

# Op-Ed

## The black fly in my chardonnay

Two weeks ago I shared one of the most traumatic experiences of my life. I even won the "conveted" Buckley award at the expense of baring my deepest, darkest anxiety-inducing memory.

I've told this story many times, usually during a conversation about my older girls' skills in swimming.

Thankfully, I've never had a moment with those two when I look back and legitimately feared that something could have happened while they were near water. We've been so careful due to my near drowning experience.

Back in 2020, when COVID was shutting down everything except Walgreens, I advocated hard for the city pool to open for the season. It didn't make sense to me that being outdoors and in

### Margie's Mess

By Margie Carter  
margie@tuscolareview.com



treated water could pose a big risk. Despite the public comments I wrote to the city, the pool remained closed and that night I ordered our above ground pool. It took over a month to be delivered because of the high demand. When it finally arrived, my husband took a week off work to dig up and level the backyard with the help of his dad and uncle.

Since then, I've become quite the chemist. I'm responsible for testing the pool, calculating the correct chemical combinations to balance it, and, when in doubt, a trusted trip to Do-It-Best for a readout keeps our pool crystal clear.

Our trusted pool is in its last leg but its gotten us 3 years of backyard fun.

This is the first year that out

youngest is finally big enough for a puddle jumper float. It took her all of 20 minutes to build her trust in that pink floaty and now she begs to go for a swim in the pool.

But I'm no fool. My past still creeps up and because of this we have still been practicing without the float with her. She's been practicing with the youngest of the swim team, gaining confidence in her skills and kicking toward toys with our coaches.

Then today I got the most ironic reminder of just how quickly something awful could happen around water.

We were getting the pool ready for the girls to swim. My little one was excited because we recently bought new bath toys that float for her to play with in the pool. Since the diving toys sink and her float keeps her on

top of the surface, she wasn't getting much use out of those.

She was climbing the ladder a couple steps, just enough to toss the new toys in. Then she's come down to grab a couple more. I was standing by the ladder replacing the cloth sock in the pool skimmer. As I was putting the pieces back in the skimmer, she tossed in the last toys and climbed to the top of the ladder. She touched the water with her toes and announced that the water was actually warm. Then one of the older girls asked if I knew where the air pump was so that she could blow up her donut float; I told her I thought it was just inside the back door. I walked toward the door where she was holding her float and as I passed the gate I noticed the puddle jumper hanging on the post.

It took my mind a couple seconds to register the situation. I turned back toward the pool, which was less than 10 feet away, and my preschooler was not on the ladder anymore.

I hadn't taken even a step when she popped up, hair soaking wet. She looked around and said, "I need my puddle jumper!"

She had jumped in and sunk. Call it what you will, but my baby hadn't panicked when she realized her mistake and she kicked her way back to the safety of the ladder. I know that even if she hadn't, I had realized it just in time to have saved her myself. That thought makes my stomach turn still.

Two weeks ago I won the Buckley award over writing about why my kids learn to swim, and today I was almost the punchline of my own story.

## My midlife crisis more of an old man incident

I try not to be brand-specific with my stories but it's kinda necessary for this one.

We have a Kia Soul that I bought new in 2009. We have put more than 290,000 miles on it and it still drives like a new car despite having been wrecked three times.

The first time, I wasn't even in it. It was only a month old and parked when another driver slid on ice and rear-ended it. The second time, I was in it but not moving. Another car rear-ended it while I was stopped at a stoplight. The third time, a car turned in front of me in an intersection and

took out my front bumper, hood and radiator.

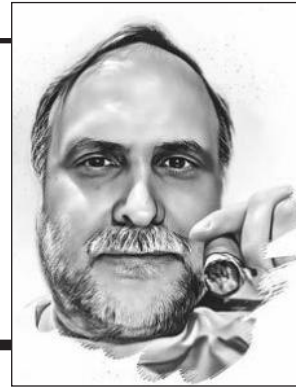
Each time, the car was new enough that the other drivers' insurance paid to have it fixed. It's been accident-free, knock on wood, for the past decade.

We decided to retire my hearse, so we started looking for another Soul. We figure if we get half as many miles on one as we have the first one, we'll be doing all right.

We found one right away, and despite being only a year newer, it had only 62,000 miles on it. Plus, we got it for \$2,000 below its book value. So now

### Ramblin' Man

By David Porter  
porter@ramblinman.us



my wife and I are soulmates with Soul mates.

The new-to-us Soul is a stick shift without cruise control. My first new car, when I was 19 years old, also was a stick with-

out cruise control. I loved that car and drove it for 10 years.

I had never driven a car with a manual transmission before and learned how by driving it off the car lot. After

a couple of rough starts, I got the hang of it. I even drove it to California and back. Such a fun car.

So, I was looking forward to driving a stick again. Sorta reliving my youth. I'd say it's a midlife crisis, but I'm a bit past midlife, and a Kia Soul is not exactly a sports car that would be typical for a midlife crisis. It's more of an old man incident.

After tooling around town in it for a week, I took it on a road trip. About four hours round trip.

It was fine, but I have to say, the allure of a stick shift at 19

is not the same when you're pushing 60.

And cruise control has spoiled me. The lack of it didn't bother me four decades ago, but today, it's a pain in the leg.

Needless to say, our new-to-us car has been designated as our in-town car. Next solo road trip I take, this old soul will take the old Soul, and Jennie will get to have fun with the stick shift. She's fine with that. At least it's not a hearse.

© Copyright 2022 by David Porter who can be reached at [porter@ramblinman.us](mailto:porter@ramblinman.us). Know anyone who wants to buy a hearse?

## Drought prompts deeper corn roots but stresses plants

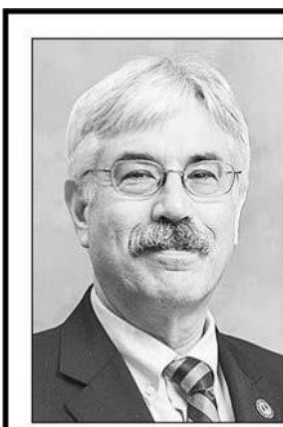
Douglas County is hot and dry as I type this on June 17. The U.S. drought monitor shows Eastern Illinois as being abnormally dry. It was tough to watch the rain run south of us on Friday, although we did not need the flood they had in Effingham. The corn rolls up tightly in the heat of the day, protecting itself by reducing leaf surface. The soybeans are doubtless under stress as well but that is less obvious.

A drainage contractor told us that there was still moisture in the ground where he was installing tile and the corn roots were 18 inches deep. The plants can't pull water out of the ground fast enough when the temperature is 100 degrees. Compacted corners and ends roll up first because the roots are usually shallow in those areas. I have seen complete fields rolled up this year.

One agriculture supplier used to say you don't want your corn to have a bad day. 100-degree temperatures and no substantial rain might qualify as a bad day. It is said that a dry June is good for yields because the plants must root deeply looking for water. We should get a test of that this year.

There is evidence that stressing soybeans may improve those yields. A Missouri farmer known for very high yields purposely burned his yield trials with herbicide to make them branch out. He had irrigation to help the plants through that stress. A friend of mine heard this farmer speak several years ago. He said there was an audible gasp from the crowd when the Missouri farmer told the rate of this herbicide he used.

The heat and moisture



### Douglas County Agriculture

Larry W. Dallas  
Illinois Farm Bureau  
District 12 Director

stress can make it harder to control weeds. The plants will grow more slowly and take up less herbicide because of that slow growth. Some protect themselves with a waxy layer the herbicide has trouble penetrating. Sprayers have still been running around here and the herbicides appear to be working.

The extended dry weather made it easier to complete our nitrogen applications. About half of our corn needed the greater part of its nitrogen after planting. We ran out of time to put it on beforehand and still plant in a timely manner. Some years that operation is difficult to complete because of rain. We did it in 3 straight days this spring.

With planting complete, we have gone on to mowing and cleaning up equipment. Effective herbicides have relieved us of the row cultivation we spent many hours at in the past. The only method of weed control was physical removal with tillage until modern herbicides came into use. Most farmers do not miss that trip over the field. I did not mind cultivating corn and soybeans if I had a good radio to listen to and I felt like I was doing a good job.

We found several broken drainage tiles when we were in

the field this spring and have fixed some of those. Many of the original clay tiles in our fields are 100 years old. Freezing and thawing, heavy rain, and heavy equipment take their toll on the tile. Sometimes a tile break shows up as a six-inch wide hole in the ground. Other times the hole is large enough to put a car in. Some of the shallow small tiles we fix by hand. The large holes require a backhoe and a lot of effort.

Fixing broken tile in dry weather is easier because the water flow is minimal. Trying to fix a big tile hole full of cold water is not fun. Many times, a hole will need to be repaired before a spot in a field will dry up enough to run tillage equipment. It is not uncommon to shut down the field cultivator and go fix a tile to get a wet place dried out.

Grain prices continue to stay near record highs. A few things are coming into better focus as far as what the harvest might look like this fall. Ukraine is supposed to have planted about 70% of its crop area. What they will do with that harvest remains a big question since they still have most of the 2021 crop on hand.

The upper Midwest stayed

wet, and they were very late completing planting this spring. Western Europe is dry and France's wheat ratings have declined 5 weeks in a row. The hard red winter wheat areas of the U.S. have been dry for 3 years. Kansas is the number one wheat-producing state. The state is projected to produce 80 percent of the crop it raised a year ago.

There is genuine concern around the world about food shortages if the U.S. crops don't turn out well. We are fortunate to produce most of our food and still be able to export our surplus. Many counties do not have that luxury, unable to feed themselves. The Middle East and much of the African continent depend on imported food.

The Securities and Exchange Commission of the fed-

eral government has proposed forcing companies that sell stock to report on climate-related activities those companies may be involved in. Supposedly, an investor could look at this information and decide if they want to support a company with their capital. Agriculture interests are concerned this may filter down to farmers who would have to track their activities that might affect the climate.

As we have noted before, agriculture is an energy-intensive business. Already some companies want to know how the grain they buy, or use was raised. It would be a burden for a farmer to track all his activities to satisfy the SEC requirements. Farm groups have responded accordingly, asking legislators to stop this intru-

sion. Computerization has made record-keeping easier but we don't need the extra work this would require. No doubt there would be penalties for providing incomplete information.

This rule is 510 pages long with 1,068 footnotes. The public was given 39 days to respond. There are huge privacy concerns for farmers since we for the most part live at our place of business. This Administration's climate policies appear to be leading to very obtrusive and expensive reporting requirements for small businessmen.

Thank you for reading about agriculture this month. We will hope for a nice rain and cooler weather. That would be good for man, beast, and our crops.

