Spring day clears the mind

There comes a day every year in the midst of the dance of the seasons when winter allows spring a brief interlude.

Since we live in Wisconsin, that day may come in late February or late March and will likely have the longevity of the latest K-pop star as the dance of the seasons is often flighty and has its own beat. But it comes nevertheless, a day when you can hang up the heavy coat for a few hours, feel the warm rays of the sun and give thanks that you survived another long winter.

(Full disclosure – I don’t know of any K-pop stars but I heard a piece on public radio recently about some new releases from the Korean popular music scene and wondered out loud to myself if any of their music will be played 50 years from now.)

My spring day came recently when the temperatures climbed into the middle-60s, melting the remaining drifts of snow. With little snow cover and the frost still in the ground, it created a perfect opportunity for a walk into the woods before the mud season.

The promise of some exploration and quiet in nature lifted my somewhat darkened mood, the result of too many hours of work, trying to recover from a cold that seems as long as our winter and too many hours of trying to wrap my head around the direction and focus of our country.

I needed some of Mother Nature’s medicine to lift my mood.

But before my sojourn, I started some spring yard work. Branches shed from our majestic maple were collected and piled. The herb bed was raked. The tender shoots of the perennial chives emerged from under the dead vegetation, which was collected and wheeled away.

Runaway vines from a grape were trimmed and gathered along with shed needles from our arborvitae. A few other fall chores left undone were finished.

The birds sang. The wind blew. Each pull of the rake released tension. The exertion was good medicine.

My next task would take me across our stream to check out something I spotted in the woods. There was a shimmering, metallic-looking object that was sparkling in the sunlight. I crossed the creek and drew closer to the invader.

It was not an alien spaceship but a large party balloon, with the number 3 very visible and some other number or letter deflated. The golden balloon was tangled in the branches of a birch tree, still fluttering and sparkling in the wind.

I was near the spot where last fall I found a large dead buck that I suspected had been shot by an arrow and was not tracked by the hunter. I found it on the opening morning of the gun deer hunting season.

Coyotes and other carrion-consumers had done their job. The only thing left of the carcass was the head, the antlers and the still attached spinal cord, along with one leg and a large pile of hair.

The carcass was beside a small tributary to the creek that was running a little faster thanks to the last of the melting snow. Skunk cabbages broke through the wet ground.

I sat on a fallen log for a few moments. Fifty years ago I wandered across this same terrain with my brother and cousins. Erosion has created a larger ditch for the small stream, but it’s a place where we once dammed the waters, creating a temporary pond.

The shouts and fun we had have long faded into the hills. Today the location was silent and I was reflective.

Further up the stream is a valley my late father frequently called “Paradise.”

I may have asked but I don’t remember how it gained that name.

But as I sat on the log with a calmer mind and a gentler disposition, it was not my place to disagree.