*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**The land called, and we answered**

There’s a rhythm to life that settles deep inside the bones of anyone connected to the land. We see it and feel it in our daily routine with crops and animals.

That rhythm is keenly felt in the spring. We’ve moved through the dark days of winter and are ready to repeat life born anew. Green shoots burst forth, crops and gardens are planted.

Ben Logan, the author of “The Land Remembers,” perhaps said it best.

“Once you have lived on the land, been a partner with its moods, secrets and seasons, you cannot leave. The living land remembers, touching you in unguarded moments, saying, ‘I am here. You are part of me.'”

The land called my great grandparents, Ray and Hilda Hardie, 96 years ago, when they packed their belongings and three children and moved to the town of Franklin in Jackson County, Wisconsin, to start a new life.

Their youngest daughter, Sara, took over the family farm with her husband, Leland. In 1970, my parents moved to the farm as well.

The land called me 37 years ago, but as a confident 18-year-old heading to college and marriage, I turned a deaf ear. I was more than eager to shake off the dust from the land and grab the world by the tail. But like the whispering wind that blows through the oak forests, the land still called. The land was patient. Time was on its side.

My wife, Sherry, and I started a family and launched our careers. I was a journalist and worked my way up through the ranks from reporter to editor and publisher.

But after our two children graduated, we started to hear the land’s voice. We spent time fixing up an old, ramshackle farmhouse near home that we bought from my parents. Then we spent weekends gardening and working on the home that Ray and Hilda Hardie built in 1926 and where Aunt Sara lived until she died in 2004.

All the while, the call of the land became like a siren, grabbing us and not letting go. And while one can never go home again, one can return home. So in 2006, Sherry and I answered the call and moved into my family’s ancestral home in Jackson County.

Since then we’ve opened up a bed and breakfast, a winery, a wedding venue and also raised Scottish Highland cattle, Scottish Blackface sheep, chickens, goats and donkeys.

In 2015, I left the newspaper industry in order to focus on our growing businesses. But I will always be a journalist at heart and will be until my last breath. A good friend and colleague Julie Belscher, who is the editor of the *AgriView* in Madison, said if I ever wanted to write a column just let her know.

A few months later I took her up on that and penned a piece about cutting thistles with a scythe in my pasture. I’ve been writing ever since.

My topics vary, but I love to focus on rural life. I write about the land. It’s what I am. It’s what I do. The rhythm of life and of the land continues.

A guiding force brought us home to the land, and it is with great respect and reverence that we carry on for those who have gone before us.

The land connects us and brings us back to where we started — with each other, with dreams and visions to share.

I now understand what English philosopher George Moore meant when he said, “A man travels the world over in search of what he needs, and returns home to find it.”

When the world fills my plate with problems and stress, the land gives me release. With each stroke of the hoe and each weed pulled, I empty the poison. The medicine of the good earth heals.

A few days after we moved home in 2006, Sherry and I sat on our porch as dusk settled on the valley. The tom turkeys could be heard gobbling from the hills as they settled in for the night. An owl hooted. The frogs from our creek began their nightly chorus.

We sat in a comfortable silence, listening to nature. While there was a chill in the air, soon it would be summer, and many nights on the porch to anticipate.

As the evening turned to silver, we heard the voice of the whippoorwill. It was faint, but unmistakable and a harbinger of the summer to come.

Welcome home, welcome home, the bird sang.

The land called.

We answered.

*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**.*