

tinent issues was exemplary.

Tim was well-liked by all district staff that

Education re-evaluate the hiring and firing practices of the Mellon Executive Administra-

Retired director of operations for Champaign schools Mahomet

it seemed all the letters from his words hit me square in the chest like

days, everyone says "thank you for your service," which is greatly

Erik Edlefsen lives in Champaign.

MIKE PEMBERTON: VOICES

# A spring morning in Hoopeston



This is how I remember it, anyway.

The sidewalks and streets glistened with rain from an early-morning thun-

derstorm as I hung the flag from the porch rail and, hot cup of Joe in hand, perched on the top step. A car crested the hill a block west. Tires crunching on the cool, wet asphalt, a ghostly silver Buick Century cruised by in the misty morning air, a petite, blue-haired woman peering over the steering wheel.

A southerly breeze ruffled the flag and brushed the green grass. A brown squirrel chattered in a maple tree as rabbits scampered across the lawn. I stretched my legs and sipped my coffee, lord of my corner lot domain.

Spring — rebirth, romance, sunlit fields of daisies and ... dandelions?

I rose, scanned the yard and descended in my tan slippers, white socks, khaki shorts and black Illinois State University tank top, coffee sloshing, wandering among the weeds and bare spots.

Weed killer. Fertilizer.

The chattering squirrel leapt onto the porch roof.

Trim tree limbs. Porch needs

a painting.

A river of rabbits flowed from a huge hole in the side yard.

They'll eat everything green, except the weeds.

Buy a .22? Rabbit stew?

Thump ... thump, thump ... THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.

A banged-up black Dodge Charger roared over the hill and screeched to a stop at the corner. A pale-faced kid, cigarette dangling from his lip, stared through me, his heavy-set buddy, riding shotgun, bobbed in rhythm to the booming bass. Tires squealing, they peeled out.

I shook my head and returned to my yard inspection.

"Office called," my wife, Yolanda, said minutes later, skipping down the porch steps in slippers and sweats. "Roof's leaking. You'll need to take a couple of buckets for the drips. Wow, where'd all these weeds come from?"

She handed me my cellphone.

"Yes," I said into the speaker.

"Hey, Mr. P."

"Who's this?" I glanced at Yolanda.

"Sorry," she whispered.

"That's a student. Joe, I think."

She studied the porch.

"Needs a painting."

"Joe?" I said, as I stared at the porch with Yolanda.

## About Voices

Voices columns are personal essays on life. To submit a column for consideration for Voices, please send the column by email to [letters@news-gazette.com](mailto:letters@news-gazette.com) with Voices in the subject line, or by mail to Voices, The News-Gazette, 15 Main Street, Champaign, IL 61824-0677. If possible, include a jpeg head shot as an attachment with email or a head shot with mailed columns. Columns should be a maximum of 750 words.

"Yeah, hey, Mr. P. I can't make class tonight. My grandmother is ill. Looks bad. Can I reschedule the essay exam for next week?"

"Doesn't your grandmother drive a silver Buick Century?"

"Hey, all old people drive silver Buick Century's."

"I had a silver Buick Century."

I heard laughter.

Yolanda's cell rang, and she strolled up the sidewalk.

"Joe? Joe?" I said, blood pressure rising.

"Sorry, Mr. P."

"You're grandmother drove by the house a few minutes before you and your pal, Vic, raced by in his Charger. She

looked hale and hearty to me."

"Really?" Joe said, laughter subsiding. "Uh, well. Wow. She sure was sick yesterday, Mr. P. I swear. But, hey, that's great news. Thanks. Have to let my folks know. Guess I'll come to class."

"You do that," I said. "And tell Vic to quit staring at people like he's James Dean."

"Who?"

"Forget it. See you tonight."

Yolanda returned, one hand over her phone as a high-pitched, mile-a-minute male voice exploded from the speaker.

"It's Tom. From the library," she said. "He wrote a play about the German POW camp in Hoopeston during World War II. Wants you to be an escaped Nazi POW. Says you're perfect for the part."

"I'm perfect to play a Nazi?"

She shooed me away with a wave as Tom rambled on about Nazis in Hoopeston.

A car horn tooted. A gleaming red F150 pickup pulled up facing traffic.

"Hey, Mike," a ruddy-faced farmer said, leaning out the driver's side window. "Ladies at the office said you'd be home."

"Lyle," I said, joining him at the curb. Yolanda stood with us. We all stared at the porch. Tom was still talking.

"Another play?" Lyle said, nodding toward the phone, his voice low and rumbling like the thunder the night before.

"Yep."

"Porch needs a painting," he said.

"Lyle," I said, taking a deep breath, "is there something I can do for you?"

"No, well, maybe. Might had some hail last night. Wonderin' about the house."

"Have a roofer take a look," I said. "If need be, you can file a claim."

I kicked the head off a dandelion.

"Some Roundup'll take care of those," he said. "I thought your grandfather was a farmer? And you walked beans?"

"He was. I did."

He snorted and drove off slow, like farmers do, eyeballing the weeds like a general surveying a battlefield.

The breeze blew, and the mist lifted. The brown squirrel gazed down from the porch roof. The rabbits scampered. Tom talked.

Yolanda smiled, and we walked back to the porch. It needed a painting.

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