*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Taking a break from life’s wild ride**

One sign that spring has arrived is when I realize that no matter how many hours I try to squeeze into the day it just isn’t long enough to finish my work.

Field work, yard work, garden work and work-work all blend together into a dizzy carnival ride that never stops. I just look for opportunities when it all slows down so I can jump off at intervals to retain a little bit of sanity. Then I jump back on because I left sanity at the station a long time ago.

A more traditional harbinger of spring on our farm is the emergence of the flora in our creek bottom — such as skunk cabbages and yellow marsh marigolds, or cowslips, that grow profusely in the boggy ground.

Skunk cabbages are named after the strong odor they give off that lures insects for pollination. They will grow up to 3 feet tall, blanketing the wetlands with dark-green cabbage-like leaves. Cowslips are members of the buttercup family; they’re now starting to bloom.

On a recent evening I was crossing our creek bottoms after forking off another load of manure on my compost pile. Noticing the skunk cabbages and blooming cowslips, I shut off the truck to step outside for a better look.

It was quiet in the bottoms except for the gentle murmuring of Little Creek and a few spring peepers warming up for their nocturnal concert. The golden glow of the setting sun fell upon the skunk cabbage leaves. It made the yellow cowslip blooms seem so much brighter.

I thought about my Great-Aunt Sara Clair who loved the flowers, a memory of her younger days on the farm. My wife, Sherry, and I would always try to pick a bouquet for her when she couldn’t walk to the creek.

It was only a brief intermission because I needed to jump back on the wild ride and finish the evening chores. But the gentle reminder of spring in the bottoms left me with a smile.

Speaking of wild rides, I wonder if the extreme partisanship in our country will ever end. When we will talk about what unites us rather than what divides us?

A scene in my barnyard this past week is perhaps a lesson we can all take to heart. We have quite the menagerie of animals sharing one space — cows, sheep, donkeys and goats. Different species and different temperaments all live together.

I am waiting for the grass to become a little longer before they are put into pasture. So all the animals are being held around the barn and being fed hay. Around the edge of the field is a line of trees, which are just beginning to leaf out. All the low-hanging branches are quickly stripped by the goats.

This past week, Sherry noticed our goat Pan had created an ingenious way to reach a little higher. Our donkey Henrietta was standing under a tree. She allowed Pan to stand on his hind hooves and place his front hooves on her back. The extra stability gave Pan a few more nibbles at the higher leaves. Henrietta was, in turn, having her face cleaned by our Scottish Highland calf, Squall, who was licking her.

It’s amazing what you can accomplish if you work together.

Don’t get me wrong. The animals have their turf and it’s not always one big happy family. Life is messy.

It’s easier at times to live and believe in the extremes. That keeps us feeling comfortable and secure about our political blindness.

The reality is that no side and no party is right all the time or wrong all the time. It takes courage to step out of our comfort zone into the middle. Instead of reacting with hostility we can plant some seeds of civility.

Maybe, just maybe, we can reach higher when we work together.

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