*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Turn thankfulness into gratitude**

Thanksgiving has come and gone but perhaps this can be the year that we turn a day of thankfulness into a holiday season of gratitude.

I can see, smell and hear the ghosts of Thanksgiving's past when I close my eyes and remember large family dinners where grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins gathered for a day of feasting and fun. My home was once the location of such events, as it started with my great-grandparents and carried on through the next generation.

My great aunt Sara was the master lefse maker. For many years the Norwegian potato wrap was baked on the top of the wood-fired cook stove that still sits in our kitchen. That eventually was replaced by a lefse grill, but the product was still the same. It was thin and translucent – never thick and tough – and nearly melted in your mouth.

Now I can appreciate the amount of food and preparation to feed more than 30 people – plus to find room for everyone to sit. But it never seemed crowded and we never ran out of food.  By the time the afternoon chores were done, it was time for another round of eating.

Back in those days, there was one football game instead of three, but I don’t recall ever watching the TV. Instead I remember games, card games and a lot of what my grandmother used to call “visiting”. The pot was on all day and the stories flowed as freely as the coffee.

Visiting seems to be a dying vocation in an era where we fill our time with electronic diversions and inane social media dialogue. I can only imagine the scolding if any of us young cousins who would have dared to have our faces aimed down at an electronic screen instead of paying attention to our elders – especially at the dinner table.

But instead of just one day of being thankful, what would happen if we built that into a daily feeling of gratitude? Harvard Health says the word gratitude is derived from the Latin word gratia, which means grace, graciousness or gratefulness.

When we feel gratitude, we acknowledge the goodness in our lives and recognize that the source of that goodness lies in part outside of ourselves. So being grateful connects us with people, nature or a higher power – maybe all three – that is larger than us.

I’d say that gratitude combined with a little humility and a dash of common sense is sorely needed in our world today.

Deer hunters weigh in

Several readers responded to my recent column about deer hunting, remembering my late father and grandfather and the reasons why I find solace and comfort in the woods.

Bob O’Brien of Sauk Centre, MN wrote:

“Thank you for the wonderful article about hunting with your dad and grandpa. I lost my hunting mentors in 1982 and 2016. This year is my 51st deer season and the lessons and memories those two men gave I carry with every season.”

Like me, O’Brien has inherited some hunting items.

“I got grandpa's rifle when he died and now my son hunts with it and I carry dad's old Winchester 94 and turkey hunt with grandpa's shotgun. Someday my grandsons will have these guns and memories of their dad and grandpa.

“The hunting heritage is a beautiful thing and I thank God for it. Thank you again for the article. It warmed my heart and I must admit this crusty old dairy farmer has tears in his eyes as I write this. Man, I miss those men.”

My column also drew a response from Andrew Strobl of Ann Arbor, MI who said he used to hunt with a group of four to six hunters from a cabin on 120 acres in northern Michigan for 24 years. Strobl said he never bagged a deer, but what mattered more to him was the camaraderie and the excitement of opening day.

Two weeks prior to the opener was a work weekend, Strobl said, cutting wood, putting up no trespassing signs and getting ready for the hunt.

“People don’t always appreciate what they had until it’s gone,” Strobl said, as he no longer has access to the property. But he still ventures north two weeks before the season for a trip down memory lane and to visit the area and what’s left of the hunting blinds.

George Peter Block Jr. of Boyne Falls, MI also sent me a note and a recording of a song he wrote about spending time outdoors.

“I read online with interest your recollections of your hunting experiences with your father and grandfather. Attached is a song I wrote entitled ‘The Woods, The Water, And The Field.’ I hope you get a smile out of it.”

Thanks George.

I did.

*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**.*

Cutlines:

2022 buck: Chris Hardie harvested this buck during the November hunt.

Deer blind: Chris Hardie's deer blind in the woods.

Staying warm: Chris Hardie stays warm drinking coffee and hunting over an open fire.

The Woods, water, etc: Reader George Peter Block Jr. of Boyne Falls, MI shared a song he wrote about hunting and being outside.