

Not feeling the love yet for the Fighting Illini

*There'll be good times again for me and you
But we just can't stay together, don't you feel it, too?
Still, I'm glad for what we had and how I once loved you*
— Carole King

When I was in school, I was “friend zoned,” A LOT. It wasn’t until I quit being a doe-eyed softy and started carrying “the attitude” around during my senior year that I started getting more dates. And then I met the little brown-haired girl and almost messed up the best thing that ever happened to me, but

that’s a story for another day. For today, faithful readers, I’m here to talk about another love unrequited. That’s right, I want to talk about the 2023 Fighting Illini football team, and how, after an entire off season of flirtation, they finally got me to commit to them, only to tear my heart to pieces by getting pushed around for two games. I know they won the first one, and Toledo won yesterday 71-3 so I shouldn’t be too dismissive of the victory, but it just hasn’t felt right yet. It’s not that we lost to Kan-

Hook, Line and Sinker

By Tony Hooker



sas, or narrowly defeated Toledo, I think they’re going to win a lot of games, but it’s how we lost. They seemed to be able to move the ball at will against us in the first half, with us falling behind 31-7 before rally-

ing. Our defense was the best in the country last year, and I figured there would be some slippage, but through 2 games, we’re ranked 125th, right there between Central Michigan and Buffalo, not the Bills,

the Bulls, who lost to Fordham on Saturday. Another cause for concern is our offense, which has been pretty offensive, to be frank. Our line returned three starters, several of whom have NFL aspirations, and we’re currently ranked #88 in total offense, right there behind Boston College, who won their last game by 3 points over Holy Cross, who is not known as a juggernaut. It’s still early, and maybe our two opponents might be better than I’m giving them credit for, so there’s a chance

that our season may turn around, even though this week’s opponent, Penn State, is the most daunting one on our schedule. I don’t expect us to win, but from there our fate will be in our own hands as we move forward with the season. Maybe our guys will justify my faith in them, get their act together and put together another winning season, just as my persistence resulted in me finding my life partner 40 (!) years ago. Or perhaps not, and I’ll quit them again, forever. Until next year. We’ll get ‘em next year if we don’t get ‘em in 2023.

The day Dr. Harris gave me the shirt off his back

My high school class is getting ready to celebrate our 40th reunion in a couple of weeks. I was blessed to be part of a tight-knit class in a small town where many of us started Kindergarten together. We have known each other literally for as long as we can remember.

When we were young, the town had two grade schools. They were two blocks and two worlds apart. All the kids on the south side of the tracks went to South Ward, and the kids on the north side went to North Ward.

Back then, it wasn’t unusual for a 6- or 7-year-old kid to walk alone to school, or, more likely, with older siblings. I guess the town leaders thought it was too dangerous for us to cross the tracks on our own. We could handle the snow (uphill both ways) and the occasional loose dog (or fenced dog as we cut through backyards), but the train tracks were where the line was drawn.

Because of that divide, it was like growing up in two different towns. We might get to know a few kids from the other side through church, little league, scouts and biddy basketball, but there were quite a few kids whose paths never crossed until fifth grade.

By that time, allegiances had been forged and friend circles had been made. Two hierarchies would need to meld into one, so there was some jockeying for position. It wasn’t merely that there were two kings of the hill; two whole decks of cards were being shuffled together.

From my perspective, there were no strong rivalries. Everyone’s experience is unique, so I can’t speak for everyone;

Ramblin’ Man

By David Porter



I’m sure there were some who felt left out or neglected. I just hope that if they felt that way 40-45 years ago, they realize now that the rest of us do grow up and mature.

I always felt like I didn’t belong to any group but could walk comfortably in and out of every group.

The closest thing I had to a rival was a red-headed kid from the other side of town named Brian Harris. I think the word “rival” is a little strong. I never disliked Brian; I just didn’t know him very well. But we were fairly evenly matched in a lot of ways.

He was a little bigger than me, more athletic, way smarter, better dressed, had a better sense of humor and, generally, was just more likable than me. If he had been better looking, I might have been envious.

Brian is now Dr. Brian Harris and is a retired educator. Let’s be frank; he was one of the highest-paid school superintendents in Illinois when he retired in Barrington. He’s being inducted into the Tuscola High School Hall of Fame in a couple of weeks.

Since I haven’t been asked to expound on his greatness at the ceremony, I’ll share a story here.

I don’t know if Brian will remember this story. I’m not 100 percent sure it’s even true. But

it’s true as I remember it. In junior high, we had 27 guys on our basketball team (which made it to the state playoffs two years in a row). I

remember that there were 27 guys because we had different colored practice jerseys. There were five sets of five jerseys. I was one of two players who didn’t get a colored jersey, meaning I was ranked either 26th or 27th on the team.

I was not bothered by this ranking as I knew it to be accurate. I was pretty sure I was number 26, which was confirmed one day when Brian got demoted.

He did something (or maybe he didn’t do enough of something) and caught the

coach’s wrath. Maybe he didn’t hustle enough or missed a layup. I don’t know; I wasn’t paying that close of attention. Anyway, he had to give up his coveted colored practice jersey to me. I was now ranked 25th on the team and Brian was 26th. It was the greatest day of my basketball career and possibly his worst. I think maybe that humiliation contributed to Brian’s drive for success. It probably led to his diligence toward earning his master’s degree and then his doctorate. Never again

would he suffer such indignity. And he owes it all to me. Probably. Possibly. Doubtfully. As difficult as that must have been for Brian, I’m the one who had to wear his stinky, sweat-soaked jersey for all of the 20 minutes it took for him to earn it back. So, who really got demoted that day? © Copyright 2023 by David Porter who can be reached at porter@ramblinman.us. My basketball record may be unmatched anywhere: six years on a team and never scored a point. Maybe I was the 27th.

Several ways to prepare chicken

Let’s Cook

By Linda Hoskins



rooms, pimientos, milk and basil.

Layer half the noodles in a large casserole dish. Top with half the soup mixture, half the cottage cheese, half the chicken, and half the Parmesan and American cheese. Repeat layers except for the Parmesan and American cheese.

Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Top with both cheeses and bake 5 to 10 minutes more or until the cheese is melted. Let stand for 10 minutes.

So many recipes call for cooked chicken. There are several ways to get that perfectly cooked chicken. You

could gently boil the chicken breasts in salted water. To use this method, place the chicken in a large skillet, and add just enough water to cover. Add 1 Tbsp salt (yes, that does sound like a lot!). Bring the water to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer, and cover the pan. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes until done. Now here is the trick: remove the skillet from the heat and let the chicken cool in the water. This keeps the chicken nice and moist.

Some people like to cook the chicken in a skillet to get it browned for an extra flavor. Heat olive oil in a skillet

over medium-high. until hot. It should take 3 to 5 minutes per side. The method I prefer is to bake the chicken. I place the chicken breasts in a pan, sprinkle on some salt, and add a bit of water (maybe just enough to wet the bottom of the pan) and bake covered at 350 degrees for 30 to 40 minutes. I add the water to keep the chicken very moist. But for extra flavor, you could rub the chicken with olive oil and skip the water. I find the oven method to be the easiest.

Please share with us your favorite recipes, or tell us a funny story about a mishap in the kitchen. If you don’t mind, tell us where you are from as this column is printed in newspapers throughout Southern Illinois and part of Missouri. If you like, I will leave your name off. Send your recipe to letscook!@heraldpubs.com or mail to Mascoutah Herald, PO Box C, Mascoutah IL 62258.

I’m a wimp when getting sick

I’ve written before about how much of a wimp I am when I get sick. My wife NEVER complains, even though she has had three kids and her share of the aches and pains that life throws at you. But this time I think I might actually have the right to squeal.

It all began in July. We went vacationing with the kids and grandkids to Michigan, swimming every day for a week. After a few days of playing Marco Polo, I noticed that the water that would usually dissipate from my eardrum seemed to remain in my ear despite a few well-placed shots to my head with the palm of my hand to force the water out. I’m thinking, “Ear infection,” but I don’t want to panic and jump to any conclusions since I already have a bad reputation for crying wolf. When no one was looking, I logged onto the internet to check out WEB MD. Each symptom I read about is a symptom I have: *A sensation (pain) that is dull or throbbing...* check; *Lying down ex-*

So there I was

By Pete Buckley



acerbates the discomfort... check; *infection pain can interrupt sleep...* double check. Even though the internet claims that ear infections often clear up on their own, the next day I snuck off to the local CVS and got examined by a nurse practitioner who confirmed I had an ear infection and prescribed ear drops for 10 days. Cathy plopped six drops into my ear four times a day and it felt as if the ear drops merely pooled in my ear canal and ran like a river down my shoulder whenever I stood up. Well, the vacation ended, but I couldn’t hear out of my left ear. I no longer had that ear infection-type pain, but it felt as if someone stuffed Play-

Doh into my left ear. I went to my Ears, Nose & Throat (ENT) doctor and she discovered that I had a fungal ear infection, not the bacterial ear infection I had been treated for. My doctor informed me that in order to prevent mushrooms from growing in my left ear, she would prescribe another type of ear drop that will eliminate the fungus. After five days or so of different ear drops, I noticed that my left ear felt as though someone had removed the Play-Doh because I could hear better. However, I was still unable to sleep and I was noticing something else wrong with me. My sinuses were beginning to ache and my head felt as if it

had ballooned into the size of a 50-pound pumpkin. My eyes resembled Christmas ornaments... cherry-red with green stuff oozing at the corners. The facial recognition feature on my iPhone didn’t recognize me and I couldn’t open my phone. My granddaughters told me I looked scary. I have had this feeling many times in the past when I had a sinus infection. I had done battle with sinus infections previously and I thought I knew just what to do. I took DayQuil and NyQuil at the appropriate times. I rinsed my sinuses several times daily with a saline solution. I took zinc tablets to reduce the length of time I would be sick. I held warm compresses over my face to alleviate the swelling. However, this time, nothing worked. I lasted one week before crying “Uncle” and going back to the ENT doctor. Doc said the good news was that my ear was no longer infected. The bad news was that I had a raging sinus infection and it was likely a bacterial

infection rather than a viral infection which means that I required antibiotics to fight the infection. After picking up my prescription, I went home and waited for bedtime when the battle would begin. That night, I sleeplessly tossed and turned with my head supported by 25 pillows. I left the bed each hour to try another remedy ... Sudafed ... NyQuil ... antibiotics (2-inch X 2-inch pills that I could barely swallow) ... nasal rinses ... nasal sprays ... a hot shower at 2 a.m. ... and now suddenly, a cough developed. I looked in our medicine cabinet and spotted the only medicine I had never tried ... Vick’s VapoRub. According to the directions on the label, Vick’s VapoRub, “when applied to chest and throat relieves cough due to minor throat and bronchial irritation...” The directions for application were to rub a thick layer of this strong menthol-smelling substance on your chest and throat. I complied with the directions and my hairy chest

looked like a poodle had been caught in a violent rainstorm. After lying down for an hour and ruining my T-shirt as well as the sheets on my bed, I gave up and headed for my second shower of the night in a futile attempt to get rid of the VapoRub. I finally admitted defeat and slumped down in a recliner. The next sound I heard was birds chirping. I had actually passed out for several hours on the recliner. My head no longer felt swollen. My eyes were beginning to clear. I could breathe. I had won ... or so I thought. However, the next day my cough became worse. My constant yakking produced yucky stuff (I won’t frighten you with the description) and my throat was sore and my ear ached again. Back to the doctor, who rammed a long Q-tip down my throat and discovered I had strep throat. What’s next? ... Malaria? Ringworm? The Bubonic Plaque? I’m not looking forward to next week.