

Bill Hall:

God's voice at the Super Bowl

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

I was boggled to realize the team I have always rooted for had won the Super Bowl.

I speak of farm families and of the dominant commercial during the annual football and advertising championships.

I was boggled because family farmers are a tiny percentage of the population today, although they still feed the nation and then some. In fact, there is hardly another profession in the land where the few produce so much for the many.

But how could a simple tribute to farmers score such a large (7.5 million and counting) YouTube Internet video audience in the days since the Super Bowl? The Dodge Ram Truck ad praising farmers was astonishingly popular with a mostly urban football audience.

Perhaps it is because so many of us are still farmers at heart or in part.

Me, for instance. When I was born in 1937, 40 percent of Americans were on the farm. Today, the figure is approximately 2 percent. I was part of that massive migration of farm kids away from farming and into other realms.

I do not regret leaving the farm at age 8 and losing my chance to slop the hogs, feed the chickens, milk the cows and work like a slave morning, noon and night in all kinds of weather. There is something about a city job inside with central heating and air conditioning that is appealing to a pampered generation like mine.

Nonetheless, most of us still have throbbing farmer genes. We still harbor an urge to plant each year when spring arrives. Store clerks and lawyers, auto workers and doctors, teachers and scientists, burger flippers and football fans by the millions get an itch each spring to nurture flowers, tomatoes, carrots, beans, state legislators - any kind of vegetable.

By the millions, we are farmers though we went into other professions where we get our physical exercise at play far more than at work. But most of us have parents and grandparents who were farmers. And deserve it or not, we were one of their favorite crops.

Consequently, the popular Super Bowl commercial resonated in tender ways with the many of us who can hardly believe how hard our ancestors worked on those farms of yesteryear, how long out in the sun other farm workers labored in their part of the profession.

That Super Bowl commercial on the super beings who worked harder than most of us struck a nerve. The words and the delivery came from one of the great radio story tellers of all time - Paul Harvey, who had an audience of millions through the years, before dying four years ago at age 90.

He was part sanctimonious conservative, but mostly a master of simple down-to-earth stories free of politics and full of enough heartstrings to build a harp for an angel. He had the phrasing of a great orator and one of those resonant baritones like the voice of God in the movies.

Some years ago, out of the blue, Harvey read one of my columns - with full credit - on his mid-day show. I have never had more feedback on anything I wrote. As I walked along Main Street that day, people rolled down their car windows and yelled, "I just heard you on Paul Harvey!"

An aunt of mine I hadn't talked with in 20 years called from North Dakota to congratulate me on finally amounting to something.

I thought she was dead. And I'm not sure she wasn't. It was a very special call.

I thought of her and of all the other farmers in the family as I watched that commercial filled with pictures of rural America.

One line in that farm folk tribute got to me:

It had God, speaking in a Paul-Harvey voice, saying, "I need somebody to get up before dawn and milk cows and 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!" Harvey declared.

I am the son of that farmer and of his wife. They labored night and day. And yes, my father was on the board of a small Idaho school district.

That was appropriate because farmers were teachers of a different sort. They taught us all with the tenacity of their labor how to lead honest, productive and useful lives.

Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's Opinion page. His email address is wilberth@cableone.net.