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The Column's New Two-Author Byline



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As I am sure you have noticed over the last few weeks, this column now sports two authors. Actually, Harwood and I have been co-writing this column from its inception on July 5, 2000. For years, his invaluable contribution was acknowledged at the end of each column. Moving Harwood's name to the byline coincides with, and is in recognition of, his completion of the requirements for a Ph.D. degree here at the University of Tennessee.

After writing this weekly column for over a decade – this is column number 526 – I thought it might not be out-of-line to use this change-in-byline event to tell you little bit about our backgrounds. To do that, I have commandeered this week's column. Yes, the two-author byline represents reality week-in-and-week-out but, oddly enough, not this week.

Harwood and I are really displaced farmers who write columns about agricultural policy and economic issues that we hope will be of interest, especially to farmers. We come by this displaced farmer label honestly.

Though he grew up in suburbia, Harwood spent over thirty years in midst of farmers and farm families in rural communities of Kansas and Minnesota. As a pastor of one – but usually two – rural congregations, he lived the economic ups and downs of grain and livestock producers as well as tending to the pastoral needs of his parishioners. Especially vivid are memories of their euphoria in 1970s and their depression – economic and otherwise – in the 1980s.

Many of us who have been part of rural congregations for several years, make that decades, have encountered a pastor who wants to get out in the field and do something. That was Harwood, but in Harwood's case taken up a half dozen notches. He wanted to understand what farmers were doing: from which crops they selected to grow, to which production methods they used, to how and where they marketed what was produced. And, he probed to find out why they made the decisions that they did. He was always there (well not always, he had parish responsibilities after all) to lend a hand when needed and he came dressed to do the job. If you are lucky enough to have experienced a similar person-of-the-cloth, you probably felt very blessed and appreciative.

In addition to having his feet firmly on the ground so-to-speak, Harwood also published a weekly country newspaper during the latter portion of his ministerial years. And he loves to work with data. Wow, what are the odds of all that?

In the fall of 1999, Harwood had an interest in moving to Knoxville at the same time we had an open position at the Agricultural Policy Analysis Center. He saw an article in the NFO Reporter that announced a talk that I was going to give at the NFO annual meeting in Minneapolis. He gave me a call. After half an hour's worth of con-

versation, I hired him sight unseen.

Harwood has since earned a second masters degree – his first was in theology – this time in Agricultural Economics, and a Ph.D. in Sociology with concentration in political economy and agricultural policy.

In my case, I grew up on a diversified crop and livestock farm in Central Iowa. My brother and sister and their spouses continue to be actively engaged in farming operations near where I grew up. When I was in third grade, my Dad bought a new 8N Ford tractor in Eagle Grove, Iowa. I remember it like it was yesterday. I used it to harrow, mow and rake hay, and windrow oats. Three years later I graduated to a new Super H International Farmall. I had a two-row cultivator on my H and my Dad and hired man had 4 row cultivators on their Super M and Super MTA. During the years that followed, it would be accurate to say that it was implicitly understood that I was to view myself as a full-time member of the work crew (school hours excepted—but not much else). That was fine because it was all fun to me. Well, for the most part anyway.

My parents and grandparents were sure that I would be a farmer, as was I. I had to be almost strong armed by the school principal, Axel Anderson, to take the ACT test during my high school senior year.

Iowa State University had a Winter Quarter Farm Operations program designed for farm boys like me who might be interested in going to "Ames College" (as many referred to ISU) during the winter to take college credit classes and return to the farm come Spring. I decided to do that. We took five introductory classes in the agricultural sciences, a total of 18 credit hours. I did well and found academics extremely interesting. There was also a two-year Farm Operations program. I decided to do that. During those two years, allergies, which I had suffered from since about age 12, got much worse; I got married and began working at WOI radio as a farm broadcaster.

There was also a four-year bachelors degree in the Farm Operations program. I decided to do that. During my senior year, a journalism professor, for whom I had completed a research project, asked me if I had thought about getting a masters degree. An agricultural economics faculty member also made that inquiry and encouraged me to go see Earl Heady, an internationally respected agricultural economist. During my first meeting with Dr. Heady he said I should not get a masters degree but go straight thru to a Ph.D. I decided to do that (not that very day; it took quite awhile to get used to the idea). I enjoyed the experience but I was scared to death most of the time.

After completing a Ph.D. degree and joining the agricultural economics faculty at Oklahoma State University, my grandparents still could not believe that I was not going to be a farmer. Family members would separately tell me that they had read about young college professors who had made the decision to return to their family's home farm.

In 1991, after twenty years at Oklahoma State, I accepted the Blasingame Chair of Excellence in Agricultural Policy at the University of Tennessee.

As for Harwood and me, we believe in serendipity. △

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