crack, cranny and crevice they can find.

The bugs release pheromones that alert others that they’ve just found a great place for the winter, which is what attracts others. It’s the same reaction that some humans have for moving to Florida or Arizona.

The insects were first released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in California in 1916 and then again in 1964-65 for biological control of pecan aphids. The bugs are beneficial in that they feed on aphids and other insects that can damage agricultural crops. So more were released in other states and the lady beetles invaded Wisconsin and Minnesota in the 1990s and have been a plague ever since.

The bugs have few natural predators because they are aposematic, having a red body color that alerts animals to stay away. Our chickens wouldn’t touch them. And when they are disturbed or feel threatened, they secrete a yellowish, stinky fluid that deters predators and makes your vacuum cleaner – one of the best weapons to extract them from inside the house – smell.

We use chemical spray around the windows and doors, but there are always a few that find their way into the house. This year the bugs upped their nuisance game by setting off our smoke detectors three times. We have 12 smoke detectors that are all hard-wired, so when one detector screams, they all do, which is quite enjoyable when you are awakened from a sound sleep.

I took some advice from a friend who used to work for a pest control business and wiped down the detectors with some spray to hopefully prevent them from crawling around on them. So far that has worked.

And even though the bugs stink and bite, I’d rather put up with them than the other plague of nauseating, negative political ads that unfortunately won’t end until the Nov. 6 election.

According to a September estimate from OpenSecrets.org, spending in just the federal midterm elections – not including state or local – is expected to exceed $9.3 billion.

I’m not an economist, but it seems like that kind of spending from folks who say they are going to take care of our inflation concerns is enough by itself to keep inflation cooking along. It’s especially disgusting when most of the ads are full of the same ingredient that I’ve often forked from the barn.

As far as the lady beetles, they’ve come in several waves this year, following the same roller coaster ride as the weather, which recently went from 15 degrees to 75 degrees in just a few days.

But I expect the worst is behind us now, as the nearby soybean fields have been combined. It’s just one of the seasonal challenges of living in rural Wisconsin.

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Closeup: A close view of a Lady Asian beetle.

Sidewalk: Dead beetles on the sidewalk.

Window: Beetles come into contact with spray and then die in the window sill.