

## 4. Boort and Beyond

Gavan Daws

*Gavan Daws was professor and head of Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History in the Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, from 1974 to 1989. This remembrance is based on words written to be spoken at Hank's memorial in 2012.*

My first sighting of Hank was in the late 1960s, briefly, during a stopover in Port Moresby.

The next time was 1974, when I came to work at ANU.

My office was in the Coombs Building, and so was Hank's – though I might never have known he was there. The Coombs was designed as three interlocking three-storey hexagons, structurally joined at the hip but functionally divided into two research schools. Hank was in one, Social Sciences; I was in the other, Pacific Studies. Different turfs, different territories, different disciplines, different departments, scores of academics in scores of offices along corridors going in six different directions, on different levels, with different entries and exits.

One day, Hank and I happened to bump into each other at a landing on the stairs. We got to talking, and it turned out that we had some things in common. The two of us were pretty much of an age, we were both from Victoria, and we were both country boys – you could tell by our triphthongs. So there were natural connections.

But there were degrees of separation too. Hank was from Boort; I was from Dimboola. From one to the other it was a bit over a hundred miles, as the crow might fly. Back when we were kids, in the 1940s, that was a long way, some of it on not-too-good roads. So, no surprise that Hank had never been to Dimboola and I had never been to Boort.

Boort then was seven or eight hundred people; Dimboola, at just over a thousand, was indisputably bigger. Dimboola was in the Wimmera, definitely; Boort not exactly – it was where the Wimmera, the Mallee and the North Central District met. These were distinctions without a difference, but Hank and I did grow up differently, because I lived in town and he was a farm boy. I wore shoes, Hank wore boots, and he did a lot of clodhopping across paddocks:

*In the 1944 drought the dry grass was blown against that fence, drift sand piled against the barrier of grass, the fence was buried and the sheep just*

*walked over the top; over there we felled the oak trees and the grain was so straight we split fence droppers from them; that bit of rusted iron used to mend a sagging gate once fitted a bullock yoke; and over there dad yarded the draught horses and fed them before dawn so they could work all day.*

Hard yakka, the price of fair average quality wheat, dust storms, rabbit plagues: this was Hank's early education in life.

For school, he and his brother John wheeled out the jinker, harnessed Bunny, their obstreperous little black mare, and jogged into town, to Boort Primary and then Boort Higher Elementary. They each marched in with their class, the way the rules said to, and sat at the standard-issue Victorian Education Department double desk, green-topped, with attached seat and enamel inkwell, in amongst other farm boys: Doughy, Curly, Knocka, Tud, Saddles, Snakebite, and Big Barney, built like a country dunny. 'We had kids who would carry a lizard in their shirt'.

The schoolyard was dry clay. When it rained,

*just one shower and the top ground had a skin of grey mud. It stuck to the football, and soon it had a quarter of an inch coat on the leather. Old, worn and balloon-like with use, the footy quickly had the weight and toughness of a mallee root. It burst through hands reaching for marks and wrenched and sprained thumbs. It thudded on chests. A mongrel punt hit high on the instep was the only safe kick. To try a drop or a fancy stab meant a stubbed toe and a jarring that went up the leg to the hip. Some kid might have a pocket knife, even a Rogers, and he would cradle the ball in one arm and slice away the mud like orange rind. That gave a light ball for just five or six kicks.*

Your town had its football team, the other little towns round about had theirs, and if they were close enough, you played them, home and away. At the Boort ground, young Nelson, only primary school age but rightly considered to be a good, reliable lad, was appointed chip heater fire lighter. Before he was 12, he was promoted to score board attendant. 'I thought this a more responsible and prestigious position. I have not added it to my CV'.

Come high school time, Hank and I each played football in the winter, in the dry and in the mud, on ovals not axiomatically flat and not necessarily mown. In the summer, cricket, on the same ovals, malthoid pitches or concrete and matting, with the ladies' auxiliary laying on lamingtons between innings.

Then there was the Saturday night dance. You fronted up, suited-and-tied-and-shiny-shoed-and-brylcreemed, for the Modern Waltz, Quickstep – *slow slow*

*quickquick slow* – Valletta, Tangoette, Progressive Barn Dance, Pride of Erin, and Schottische. (A cultural history note: Hank told me something I never would have intuited – there was a sheet music ‘Boort Schottische’, dating from 1865.)

Here is Hank on a do after the football, an away game at Woosang:

*The Woosang ground was a clearing, probably ‘mown’ by sheep. A galvanised shed for a changing room, galvanised dunnies, and a lean-to where savs could be boiled. No showers. The visiting side was invited to a dance afterwards at the Woosang hall. By the third or fourth dance, as the blokes swung into the Jolly Miller, the combination of sweat, training oil, and cigarette smoke was so dense that frail girls floated in the haze and ruckmen had to grab them and force their feet back onto the sawdusted floor.*

Boort was Aboriginal for ‘smoke’; Boort Boort was ‘big smoke’. The biggest Big Smoke was the city. After high school, Hank and I each headed off to Melbourne, to go to university.

The only way for either of us to have got there was on an Education Department studentship, and we lived in department hostels, Hank on St Kilda Road, me on Victoria Street in Carlton – safe places for country kids not worldly enough to be out on their own (and short of the rent for a flat).

Relocating from dusty-dry bush to big-smoke city was a significant rite of passage. Hank’s rendering:

*Those of us who left came to Melbourne still wearing the hat with corks dangling, carrying a canvas water bag and chewing a piece of straw. I did not go to a public library until I went to the one in Swanston Street.*

For 18-year-old boys in the 1950s, there was another rite of passage – National Service. I was in the second intake at Puckapunyal, in the summer of 1951, Hank a few years after that. We both had immigrant Pommies for platoon sergeants. To dinkum young Aussies like us, these alien specimens were an offence against nature, nothing on earth like real Diggers – except for being baggy-arsed, and on them even that didn’t look right. The one I drew was Liverpool Irish, skinny, bucktoothed, and bone-ignorant. At reveille he used to scream, ‘*Get fell in threes!*’ and he was scared of snakes. Hank’s was called Fookin Joomp, as in, ‘*When I tell yers to fookin joomp, yers fookin joomp!*’

Back at university, we had an ongoing army obligation, to be infantry privates in the Citizen Military Forces. We were issued a uniform, one size fits none, with a patch, MUR, for Melbourne University Regiment, a slouch hat, and a Lee-Enfield .303, kept at home, but with the bolt taken out and held at the armoury.

Three years of repetitive parades and desultory bivouacs, and that was it for CMF. When we graduated, BA, DipEd, we were deployed to teach high school – another three-year commitment, working off our studentship bond, Hank in the country, not all that far from Boort, me in Melbourne.

Neither of us kept on being chalkies in Victoria long-term, but we did stay in teaching, lecturing in entry-level tertiary classrooms, in faraway places, islands in low latitudes with strange-sounding names, Papua New Guinea for Hank, Hawai'i for me.

And so the years went instructionally by, until we each came back to Australia, on the cusp of early middle age, to ANU, to the Institute of Advanced Studies, to the Coombs Building, Hank starting in 1973, me in 1974.

I read what Hank wrote and listened to him give seminars. He was quality, no question in my mind; and as well, it sounded to me as though the two of us had some ideas in common about doing history. By good fortune, in 1975 a window of opportunity opened up and I was able to bring him into my department.

For going on 15 years, Hank and I had offices just a couple of doors from each other, and he was the best possible person to work alongside. In fact, if I was designing a model colleague, and I had the authority to mandate the perfected version for adoption university-education-wide, I would use Hank as the template.

First thing – and it was basic – he had common sense. This is an attribute not evenly distributed among academics, and entirely absent in some. In Hank it was foundational, rock-solid.

With postgraduate students, he had a great touch. He could be personally easy-going and at the same time quietly tough-minded about quality, and he was willing to put in time and effort, way above and beyond the call, doing whatever it took to help each and every one of them to come up with their best.

Among faculty and staff, in the department and in the school at large, he was highest value. He could see what needed to be done, and figure out how to get it done, on his own, or along with others, always equable and good-humoured – zero operatics.

Just by being himself, Hank was an exemplary citizen of the republic of learning. He was not in business for the greater glory of Nelson – no big-noting, no putting on the dog. He never needed to be seen leading the big parade. He was not interested in parading for the sake of parading. He wanted things to always be heading somewhere useful, somewhere (and this was important to him) not just over the academic rainbow, way up high, but in the real world.

Around the Coombs or out in the world, Hank was the best company. One time, we drove from Canberra to Melbourne for a scholarly conference, hours on the Hume Highway, that big Australian interstate country road, Hank easy at the wheel, with cruising-speed thoughts about any number of things, from Bathurst burrs and Paterson's Curse, which he knew all about from being a farm boy, to the Curse of the Seminar, which he knew all about from being a career academic.

Hank wound up being based in the Coombs for more than 30 years, and latish on he did the longitudinal arithmetic of seminars in the three hexagons in his time. In an average week, more than 50. In an average academic year, 2,000. Grand total when he did his calculating, 50,000-plus.

Statistics to conjure with. Or not. Along the Hume, we decided against, in favour of other subjects of interest that presented themselves. One of these was Aboriginal place names, on the highway or off. Gundagai. Jugiong. Wangaratta. Tumbarumba. From Hank's early days, Quambatook and Numurkah; from mine, Warracknabeal, Nhill, Gerang Gerung. We wondered about the sound of them, compared with American Indian place names, and why there should be more American songs with Indian names in them (*Oh Shenandoah, I love your daughter, Away, I'm bound to go, Across the wide Missouri* ...) than Australian songs with Aboriginal names in them. Hank, never short for local knowledge, came up with 'The Boort and Quambatook Standard-Times', sung by The Cobbers.

As we were closing in on Melbourne, within day tripper range on good 1980s roads, a different question about cultural identity arose: what size did a Victorian country town need to be before it would have a restaurant with a French name? Boort never used to have one; neither did Dimboola.

The conference was at Melbourne University, more than a quarter century on from our undergraduate time. Hank gave an excellent paper, about Australian POWs of the Japanese in World War II.

When Hank spoke to audiences, including academic audiences, he practised what he preached in a piece he wrote about all his hours on the receiving end of seminars in the Coombs:

*Those who have given the best seminars I have heard spoke without rhetorical flourishes and they used plain English with a sparkling clarity, sometimes investing simple words with grace and power, and they shifted easily between particular cases, shrewd insights and generalisations. They were also saying something significant.*

This was what Hank always aimed for in his own words, written or spoken.

Professionally as well as personally, he was plain style. He did not like writing that got in the way of reading, the way so much academic prose does, convoluted,

inturned, ingrown, all pedantry, obscurity and bibliography. He liked language to show strong active vital signs, with style and substance inseparable, the two in one. And he wanted his words, live or on the page, to be understandable and interesting to other people. He never wanted to be talking to himself.

He was serious about his research, and he was as good at thinking as anyone. But he wasn't a theoretician. His way was to pick a subject that was worth the trouble, search out the facts, and make sure of them. At the same time he would be looking for meaning – and for Hank the meaning was always *human* meaning.

He was interested in history as story, and he was interested in how to tell stories. He liked the sound of voices, all kinds of voices. This led him to oral history. And he was interested in audience. This brought him to radio, to the two big series he did for the ABC with Tim Bowden, *Taim Bilong Masta: The Australian Involvement with Papua New Guinea* and *P.O.W.: Australians under Nippon*. They were great successes, in both substance and style, and they attracted big listening numbers.

Hank was up for collaborating. So was I. I had watched him road-tested with Tim in radio. I started talking to him about doing documentary films. For those in the Coombs who saw the world as an academic projection – with their own office pre-Copernicanly at the centre, and scholarly publications the only landmarks – film was off the edge of the map, risky, dangerous, even frightening: *hic sunt dracones*. But here we all were, coming to the end of the 70s, heading for the 80s. Hank could see, as I could, that people were increasingly going to be getting their entertainment – and not just their entertainment but their information, and not just their information but the way they understood the world – less and less from the printed page, more and more from TV and film. Why should academics quarantine themselves off from this? We had no doubt that good serious work could be presented responsibly, usefully, and interestingly in media beyond print, and we liked the idea of extending the reach of Pacific history by way of technology.

Hank had always been a moviegoer, beginning with the Saturday flicks at the Rex in Boort, then in Melbourne at the Odeon and the Australia, then in Port Moresby at the Papuan, the Arcadia, and the Skyline Drive-In, which were mostly for whites, and the Badili, the Bar X, and the Hohola, which put on ancient westerns and martial arts movies, mostly for Papuans.

When he was teaching at UPNG, he showed World War II documentaries at night, and anyone could come and watch, free. 'Students from all courses went, and so did gardeners, clerical staff, their families, and people living in the nearby housing areas'. For them, it was an eye-opener to be seeing their own history on the screen.

*The bombing of the Macdhui as it zigzagged from the Port Moresby wharf always brought a chorus of exclamations, and there was a shout as it disappeared in blast, smoke and water-spouts. Brief glimpses of bewildered villagers caught in terrible violence provoked quiet expressions of sympathy.*

For our first documentary, we decided to look at what happened to the people of Papua New Guinea in World War II. Hank knew the story, and he knew that the War Memorial in Canberra had all kinds of footage from the New Guinea campaign, shot in combat and behind the lines – rich archival source material.



**Figure 2: Editing *Angels of War*. Standing, left to right: Hank Nelson, Andrew Pike, Gavan Daws and John Waiko. Sitting: Stewart Young.**

Source: Photograph by Stephen Berry, published in *ANU Reporter*, 24 July 1981.

Hank and I enlisted Andrew Pike, who knew about producing. Andrew and Hank recruited Dennis O'Rourke and several other filmmakers with PNG experience, to shoot interviews with men and women who had lived through the war. Andrew brought in Stewart Young, an excellent film editor. I had some thoughts about structure and pacing. We raised money, non-academically (meaning dangerously off-the-map), and away we went.

A good collaboration is a very good thing. Making *Angels of War* with Hank and Andrew and Stewart was one of the best times I have had in my working life, certainly the best time I ever had as an academic.

The four of us came to the project from different directions, bringing our own individual aptitudes and attitudes and metabolisms and work habits; but all of us together wanted to get things done, done well, and in good time, and we wanted to see the product go out from the Coombs into the world.

*Angels of War* got done in good time, and it did well in the world. It won the Australian Film Institute award for best documentary in 1982; the gold medal of the major European documentary festival, Visions du Réel, at Nyon in Switzerland; and the ATOM award of Australian Teachers of Media for best film in the social sciences. It was chosen to wind up the Margaret Mead Film Festival, a showcase of international documentaries, in New York – prime time at a prestigious event in one of the biggest Big Smokes on earth, on the other side of the world from Canberra. It was acquired for television in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and Japan, and distributed in the United States. It has had a continuing life, to the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, morphing technologically, from 16 mm film to videocassette, then DVD, and now online streaming. Versions were made in several languages, including New Guinea Tok Pisin. In 2008, when a PNG government TV station went on air, on Independence Day, *Angels of War* was one of the first films picked to be broadcast; and in 2013, more than 30 years after the earliest screenings, *Sydney Morning Herald* TV featured it for Anzac Day.

All this put the case for one of Hank's basic propositions, about *scale* – the difference in the capacity of the historian to communicate the results of serious research, depending on the medium. Hank did his arithmetic, and the figures came out far different from his numbers about seminars. An article based on a seminar paper, published in a scholarly journal, might be read by a few score academics. A book published by a university press might have a print run of one or two thousand, and next to never a second printing. A radio series could be heard by a hundred thousand people, the way *Taim Bilong Masta* and *P.O.W.* were. And with film, the potential audience for well-presented serious work could increase by another order of magnitude. Worldwide, *Angels of War* has probably been seen by a million people.

For Hank, it was not just that films could attract a bigger audience but that they could reach a different kind of audience. As he said, he could have interviewed Sergeant Yauwiga, DCM, in his village on the Maprik road out of Wewak, and then written about him.

*Yauwiga would have given his time and knowledge courteously and generously and would never have known what part of his information I had used, what I had discarded, and what shape I had given to that which I had exploited. But when the interview is filmed, and Yauwiga's comments are woven into a documentary film, then the product can go back to those who are the source and the subject. The village people are well able to comment on the context and the selection of the ideas which have been made by the film-maker. That is a much healthier cultural situation for both villagers and historians. There can be no charge of cultural theft: the taking of data from one culture and using it to enrich an academic tradition within an entirely separate culture. And when I was involved in the making of Angels of War I was sometimes conscious of those warm evening open-air screenings with numerous children and many audience interjections that are all part of a Papua New Guinea village film show. It was an incentive to get it right.*

You can hear Hank's voice on the soundtrack. And another voice from the Coombs as well – John Waiko, narrating and interviewing. John was a student of Hank's. He came from Tabara, a village of Binandere people on the Gira River, in the Northern Province of PNG – much, much more remote from the world of the Big Smoke than Boort or Dimboola. John was one of the first two Papua New Guineans to get a PhD, and it was his intention to carry his education back to his country. He had gone out into the big world, and now he was coming home.

Hank thought this would make a good, interesting, useful documentary. And so it did. *Man Without Pigs*, shot at Tabara, went out into the big world, winning the 1990 award for best documentary at the Hawai'i International Film Festival, the leading showcase for Asia-Pacific cinema. Again, a demonstration of reach and scale.

You can see Hank onscreen. Along with the filming of the ceremonies for Waiko's homecoming, some young Tabara men put on a performance of their village specialty, an impromptu farce. For best effect, they needed a whiteman to play a *kiap*, a government field officer. Hank looked like perfect casting, and they talked him into it, telling him his part was not hard: all he had to do was sit on a patrol box, and when he thought the time was right, call out, 'I don't understand!' and then, at another point in what appeared to him to be the plot, 'Have you got a licence?' Taking off from there, 'the Binandere actors sustained over half an hour of sight gags, lewd asides, political satire, and funny walks'.

The Tabara audience loved Hank's cameo, and if there had been acting awards at the Hawai'i International Film Festival, he would certainly have been nominated for Best Supporting *Kiap*.

He wrote a wonderful piece about the *Man Without Pigs* project. 'Pictures at Tabara' is vintage Nelson, with his trademark eye and ear for place and people, and his way of telling interesting stories that turn out to have interesting human meanings.

Hank often had several things going at the same time, yet he never seemed to be rushed. He gave the impression of being naturally slow-revving, his face undistorted by fierce acceleration; but he covered a lot of ground, in a lot of different directions, in a lot of different gears. Doing sit-down archival research for long stretches was alright with him; so was footslogging, crossing creeks that fed the Gira River on the way to Tabara, plunging into dense bush, wading through stagnant water waist-high, hauling himself up the far bank. And back at his desk he was ongoingly productive – books, articles, print journalism, conference papers, consultancies, committee reports.

As the man said, 'Good prose is like a window pane'. And as the other man said, 'Readability is credibility'. Hank was always clear, always readable, always credible. Over the years, his body of work grew and grew, and not just by annular rings; it kept accruing more and more authority. It got him elected to the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. And his exceptional value as an academic who was useful to his country brought him national honours, in the Order of Australia. This was a perfect fit: Hank was *Australian* through and through, substance and style – though with a curious small aggregation of cultural aberrations. He did not drink or smoke. And he did not swear. (What, never? Well, hardly ever.) These irregularities were not held to be disqualifiers for official recognition, and no mention was made of them in the citation.

I was not there to shake Hank's hand when the honour was announced. In 1989 I left the Coombs, ANU, academic life, and Australia, and went back to Hawai'i.

Honolulu is across hemispheres and time zones from Canberra. But by technological good fortune, along came email, so Hank and I were able to keep in easy touch.

For the better part of 20 years we Sent and Replied. Our back-and-forths came to number hundreds. I archived them all.

In Hank's, there was a lot about PNG, from Errol Flynn to tourism on the Kokoda Trail, to Sepik people going to England and getting on Facebook, to his wish that there was more written about individual Papua New Guineans such as the ones he taught in 1966, and how they turned out. 'Two became prime

ministers, one became assistant secretary to the permanent organisation of the British Commonwealth, at least one went to jail, and one robbed and rorted outrageously and flourished’.

There were truly dreadful things too – gun violence in Port Moresby and Lae and the Highlands. I told Hank it wasn’t as bad as in the United States.

When he saw the US for himself, he sent good reports, very Hank-like. Here he is at Padow’s Deli, doing the arithmetic of sandwiches in America:

*36 possibilities on his menu wall, not including mile highs, combos and subs. Then there was a choice of nine breads (not including ‘biscuits’ which looked like scones or small dampers) and six cheeses (including pimienta spread which technically may not have been a cheese). So Padow’s had a choice of 1,944 sandwiches (not including biscuits, mile highs, combos and subs). I was so beguiled I wrote all this down.*

And while he was at it, he did some Nelsonian calculations about Starbucks: by his figuring, there was one every five acres, the same as for sheep in the Mallee in a bad year.

Other travels took him to Asia. He put together a book with Gavan McCormack about the Burma Railway. After it was published in Australia, it appeared in Thailand, in English. It was also translated into Japanese, and when Hank went to Japan, he was pleased to hear his name rendered as Hanku Neresu.

He kept writing up to his retirement, and after. In 2009, some more Nelson statistics came to my inbox:

*In the last couple of months I have written 2500 words on the sinking of the Montevideo Maru, 3000 on Kokoda, was team leader on a 120 page report on Kokoda for the govts of Aust and PNG (I wrote 20 or so of the pages and helped pull the lot together), wrote a talk to give to 100 aircrew who fought in Europe, other short pieces, and briefed a couple of journalists on present PNG.*

He wrote as he had always written, in plain style. He never did warm to academic jargon, especially the postmodernist cultural studies kind, ‘all of that interrogation of the articulate space between words, the unpacking unravelling nuancing deconstructing of the hegemonic canon’. It wasn’t that he had to move his lips on the big words; it was just that he didn’t see any real-world human return from it.

And, as ever, he wrote for usefulness. He often published

*where it is close and quick. Now a lot goes out as discussion or working papers for state society and governance in melanesia (nominal chair, me). I must have written six or seven pieces for ssgm. Wise people ask me why. But to publish in a 'learned journal' will take many months – perhaps 18 – and the editor will send me the comments of the referees and in my preciousness and arrogance these will annoy me. To publish in the scholarly journals is grief and delay. And the ssgm publications are read in the region by scholars and policy formers and implementers and immediately released online.*

All this he did at low revs. 'I have not been working hard – never been writing late at night'. And he could find time for other things in life. 'I have painted much of the house, and I have read novels'.

Australian writing was one of the things we went back and forth about. Peter Carey. Peter Temple. Tim Winton. Douglas Stewart's poem 'The Mice of Chinkapook'. The poetry of Les Murray, another boy from the bush, Nabiac and Bunyah. Differences in substance and style between Ken Inglis on the Stuart case and Chloe Hooper's *Tall Man* ('creative nonfiction'). Tom Griffiths and Stephen Pyne on Australian fire history. And from there, by way of climate, back to Boort, where Hank's brother John was still running the farm: droughts and flooding rains; disputes over water rights, escalating in the driest of dry years to fist fights and talk of dynamite; and, in a wet wet year, schoolkids standing on a bridge to see a river flowing for the first time in their lives.

Hank also emailed about watching cricket and AFL football. By technological good fortune, I could watch too, courtesy of ESPN. Hank's commentaries were much better than anything in the sports pages of the online *Age* or the *Sydney Morning Herald*, sharper-eyed about the overall state of play in cricket, with more of a sense of history, from late Bradman to late Ponting. And funnier. So, Hank on Ben Hilfenhaus hooked up to a heart rate monitor delivering real-time vital signs to TV watchers. The many moods of Mitchell Johnson. And the streaker who ran out onto the Gabba wearing nothing but a stubbie cooler tied to his wrist, making for Andrew Symonds. Then, in season each year, football, past, present, future – from Bobby Rose of Nyah, and Tiger Ridley, who went to school with me at Dimboola (Bobby Watson too, uncle-to-be of Tim and grand-uncle-to-be of Jobe), on to women goal umpires, and Buddy Franklin and all the other 21st-century six-and-a-half footers, with Hank looking forward to the first Sudanese ruckman.

I have bushels of email words from Hank, many of them about his life. The full harvest would be a book's worth. I always wished he would write his memoirs. I kept encouraging him to, but he never did, and more's the pity.

What I do have, alive in my memory, are some choice bits.

The town show, and the big attraction is Jimmy Sharman's travelling boxing tent, Jimmy's abos all in a row (back then they were abos, lower case), gloves on, dressing gowns over their shoulders, Jimmy the urger whipping up the crowd, who reckons he can go three rounds, who's game? – and up jumps a big drunken lair and kinghits a skin-and-bones lightweight.

Country cricket, the visitors' opening bowler measuring off his run, he counts out his twenty paces, with an extra big hop for the twentieth, and throws down his false teeth for his marker.

And here is the one I like best. It is from a home football game in Hank's high school teaching years. Hank was a centre half-back in the great mid-20th-century tradition. His job description of the position, substance and style, went along these lines:

The big men fly, you rise out of the pack and snag the mark, you get the whistle, you take your dignified time pacing back backwards, with the ball in one hand hanging nonchalantly down to demonstrate casual self-confidence, you come to a halt and steady yourself, you lean forward, a couple of stutter steps to get into your rhythm, and you launch a stately drop kick, highly parabolic, and as you watch it in flight past midfield you pull up your socks, even if they are pulled up already, and then you pick up your man and cover him, standing with your hands on your hips – and your elbow in his ribs, nothing over-invasive or disrespectful of his human rights, you just want him to be aware that he has your continuing concern.

Hank's man this day is a nasty piece of work. All through the game he has been hacking Hank behind the play, running boot sprigs down his shins. Everybody sees it bar the umpire. First quarter, second quarter, third, Hank keeps his cool, low-revving, non-eruptive, until halfway through the last quarter a moment comes and everything lines up perfectly, and Hank goes for it – he lays the bloke out, decisively, conclusively, concussively. And legally. And from the boundary comes a cheer, a kid Hank teaches at school, his voice just breaking: *'Good on yer, Mister Nelson!'*

That sounds like the proper send-off. Good on yer, Mister Nelson. Good on yer, Hank.

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