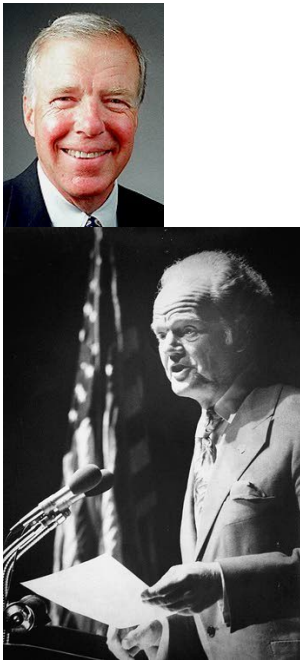


Radio news legend left words of wisdom here

UP FRONT/COMMENTARY

By A. L. Alford Jr.

Wednesday, March 4, 2009



Paul Harvey, who died Saturday at the age of 90, speaks at a 1976 presentation at Washington State University in Pullman.

For six decades, many - probably most - Lewiston Tribune readers have from time to time listened to the resonant voice and trademark delivery of talk-radio pioneer and news commentator Paul Harvey.

Harvey was a five-day-a-week presence on Lewiston's KOZE radio, among stations on the dial in the region. He died Saturday in Phoenix, where he had a winter home. It was the end of this heartland icon with a distinctive Midwestern flavor, with his trademark "Stand by for news."

Twice, Harvey gave speeches to Quad Cities audiences.

Each was before Harvey was credited with inventing or popularizing terms such as "skyjacker," "Reaganomics" and "guesstimate." In between his two appearances here, the supporter of the Vietnam War (and early supporter of the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy) shocked his listening audience when in 1970 he renounced his support of President Nixon's expansion of the war.

He said: "Mr. President, I love you but you're wrong."

Harvey's second appearance here was in 1976, when he spoke to 700 at Washington State University's Beasley Performing Arts Coliseum in Pullman. The God and Country Freedom Rally was sponsored by the Pullman Church of the Nazarene.

"Things can't possibly be as bad as we newsmen make it sound," Harvey said, noting the U.S. 1976 bicentennial celebration was coming "just in time. And we in the media ought to lead the way to an audit of our blessings."

The message of the news, he said, seems to be "Don't just sit there, worry. News isn't news anymore. It's a round-the-clock warning."

Harvey said the freedom of Americans cannot be absolute. "Americans mouthing platitudes about freedom are obscuring the very meaning of America. We're free - free as a driverless car."

Harvey recommended the Bible as the best guidebook to a rich life. "You don't do what you want; you do what you ought. And for those consciences that are anesthetized," he added with a chuckle, "it (the Bible) specifies which is which."

"Uncle Sam has been sick from time to time," Harvey said, setting up another gag line: "But every November, and sometimes in between, he throws up and gets up and gets on his way."

Harvey's first appearance here was at the 1966 Lewiston Roundup in North Lewiston, first a brief stop at the Sunday performance and then that evening before more than 500 (at a ticket cost of \$1.50) in a chilly outdoor setting. At the rodeo, Harvey was given a cowboy hat by the Rev. J. Stanley Lyman, chairman of the Lewiston Ministerial Association.

His talk dealt with the liabilities and the assets of America and he discussed the political and moral structure of society, mixing humor and criticism in the 50-minute talk. He spoke of U.S. foreign commitments, saying Americans needed to determine their limitations and abilities in order to cope with problems confronting the country.

The strongest reaction was when he quipped about U.S. Sen. Robert Kennedy of New York.

He said: "Kennedy said the other day he would gladly send his blood to the Communists. Which reminds me of a letter I received from a lady in Kansas the other day. She wrote she hopes that Bobby would send all his blood in the original container."

"And that," Harvey continued, "reminds me of the two people from Oregon who called me the other day to say they too would give blood to the Communists."

"Yes," said one of the Oregon folks, "both my friend and I have infectious hepatitis."

On that Sunday evening in 1966, Harvey was guest of honor at a social at the Lewiston home of KOZE radio co-owner John H. Matlock. John's wife, Alice, my aunt, summoned me to attend, difficult at the time because I was completing Tribune coverage of the Sunday Lewiston Roundup performance and an interview with the all-around champion, Oregon's Larry Mahan. I quickly departed for the party.

I had perhaps 10 minutes with Harvey, before scurrying back to work. Harvey had two things to impart.

One: Young man, you've got an alcohol drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Neither is good for you. (I agreed to half, putting out the cigarette.)

Two: Young man, I'd like to offer you my newspaper column, now carried by some 250 newspapers. Although I wasn't the decision-maker at that time, I demurred on behalf of the Tribune, saying his radio broadcasts were sufficient. (Actually, he was better on radio than his print column, in my opinion.)

At that time, Harvey was in his 50s, lean and tall and balding. His voice was a marvel, whether in conversation or on the radio.

The Matlocks' youngest of three sons, Steve, was a Lewiston High School student. Steve, now of Phoenix and owner of a telecommunications company, recalls:

Harvey had forgotten to pack a belt. Steve, prior to the Roundup Park speech, loaned him his.

It was never returned.

Alford is former publisher of the Tribune. He may be contacted at alajr@lmtribune.com or at (208) 848-2250.