
Gods, Heroes, & Legends

Lynn Nelson In His Own Words

I was born in 1931 and my childhood was divided between South Chicago - Sixty-third and Cottage Grove under the El - and a farm fourteen miles north of Loon Lake (pop. 64) in northern Saskatchewan - beyond paved road, electricity, stores, running water (except in the streams), etc. My family - I'm an only child - moved to Sterling-Rock Falls at the start of the Second World War and I attended Sterling Township High School where I achieved some fame as the worst right tackle in the school's history - I had skipped a couple grades (the result of a couple of years in a one-room schoolhouse under the guidance of Miss Bell, who brooked no nonsense except outside at recess time and not very much even then) and weighed only 135 lbs. in a line that averaged (without counting yours truly) 180 lbs. This was before platoon and face mask football, I might add, and I served on the second string behind Jim "Iron Man" Glenn, famous for his bulk and his record of having played sixty minutes of his (and my) varsity career.

Shortly before graduation in 1948 - I was sixteen since I was born late in the year - my parents received a letter from the University of Chicago offering - for what reason I have never discovered - a scholarship. I entered with the intention of majoring in Chemistry but soon fell into History because I liked the way that apparently disparate things turned out to be intimately related. 1948 was a great year to be a kid in Chicago. Being a union type - I got my social security card on my sixteenth birthday, walked across the street and took out a union card, and, as a birthday present, my grandfather Gus gave me a paid-up IWW card - I was recruited into Cook County Democratic Headquarters as a volunteer and assigned the job of writing speeches for politicians too busy to develop any principles of their own. I've continued this as a hobby over the years.

I graduated with the class of 1950 after having associated with such a group of classmates that I'm thrown into a funk every time I read the alumni magazine - too many Nobel laureates, Pulitzer winners, and such. I learned a great deal, though, in addition to learning other things at summer jobs in a steel mill, specialty foundry, farm equipment factory (ever since, I've had a soft spot for drop hammers) and the like. I also learned how to play soccer and played with the Chicago Hanse while starting graduate school and working in a liquor warehouse.

Then my parents got another letter that they forwarded to me. It seemed that Harry Truman needed me to defend the country - which I suppose I did pretty well since I'm writing in English, not Chinese. I reached the exalted rank of sergeant as Master Gunner of an Anti-Aircraft Bn, taking what passed for Ranger training in those days, teaching hand-to-hand combat, and doing other martial sorts of stuff.

When I was released from service, I joined my parents, who had moved to Amarillo TX. Considering that I should learn a trade before entrusting myself once again to graduate school, I more or less apprenticed myself to an old Panhandle surveyor, Howard Trigg, who taught me more than you could throw a cow at. When I passed the Registered Professional Engineer and Licensed State Land Surveyor examinations, I felt ready to try school again. The University of Texas at Austin had some good people, was cheap enough (\$25 per semester tuition) to live almost luxuriously on the GI Bill, and offered me a job teaching Judo. I got another Bachelors degree in 1958 and received my doctorate under Archibald Lewis in 1963.

I accepted an offer from the University of Kansas in Lawrence KS that Fall and never seemed to have gotten around to moving up and out. I had a couple of nice offers, but I always had something else I had to do. I had published my dissertation in Anglo-Welsh-Norman frontier history and then switched to Spanish, specializing in the economic History of early Aragon. I've had enough sabbaticals and grants that I feel as if Barcelona is my other home. It's a good deal better than Lawrence KS at any rate.

I should mention that I started having "panic attacks" - they were actually epinephrine seizures - in 1962 and it was 1989 before I found a doctor who recognized what was going on and gave me a medication that ended them. Of course, a month later another doctor managed to turn a simple case of bronchitis into a pulmonary yeast infection that left me with COPD, an irreversible and progressive condition.

All of which is to lead up to saying that I was sufficiently handicapped (and not usually able to find a handicapped parking space) that I retired in May of 1998. In 1986, I had acquired Sam the Dog from the local pound and we were as close as he could devise to being constant companions for the next fifteen years. Sam decided early on that we should always be together and that we should work - me at the computer and him lying on the bed behind me, watching. I managed to do a good deal of publishing and working on computer stuff, and Sam didn't figure that we should slow down in working just because I had retired. Sam died on May Day, and I'm now saddled with a sixty-pound pup who wants to sit on my lap while I try to work. I'm not doing as much these days as I used to.

By this time, you're probably wondering when I'm ever going to get around to writing about the things you really want to know. Well, I've already done that but I didn't want to tell you until I had the chance to bore you stiff. I've been asked to write articles for European publications about History and Computers, about the Heritage Group, about myself, and about other things, and I happen to have the English drafts for a couple of these on-line. It's a shame that I'm known in Europe because I have gotten invitations to speak, spend a semester, or whatnot at a lot of places that I would have sold my soul to have received ten years ago. Now all I can do is turn them down with my thanks and regrets. People who spend so much time and effort doing things to prolong their lives never stop to consider the possible quality of the extra time they're pursuing.

"A New Jerusalem On-Line" is a sort-of history of the Historical profession's reception of the development of the technology of Computer Telecommunications and what my share of it has been. It's a bit of a tirade, so it reads much better in German. Breipohls asked for it as the opening chapter of a book on History and the Computer Revolution that should be out soon.

I wrote another article, "Before the Web: The Early Development of History Online," for an Italian Journal covering some of the same territory that you can find at http://www.ukans.edu/history/ftp/internet_history/noiret-article/text

And, if you would like something I wrote that should be more readable since it was written to be published in English, there's "Carrie: A Full-Text Online Library" just sitting there at <http://raven.cc.ukans.edu/%7Eassoc/carrie799.htm>

As a personal aside, I should note that I already had my dratted pulmonary condition when I started taking time away from other things to devote to Internet things. My mother died of a similar condition, so I knew the drill pretty well and thought that it might not be a bad idea to learn to do something with which I could continue accomplishing things when physical limitations began closing down other avenues of activity. Always play high-low poker and you'll never draw a good-for-nothing hand.

Now you're asking yourself "How in the world did I ever let myself in for all this?" You can learn something from this experience. Never ask anyone as old as I am to tell you about themselves unless you have a weekend to spare.

For more on Lynn Nelson, read his stories at www.ukans.edu/carrie/kancoll/articles.

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