

The Back Story



“... And now, for the rest of the story”

I HAVE HEARD SO MANY behind-the-scenes stories since we relaunched *Missouri Life* in 1999 that I decided to start writing some down. I have to admit I came up with the idea based on one of Missouri's two world-famous radio commentators and broadcasters. No, I'm not talking about Rush Limbaugh, America's number one talk show host who hails from Cape Girardeau. I'm talking about Paul Harvey, whose daily broadcast *The Rest of the Story* aired on more than 1,100 radio stations for thirty-plus years.

I knew Paul Harvey had Missouri ties, but I didn't know how many until I started digging into his life story. I knew he had a farm near Kimmswick, south of St. Louis, that he called Reveille. He had a lifelong love and sweetheart, his wife Lynne, whom he called Angel. Their marriage produced a son, Paul Harvey Jr.

I recently visited the new Paul Harvey museum, which is inside the World's Largest Toy Museum in Branson. There, I talked with the owners, Tom and Wendy Beck, about my research into Paul Harvey's Missouri connections.

“Let me see if I can get Paul Harvey Jr. on the phone and you can talk to him directly,” Tom said. Fifteen minutes later, I was on the phone with the only child of Paul and Lynne. A few minutes later, it felt like we were lifelong friends. It was delightful to hear Paul Harvey Jr. recap the love story of his parents.

“My dad met my mom in St. Louis in 1940 when they were both working for the radio station KXOK,” he told me. “She was a well-known radio broadcaster and personality, and my dad came on to KXOK as program director. They actually met on the elevator and my dad, thinking fast, asked if she could give him a ride to the airport. She wasn't exactly sure what to say but agreed and they stepped into her 1938 Nash Lafayette Coupe. On the way to the airport, she asked Paul, ‘What time does your flight leave?’ And Paul replied without a hitch, ‘What flight?’”

They were married within the year.

Mary Hostetter, owner of The Blue Owl in Kimmswick, one of Paul Harvey's all-time favorite restaurants, put it this way: “Everyone who knew them knew they were not only lovers and best friends—they



Paul and Lynne Harvey pose by her 1938 Nash Lafayette Coupe. Though Lynne preceded Paul in death by almost a full year, friends report Paul never stopped driving the car until his death in 2009.

forged a partnership that propelled and sustained Paul's long career.” And that '38 Nash was seen rolling around Kimmswick nearly up until the day Paul Harvey died in 2009.

Mary's favorite memory of her famous customer goes back to the Flood of 1993. “The entire town was under water except for a few buildings, including our restaurant,” she says. Paul surprised her when he came up to The Blue Owl in a boat and called out in his distinctive voice, “Got any pies, Mary?”

Paul Harvey Jr. was an integral part of the Paul Harvey radio show and the writer behind the scenes of the worldwide broadcast, *The Rest of the Story*. Paul Jr. also filled in many times for his father on both shows. “All our big family gatherings were in Missouri,” he says, even though the show had made them world travelers.

Paul Jr. now owns three farms in three different Missouri counties. “There's Reveille, which is in Jefferson County, and farms in Maries and Franklin counties,” he says. “The farm in Maries County, just north of Rolla, goes back to a great, great—I don't really know how many greats—grandfather who came over from Germany in the early 1800s.”

Now here's “the rest of the story” about the farm in Franklin County: “My mom's dad was very concerned when he heard about Paul and Angel's plans to get married,” Paul Jr. says. “He told them both, ‘I don't have much confidence in this radio thing. It might not take off.’ So he drove my dad out to Franklin County and showed him a farm that was around two hundred acres. They pulled up to the farm gate and got out and my grandfather told my dad, ‘Now when this radio thing fails, you'll have something to keep you going.’”

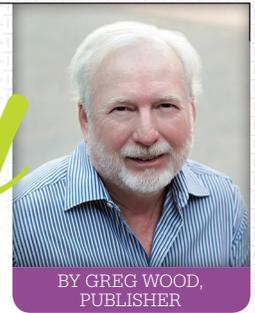
Fortunately for all of us, he never needed to make use of that gift. But from all I've discovered about Paul Harvey, I think he would have been a happy man on the Franklin County farm as long as Angel was by his side.

Anyone who listened to Paul knows he closed every show with a resounding, “Paul Harvey—Good Day.”

To Paul, every day was a good day.

COURTESY PAUL HARVEY JR.

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A Tale of Two Kates

IN 1885, Ella Kate Ewing, a sensitive thirteen-year-old girl, stood six feet tall, alone on a stage in rural Scotland County, Missouri:

"My classmates chose me to recite the Declaration of Independence. I practiced for weeks ... I heard voices from the crowd. 'Would you look at that girl?' cried one man. 'She's as tall as a barn!'"

"'Her hands are as big as skillets,' laughed a woman.

"'I'll tell you what that girl is,' yelled a boy. 'She's a freak!'"

"I ran off the stage in tears."

Those words were written in Ella Kate's voice by another Kate who also claims Missouri as her home. They are from noted children's author Kate Klise in her 2010 book, *Stand Straight, Ella Kate*, illustrated by her sister M. Sarah Klise.

It's no wonder that a writer like Kate would be drawn to the story of Ella Kate, the "Missouri Giantess." Born in LaGrange in 1872, Ella stood eight-foot-four inches when fully grown and wore size 24 shoes. But it wasn't *what* Ella Kate was that captured Kate Klise's attention. It was, rather, *who* she was.

"The more I read about her, the more I saw that she was the hero of her own life," Kate told me in a recent interview from her farm deep in the Missouri Ozarks near Mountain Home. "Ella Kate was devastated that day she took the stage, totally devastated. There is no question she wanted to hide herself from the world. But there was something within her that made her rise up—no pun intended."

Eventually, as Ella Kate assumed her inevitable stature, word got out about the giant woman from Missouri whom many called "a freak." When she was eighteen, a man from a Chicago "dime museum" (aka, a sideshow) offered her \$1,000 to go on public display for a month. Kate Klise says that Benjamin Ewing's response, as told by Ella Kate, was, "Nobody's paying money to gawk at our girl!"

That may have been the moment that moved something deep inside Ella Kate, moved her out of the malaise and the hurt she felt into the

person she truly was. She told her father, "If people were going to gawk, make them pay." In 1893, she exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair, an event attended by twenty-seven million people.

In 1897, she joined Barnum & Bailey Circus on a nationwide tour. In an interview with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Ella Kate conceded, "It was terribly embarrassing to me at first, but I have almost gotten used to it."

Ella Kate used her earnings to help her parents pay off a loan on their property in Scotland County. Then she took on the daunting task of building a house nearby to her specifications, including tall ceilings, eight-foot-eight-inch doorways, and custom-built furniture.

After she completed her house and took some time to enjoy it, she went back on the road, joining Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows. After that attraction ran its course, Ella Kate exhibited herself at county fairs and other small venues. She died in 1913 at the age of forty from tuberculosis, probably contracted during her travels.

Ella Kate's story is one of pain, but also one of acceptance—accepting the person she was with no qualms and a lot of courage—and ultimately one of embracing life. Kate Klise's book illustrates this in a poignant way:

"More than one rude spectator stuck my leg with a pin to see if I stood on stilts. When this happened, I always whispered to myself what Mama

and Papa always told me when I was growing up, 'Stand straight, Ella Kate.' The more I said it, the better I felt. And the more I saw of the world, the more I wanted to see. Because as big as I was, the world was so much bigger. And I intended to see it all."

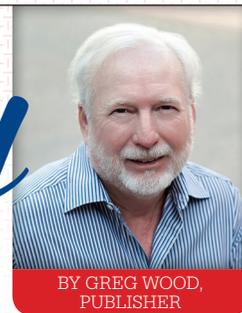
Perhaps it was this acceptance and inner strength that drew Kate Klise to Ella Kate's story, and motivated her and her sister to create their book. "Ella Kate had a Mona Lisa smile," Kate says, "like she knew something that no one else knew."

We can all be sure that she did, indeed. Rest in peace, Ella Kate.



Ella Kate Ewing, pictured here with her father, Benjamin, and mother, Anna.

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A Night at the Crossroads of America

I WAS LISTENING to Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris for some reason on my way to Carthage a few weeks ago while enjoying the beautiful rural scenery on the back roads of southwest Missouri. One of my favorite lookouts is on state Route 82 where a roadside park overlooks the confluence of the Sac and Osage Rivers.

Somehow, the Southwest-influenced sounds and beautiful harmonies of Emmylou and the late-great Parsons made fitting music for the drive. That musical groove changed dramatically as I entered my room at the Boots Court motor inn on historic Route 66 in Carthage.

The rooms are all equipped with radios from the 1940s era as their sign proudly proclaims “Radio in Every Room.” And they are tuned to “Fabulous 1490” KDMO-AM, a local Carthage station that plays only music from the golden age of radio: the ’30s, ’40s, and ’50s, which was also the golden era of Route 66. There are no TVs at Boots Court—just the radio for entertainment. I found it relaxing as I listened while unpacking and then stretching out on the full bed with the charming, colorful chenille bedspread. There’s a different style and color on every bed at the Boots.

Before receiving my room key, I got a good history lesson on the Boots by the manager Debbie deReal. She gave me the grand tour and showed me several rooms, including two where actor Clark Gable had stayed. He apparently preferred driving cross-country to trains and planes.

“Arthur Boots first built a gas station,” Debbie explains. “That’s where we are standing,” referring to what is now the office. “He began building the rooms after he saw that there was a demand. Back in that day, you could get a room at other less-reputable places for as little as 50 cents. Mr. Boots charged \$2.50. That was to keep out the riffraff.”

And that pricing policy probably made the accommodations more appealing to people like Clark Gable.

Arthur Boots moved his family to Carthage from Kansas City and began construction in 1938 after deeming the best location would be at the intersection of US 71, which ran north and south between Minnesota at the



Arthur Boots designed the “motor-hotel” himself, following the Art Deco Streamline Moderne style. Even the replica neon signs are true to the originals.

Canadian border and the bayous of southern Louisiana, and Route 66, the US highway that ran from Chicago to Los Angeles. US 71, which runs all the way along Missouri’s western fringe, was part of the original Jefferson Highway that opened in 1910 and ran from New Orleans to Canada, nicknamed the Palm to Pine Highway. It predates Route 66 by sixteen years. The intersection where Boots Court sits was known as “the Crossroads of America.”

What could be a better place for a “motor-hotel”? Boots Court opened in 1939. (The word “motel” was coined in 1925 but didn’t enter dictionaries until after World War II.) Over the years, Boots Court went through many owners and many transformations, not always in a good way.

In 2006, two sisters—Priscilla Bledsaw from Illinois and Deborah Harvey from Georgia—took a road trip on Route 66. “We saw the Boots and had to stop and take pictures and casually said to each other, ‘Wouldn’t it be fun to own a motel on Route 66.’” Deborah is a professional historic preservationist and works all over the country on historic projects. “It was about 2011 when we saw that the Boots was up for sale. My sister said, ‘Let’s buy it!’ I said ‘How are we going to do that? You live in Illinois and I live in Georgia.’ But we did anyway.”

By then the Boots was in sad disrepair and even had a gabled roof over it that had to be removed. “We wanted to restore it to the original 1940s,” Deborah says. And they have done that, one room at a time. Deborah actually moved to Carthage in 2014 to help oversee the renovation work. “I just love it here,” she says. “So much history all around us.”

She says most of their guests are driving Route 66 and they get many international visitors. The Boots enjoys a reputation as one of the truly original motels on the Mother Road.

What better way to slip into a nostalgic mood than to spend a night at the Boots where you’ll find a radio in every room playing tunes from a not-too-distant past. And thanks to two sisters on a road trip who fell in love with the place, we can now all enjoy and admire their efforts.

KORAL MARTIN