

1. Farm Boys

John Nelson

John Nelson, Hank's older brother, still resides on the family farm in Boort.

We lived halfway between Boort and Quambatook in the northern Victoria Mallee area, where Dad share-farmed on a grain-growing farm. There was no electricity in those days; kerosene lanterns were used for lighting and wood fires for warmth and cooking. There was always a shortage of water, and the temperature often hit 100°F in the summer. When we look at these conditions from the comfort of our air conditioner now, it seems that it was a very tough lifestyle, but everyone was in the same boat, so it was just a matter of getting on with life. Those were the days when horses were used to cultivate the land and pull the harvester to gather the grain.

When it was time for me to start school, we moved to another farm, now known as the Nelson home farm, which was only three kilometres from Boort. This was an irrigation farm that had been purchased by our grandparents some years earlier. There was no such thing as school buses in those days, so it was either walk or ride a pony to school.

When Neil started school, we had a Shetland pony and a jinker, which we left at an auntie's place in Boort where there was a big backyard. One of our neighbours used to ride a bike to school, and we used to throw a rope to him and tow him along. To brighten our school trips, sometimes we used to stand in the jinker chariot-style with the horse galloping and try to keep up with cars (which were not very fast in those days).

Neil was an easy-going student with no ambition to be top of the class and was content to get reasonable pass marks, which he could achieve without too much effort. This attitude changed as he moved to university.

We had a tennis court at home, and Neil and I had many great battles at tennis as well as playing tennis and football in the local competitions.

As a budding farmer, Neil had limited success. We had a small dairy, and Neil never quite mastered changing the machines from one cow to the next with a book in one hand. It was definitely a two-hand job. I remember him driving a harvesting machine on a 150-acre paddock with one tree in it, and he managed to hit the tree. It was at this stage that Dad decided Neil was not going to be a farmer and so began the concentration on education. In spite of being physically apart for 90 per cent of our lives, Neil and I maintained a very close relationship.

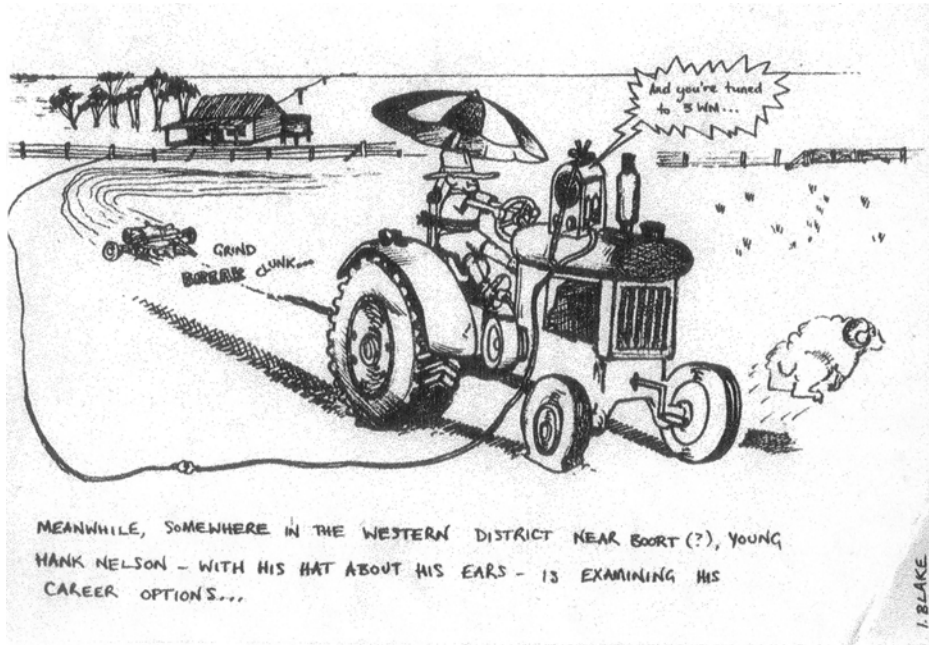


Figure 1: Young Hank Nelson on the farm.

Source: Cartoon drawn by Ian Blake.

Neil left home to complete years 11 and 12 at Kerang High School, as Boort Higher Elementary School only went to Form 4. This meant that he was home at weekends and during school holidays. Then he went to Melbourne University to complete his teacher training and so was home for university holidays. During his time at university he met up with a young lady by the name of Janet Pellas. This meant that his time of coming home during holidays was reduced, but we eventually welcomed Janet into the Nelson family. She proved to be a wonderful wife, and a great sister-in-law to myself and Margaret. Neil moved on with his teaching career, raising a family, moving to PNG and finally to Canberra, where the family now lives.

Neil and I spent many hours on the telephone, mainly on Sunday evenings, when all subjects were discussed thoroughly between us, from cricket, AFL, tennis and farming to politics. After an hour or so on the telephone, Margaret would ask me, 'What is the news from Canberra?' and my reply would be, 'There were no problems mentioned, so everything must be alright up there'.

Neil was a wonderful brother. I could not have asked for a better person as a brother.

This text taken from *The Boy from Boort: Remembering Hank Nelson*, Edited by Bill Gammage, Brij V. Lal, Gavan Daws, published 2014 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.