Back Home by Chris Hardie

**How long has that hornet’s nest been there?**

It would be an accurate assessment if I were described as someone who keeps his nose to the grindstone.

But as I discovered recently, one needs to look up occasionally just to be on the safe side.

We have an outbuilding next to our house that would have been called a two-car garage when it was built 60-some years ago. Today, it’s a one-car garage unless you happen to have two vehicles the size of Ford Pintos. Only a circus contortionist could park two cars in that garage and actually open the door to climb out.

It’s been a few years since I’ve parked any sort of vehicle in the “garage” because it has been turned into a critical-component storage facility. The space is utilized for housing important tools and materials that any homeowner — or farmer — would need, might possibly need or would not need but I keep just in case.

t’s a place for my stuff. And only I can find and retrieve critical components because only I know the precise place of storage. I use a very sophisticated filing system that’s perhaps best described as “because I think that’s where I saw it last.”

I use the same system for my desk and office at work, also known as the vertical filing system. I stack documents on any horizontal surface as high as I can without them falling over.

I was in my garage recently on a component-retrieval mission that rivaled the complexity of the Apollo 11 mission. That’s when I looked up and saw evidence of an alien invasion.

Under the peak where the roof rafters meet is a wasp nest. Not a tiny honeycomb paper-wasp nest but a massive gray bald-faced hornet’s nest, built in an oblong shape around the rafter peak. It looks like an alien pod.

Those nests are actually giant spitwads; the paper-like material comes from chewed wood fibers mixed with saliva. The outer shell is multilayered while inside are tiers of combs.

Normally, the nests have one opening for the hornets to fly in and out, but this nest looks like it was built as a condominium with multiple units. A nest can house as many as 400 hornets by the end of the summer, but they are only used for one year. By the fall new queens are produced. They hibernate for the winter, repeating the process the next year. The other hornets die.

I didn’t see any activity that would suggest this is an active nest. Then again I didn’t want to knock on the door and take a census.

Some might think that if a nest this size was in the garage this past year that I would have noticed it. And for readers with good memories, this is not the same location where I was stung last year.

It’s possible — and quite probable — that the nest has been there a year or longer. I simply haven’t looked up and paid attention.

To tell you anything else would be a bald-faced lie.

**Wild weather continues**

It’s been a tumultuous weather year so far across much of Wisconsin. We finally had a dose of an authentic heatwave that was interspersed with thunderstorms and heavy rains.

The multiple-inch drenchings have brought water into our basement — especially in a spot where the gutter needs repair. To keep the water from dumping next to our foundation, I cobbled together a temporary fix using a couple of old sections I located in the garage.

I didn’t have enough gutter to reach the ground, but I propped it up on an old barrel for support — and turned the spout toward a tarp to direct the water downhill. It’s not fancy but it held a 2-inch cloudburst; it will be good enough until I can have the downspouts professionally repaired.

I guess all those years that people accused me of working in the gutter finally paid off.

*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**.*