

Paul Harvey said it best in his column for farmers

As a child, I spent a great deal of time on my Grandpa and Grandma Hooker's farm northwest of Pierson Station. I'm not a farm boy and I didn't grow up farming, though I did take out the family mailbox pulling a mower behind an old M tractor once.

For farmers, it's often a spiritual relationship with the land they steward and that's a fraternity I'll never join. Therefore, as is my tradition for the farm and garden edition, I'll allow the great Paul Harvey to express in his 1978 tome "So God made a Farmer" words that I could never hope to equal:

And on the 8th day, God

looked down on his planned paradise and said, "I need a caretaker." So God made a farmer.

God said, "I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, milk cows, work all day in the fields, milk cows again, eat supper and then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the school board." So God made a farmer.

"I need somebody with arms strong enough to rustle a calf and yet gentle enough to deliver his own grandchild. Somebody to call hogs, tame cantankerous machinery, come home hungry, have to wait lunch until his wife's done feeding visiting ladies and tell

Hook, Line and Sinker

By Tony Hooker



the ladies to be sure and come back real soon -- and mean it." So God made a farmer.

God said, "I need somebody willing to sit up all night with a newborn colt. And watch it die. Then dry his eyes and say, 'Maybe next year.' I need somebody who can shape an ax han-

dle from a persimmon sprout, shoe a horse with a hunk of car tire, who can make harness out of haywire, feed sacks and shoe scraps. And who, planting time and harvest season, will finish his forty-hour week by Tuesday noon, then, pain'n from 'tractor back,' put in an-

other seventy-two hours." So God made a farmer.

God had to have somebody willing to ride the ruts at double speed to get the hay in ahead of the rain clouds and yet stop in mid-field and race to help when he sees the first smoke from a neighbor's place. So God made a farmer.

God said, "I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bails, yet gentle enough to tame lambs and wean pigs and tend the pink-combed pullets, who will stop his mower for an hour to splint the broken leg of a meadow lark. It had to be somebody who'd plow deep and straight and not cut cor-

ners. Somebody to seed, weed, feed, breed and rake and disc and plow and plant and tie the fleece and strain the milk and replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week's work with a five-mile drive to church.

"Somebody who'd bale a family together with the soft strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh and then sigh, and then reply, with smiling eyes, when his son says he wants to spend his life 'doing what dad does.'" So God made a farmer.

As always, this issue goes out with sincerest thanks to those who work the land for their living and for all of us.

Having a dogged conversation?

I heard some people talking about their dogs the other day, and it got me to thinking about the dogs I've had and the stories I could tell. I was going to share one, but I couldn't find the right spot to jump in.

You ever do that? A group is talking and you think of something clever that you can contribute, but you just can't find the right segue? You don't want to step on their story.

Then the conversation moves on and you miss your opportunity altogether. Or it takes so long for a spot to open up that you forget what you were going to say.

That happens to me a lot. I wonder if people think I'm not a very good conversationalist. It's not that. I'm just a slow interjector. I'm slow in a lot of ways.

I'm even a slow driver. We talked about that some, and I was able to slide in a comment.

It felt good. It was irrelevant. And unnecessary. And redundant. But I was there, man.

I think when you're in a conversation, you need to converse. Listening is good, too. Let's not undervalue listening. But if you're only listening, you're not in the conversation. You're near the conversation.

I do like to listen. Some people call it eavesdropping.

That has a negative connotation. I don't actively eavesdrop. I don't stand outside rooms with my ear pressed to the door. Not usually.

I'm more of a passive eavesdropper. If the sound is just floating in the air and I'm not chasing it down, is it entirely my fault that I hear it? If you want to have a private conversation, maybe you should take steps to ensure the privacy part.

If you're in the booth next

to me in a restaurant and talking in a way that I can hear, and it's more interesting than the game of solitaire that I'm playing on my phone, then, yeah, I'm probably listening.

Now, in that case, I'm usually not looking to interject. That would just be rude. I've done it, but not usually. Besides, you'd know I was listening and you might shut me out.

I was on a train one time and this kid was talking on his cell phone. I could hear him tell the person on the other end that he needed to make some money and that he had some dope in his bag that he wanted to sell. At the same time, he had his hand in the bag, presumably searching for the drugs.

I wasn't really sure what to do with this information. Normally when I passively eavesdrop, I might chuckle to

Ramblin' Man

By David Porter



myself, or it might get me to thinking about something in my memory. But this was different.

Also when I typically passively eavesdrop, I don't share or retain the information. It just helps the time pass. Again, this was different.

I decided to tell the porter, which amused me a little because that's also my name. I nearly got distracted over that. But I managed to tell the porter what I had heard.

Ten minutes later, the train

came to a screening halt in front of a couple of police cars and a big German Shepherd. They hauled the kid off the train, which he didn't seem too happy about.

And that's my dog story. But it wasn't my dog. It was just a dog.

I have a couple of good dog stories to tell, but we're about out of time, and do you really want to hear about a dog that's been gone for 30 years?

I don't have a dog now. I'm not really a dog person. I'm not

a cat person, either. I'm not a pet person, really. Truth be told, I'm not entirely a people person, either.

We don't really have room for a dog. We have a dog house, but I'm usually in it. I don't think having a dog will get me evicted, either.

Earlier, we talked about trying to get into a conversation. Sometimes, it's just as hard to get out of one.

Like this one. It just seems to keep going and going without an end goal. Maybe we should get a dog. We'll probably get a dog.

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Bill calls for review of teacher licensing standards

By PETER HANCOCK
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SPRINGFIELD – Some Illinois lawmakers are calling for a review of one of the tests prospective teachers must pass in order to be licensed in Illinois.

The test is known as the Teacher Performance Assessment, or "edTPA," and it is intended to determine whether a prospective teacher has the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective in the classroom. It has been a requirement for teacher licensing in Illinois since 2015.

State Sen. Tom Bennett, R-Gibson City, said he started hearing concerns about the test from people in his district, and he later learned that those concerns were shared by other lawmakers.

"And it was over and over again," he said in an interview. "I was only hearing from a few folks that thought it was the

best thing since sliced bread, which, okay, but then I hear from the other side. It's like, I'm not hearing the same thing from people in my district."

Every state has its own criteria for licensing teachers and every school of education uses its own curriculum for training teachers. Developed at Stanford University, the edTPA was intended to be a standardized way of measuring an aspiring teacher's knowledge and abilities, regardless of what state they came from or which college or university they attended.

The assessment is given at the end of a prospective teacher's student teaching experience. It's a performance-based assessment that, among other things, requires applicants to submit a portfolio that includes actual lesson plans and tests that they've administered, examples of their students' work, and other material that demonstrates their

knowledge and competence.

The portfolios are then scored by teachers and teacher educators with expertise in the subjects and grade level in which the applicant is seeking a license.

Bennett said that having outside evaluators who have never met or worked with the applicant scoring their portfolios is one of the issues that concerns him about edTPA.

"They're weighing in, and their weight is pretty heavy," he said. "If they pass, great. If they don't, it's based on this evaluation from these folks that don't understand the whole situation. So that just got my attention."

Sen. Meg Loughran Cappel, D-Shorewood, a cosponsor of the bill, said she has concerns that edTPA is so rigorous and intensive that it could deter some people from ever trying to become a teacher.

"You will have someone that wants to be a math teach-

er, and then they get to the point where they have to do all this work for their student teaching and all this additional rigorous testing and projects," she said. "And what you end up having is, they're like, 'Why would I go through all of this and maybe not even make it, only to make \$40,000 coming out (of college) when I could stop what I'm doing right now as a junior, take a couple extra classes and become an accountant and come out making \$60,000 or \$65,000?'"

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. JB Pritzker issued an executive order suspending use of the edTPA but that executive order will expire when the disaster declaration is lifted on May 11.

Bennett is the lead sponsor of Senate Bill 1488, which passed unanimously out of the Senate March 30 and now awaits action in the House. It would continue the suspension of the edTPA through

Aug. 31, 2025. It would also establish a task force to evaluate teacher performance assessment systems and make recommendations to the State Board of Education and the General Assembly by Aug. 1, 2024.

"I think this is a good time to sit back, let's review it, see what we got, and I'm very grateful for bipartisan support

from a number of Republican and Democrat senators really feeling the same way," Bennett said.

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April is National Financial Capability Month: Three tips to protect your money in an emergency

April is National Financial Capability Month: a reminder that everyone should arm themselves with the knowledge and skills to effectively manage their finances every day, but especially in case of an emergency.

FEMA is offering three key steps to financially prepare for unexpected disasters.

1. Gather financial and critical personal, household and medical information. Have extra originals or copies of passports, driver's licenses, insurance and medical information, birth and marriage certificates and other critical documents stored in a safe, easily acces-

sible location—such as a safe deposit box, external hard drive or the cloud—to avoid any issues.

2. Consider saving money in an emergency savings account that could be used in any crisis. Keep a small amount of cash at home in a safe place too. It is important to have small bills on hand because ATMs and credit cards may not work during a disaster when you need to purchase necessary supplies, fuel or food.

3. Obtain property, health and life insurance if you do not have them. Not all insurance policies are the same. Review your policy to make sure the

amount and types of coverage meet the requirements for all possible hazards. For example, homeowners insurance does not typically cover flooding, so you may need to purchase flood insurance from the National Flood Insurance Program.

An easy way to start preparing your finances for an emergency is by completing an Emergency Financial First Aid Kit. This important document offers guidance on organizing and securing important documents, provides important advice on managing finances, and describes what to expect should a di-

saster strike your community. For even more information on how to financially prepare for an unexpected emergency or disaster, visit www.ready.gov/financial-preparedness.

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