

Remembering Paul Harvey: A Great Tree has Fallen

By Stewart Truelsen

Paul Harvey was not cut out for retirement. A deep obligation to his radio audience kept him behind the microphone until his death at the age of 90. The voice of Middle America has been silenced, and radio will not be the same.

Having worked as news editor for Paul Harvey at ABC Radio in Chicago in the 1970s, I thought of how he might have written his own farewell. His ability to sum up a person's life in a few clipped sentences was truly amazing. It didn't matter whether the person was great or small. A yellow sheet of paper would spin out of Harvey's typewriter with just the right words on it.

At the funeral in Chicago, his son, Paul Harvey Jr., borrowed part of the eulogy he delivered from the words his father had written about FDR's passing. "A great tree has fallen. An empty place has opened up against the sky." It was very appropriate. There is an empty place on the air for millions of faithful listeners.

Harvey was friends with Dr. Billy Graham, Warren Buffett and many of the nation's most recognizable leaders over decades, but he had a great appreciation for the average working man or woman. Farmers and ranchers, law officers and airplane pilots were among the groups he admired most.

After I left ABC News and joined the American Farm Bureau Federation staff, Harvey gave the featured address to an AFBF annual meeting. Of the 30 annual meetings I have attended, I can't remember an address that was more appreciated by a Farm Bureau audience. This was no surprise really; he was always ranked at the top as a convention speaker.

AFBF sponsored *Paul Harvey News and Commentary* for a couple of years, and Harvey also was a spokesman for several commodity groups and agribusiness. Paul and his late wife Lynne, or Angel, as he referred to her on the air, owned a farm in Missouri, but Harvey did not count himself a farmer. That honor he reserved for men and women who worked the land. He was, however, a Farm Bureau member.

Harvey's mixing of news and commentary and reading commercials on the air set him apart from newsmen like Walter Cronkite. He also was different from those commentators on radio and television today who are arrogant and argumentative. Paul Harvey had a powerful voice in his prime, the most recognizable on the air, but he didn't have to raise it to make a point.

I can personally attest to his love for his country and the special attention he paid to people who live in rural America. There were times we talked about conditions in farming and the breakthroughs that would lead to an even greater and more prosperous American agriculture. Good day and thanks Paul Harvey.

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Stewart Truelsen is a regular contributor to the Focus on Agriculture series and is author of a new book marking the American Farm Bureau Federation's 90th anniversary, Forward Farm Bureau.