

Vintage Hank

A Great Basin shepherd with the double recessive mutant gene.

Words and photos by C.J. Hadley.

Hank Vogler's grandparents built a ranch during the Depression by working hard, being frugal and never giving up. "Legend has it that he traded a horse for my grandmother," Hank says. "He claimed it was a good horse and she called him a cheap old bastard 'cos a bride price is three horses. He was German and she was Indian."

Hank claims he was five or six hours old when he made his choice for the hard but good life of ranching. "I have the double recessive mutant gene to be in agriculture. I don't have any choice. You don't choose agriculture. It chooses you."

His grandparents started out in eastern Washington. Then, when the Coulee Dam project started, they sold out. They moved to Hermiston, Ore., and ran cattle and grew wheat on Butter Creek. "One day a realtor asked him to look at an old Miller and Lux ranch in southeastern Oregon, just 15 miles out of Burns. My grandpa 'savvied the burro' and, rather than help with an appraisal, bought it—the Island Ranch."

Hank has five sisters and, by age 11, he was escaping to the ranch as often as possible. "I stayed there every minute I could. Summertime, weekends, Christmas vacation, Thanksgiving. Any time I could get a ride to the ranch, that's where I was, working cattle, or helping where I could."

The old man was farming 10,000 acres and putting up about 10,000 tons of hay on the meadows. He ran 5,000 mother cows on private land. "He had 160,000 acres under fence, state land, some old homesteads that were mixed in, and some scattered Indian land, all in one block. He was Henry Vogler Junior, I am Henry Vogler the Fourth."

Henry Vogler III, Hank's father, was not





ABOVE LEFT: Choked up piñon juniper. "Some young BLM guys want to do something, but everybody is scared," Hank says. "My joke is, you could be in Ely, Nevada, and you could write a letter to the BLM bosses in Washington, D.C., and say, 'We have the piñon/juniper problem from hell out here and we need to get some stuff done and this is what we need.' Then outline it. By the time a letter came from D.C. months later, it would probably say, 'Gentlemen, ladies. We understand you have an opinion, but what is it?' That would be about what you would get back, because you mention in the first sentence piñon and juniper and that would be about how much of it would get read—no matter how much detail you put into it or how much better the resource would be." ABOVE RIGHT: Hank points to the government's water-sucking PJ across the fence from his substantially rejuvenated private property. OPPOSITE: Vintage Hank.

encouraging, telling his only son: "You don't want to be a goddamn rancher! It's the worst goddamn job!" His aunt, who was Hank's high school career counselor, said Hank had "no aptitude, no chance," that he'd be lucky if he could pass the board to become a plumber or electrician—even while Hank was buckarooing, breaking colts, working on the fence and haying crews—any way to fit in.

Hank thought he'd never leave the Island Ranch, that he was the crown prince of the outfit and would be there for the rest of his life. "I was going to show the world that I could run the place as well as my grandpa." But to Hank's chagrin, his grandpa sold the ranch when he was a sophomore in high school.

"My father preferred whores and cards to work and I was not the fair-haired boy. My cousins were blond-haired, blue-eyed German-looking and I looked like the Indian side of the family."

At age 15, he says his world basically ended. "There was nothing left and no reason to even exist because the Island Ranch was gone."

"This dominant stud is chasing off a competitor from his mares and foals. A stud is like any other male. They want all the girls for themselves so there's competition. They will fight. The horse lovers don't want to hear that the satellite-stud is the son of the father that gets whipped and his sisters and his mother get raped and the next generation is inbred to the point where one day they are just going to hop off into the sagebrush."

Two years later, Hank married Sheryl, his high school girlfriend, and went to college in Reno. Shannon and Kiki were born while they were there. Hank worked full time at Safeway and went to school year-round. He changed diapers, milked cows on weekends at the university dairy, and worked in a slaughterhouse.

He graduated in three and a half years with a degree in agriculture. After they returned to Burns, Betsy and Henry "HC" Vogler V came along. Rori was born in 1981. The family moved to Nevada in 1984 and continued to



develop the Need More Sheep Company.

When HC was 17, driving back from town to move a sheep camp, he hit a patch of ice, flipped his truck, and died. The ache in Hank's heart will never diminish and the marriage broke up. Hank married Dana and they have a son named Stensen, now 13.

Nothing is easy in ranching. Sin City to the south needs water to flush toilets and ranchers are being encouraged to sell to Southern Nevada Water Authority. Led by Patricia Mulroy and in business to bring water via massive pipelines to Las Vegas, SNWA has been buying ranches in northeastern Nevada for millions of dollars over appraised value, just for water rights. No real rancher can compete.

Hank calls himself a bedouin, a nomadic shepherd with no water rights. "You know what I am going to do?" he asks. "I'm going to get me a little rotten town and I'm going to get some plastic cows and some plastic sheep and some Astroturf and a plastic fence and a plastic horse from China and every morning I'll get up and do my chores in the desert. We'll have a sheep wagon to live in and everything's going to be plastic. There will be no more death and destruction. There will be no more finding critters upside down in the ditch. No feeding. They can eat all the Astroturf they want. Everything will be perfect."

Hank's known for his quick wit, suave tongue, liberty with words, common sense, and deep love for agriculture. "We used to be a production society, not unlike England and the Commonwealth. The Brits got wool from



Ophan lambs and guard-dog pups are taken care of close to the home ranch. BELOW: Hank and Dana's house is tiny so they have two sheep wagons in the yard for guests.

Australia and New Zealand, cotton from India, silk from China and their people manufactured things and sold them throughout the world. What happened?

“The United States got into revolution with Mother England because we wanted to manufacture in this country rather than send the raw product to King George and pay tariffs and stay a colony. That was the whole fight. Independence was based on what you produce, you got paid for! Now we are looking in the mirror at the British Empire. They don't have the productivity they once had and we want to do the same thing! It's nuts.”

Hank's isolated outfit, based in North Spring Valley, elevation 6,500 and 50 miles north of Ely, Nev., is run on “managed chaos.” The original ranch house is made of logs; another is a kit house “from Monkey Wards”

built decades ago. A porch was added and some sturdy corrals that are used to geld horses and as an animal hospital. Hank and his family have a sheep camp at the south end of the meadow. “This is Upper Spring Gulch and if you think that wind power is a new innovation,” he says, “look at that old Aermotor wind generator!”

Hank is self-winding. He speaks in tongues—Irish, Basco, Indian, Mexican and bull rider. He won the world champion bull-rider buckle in Bend, Ore., in 1974, but he's never worn it. His brain is on constant alert, moving from subject to subject with aplomb, but always with the same focus—production agriculture and good resource management.

“Look at Yo-See-Might Park. It's going to burn up, and why? Because they have been putting out the fires for a gazillion years and

they quit logging. Enviros say we've got to get back to pre-Columbian nature. And so they cuddled and bribed the congressmen and the bureaucrats and got back to what they think is pre-Columbian nature. No management. No production. No fires. So why did they have Big Smoky Valley, Little Smoky Valley and the Smoky Mountains? Because, when Columbus landed, there were fires burning 24/7.”

He points west, to the Schell Creeks. “Look at the piñon and juniper that's encroached off those mountains. This is the best, most fertile ground in the county and it's being choked.”

Hank is bothered by SNWA because it is taking water from agriculture and drying up ranches, while the government's and taxpayers' piñon/juniper—aka PJ—is sucking H₂O quicker than Niagara Falls.

“How many million acres and gallons of water is that taking up? If you do cowboy math, and if the average tree took up 10 gallons a day, and we just cut 200 trees, that's 2,000 gallons of water that's no longer going into basically a scrub tree. But now they just let those trees burn, nobody puts it out. Indians and sheepherders, when they'd come out of the mountains in fall, would set fires everywhere because the next year they'd have more grass.”

Most federally managed forests have gone beyond critical mass and need to be mechanically manipulated. “This is the Saudi Arabia of the United States of America. Specialists at the Ely District of the Bureau of Land Management [BLM] figure that you could cut 50,000 acres of PJ a year and never run out of trees. You can make fence posts. You can take those trees and have biomass fuels to create electricity. You could burn those trees and make steam-generated power. You could chip it and make wood alcohol for burning in a car or mixing with blended gasoline. This is a new day and time. These are alternative energy sources. The projection is 45 megawatts from this area could be produced. That's enough to light 10,000 homes. But the environmentalists will just absolutely raise holy hell to ever do anything with that, because they smell blood.”

Once the ranchers are gone, and SNWA has its pipeline, the enviros will have all the wilderness and nonuse they want. There will be nothing to protest and nothing will be produced.

For years, it's been obvious that activists want to do away with agriculture, especially livestock raising in the American West. They



cause so much stress, cost and discord that they have succeeded in many places. Every year, there are fewer family farms and ranches producing food. They litigate against the Forest Service and the BLM because they want the livestock off federal lands. They want the country to rot in the name of Mother Nature, to do nothing—and the result is an unused and degrading renewable resource.

“There are so few of us left,” Hank laments. “Look at wool. That’s produced from an animal and the animal doesn’t have to die. Sheep eat junk brush and grasses that nothing

Across the valley and north from the home place, Hank and Dana bought 800 acres of solid PJ at Barrell Springs in Sampson Creek in 2004. At the time, there was hardly any water in the springs. They fenced it in and have been cutting trees. They even burned a little. This is a test to see what will work to improve their range.

“It’s now four years later and nobody is waterskiing this morning, but see that bit of water down there with all that grass? It used to be just a wet spot next to the bank and now there’s a little pond. Elk drink right out of it.”

goes to take care of horses back in the Midwest—in Kansas and Oklahoma—taken from western ranges and put in sanctuaries paid for by taxpayers.

“There’s not enough money left to manage the free-roaming bands out West and if you are back in Washington, D.C., and you are making your Beemer payment, your house payment, and your retirement schedule is all coming out of keeping the wild horse myth alive, what are you going to choose?”

Hank says the bleeding hearts think they are doing something to save horses from misery with the proposal of the “no-slaughter” law by Congress in early 2008, but they are creating way more misery for horses. Because of the closing of all U.S. killing plants and the high cost of hay, some backyard horse owners can’t afford to destroy sick or unwanted horses and are releasing them into the wild. That is a death sentence to the pet because it will not be accepted by free-roaming horses and will be brutally beaten or starve to death.

When he first came to Spring Valley in 1979, Hank says, “There were stud piles that looked like coke ovens—horses all over this country. They started gathering in 1985, and took several thousand more in succeeding years, but there are still about a thousand head in this valley.”

Hank’s sheep are managed carefully, moving through the country in a progressive manner. Herders with dogs make sure they don’t stay in the same place for long.

“These horses are here 24/7, 365, and will increase about 30 percent per year. Once they get their feed ate plum into the quick, they might move into the next draw, but they stay right here, just hammering it. And it gets worse every year.

“Am I wanting every wild horse to be eliminated off the face of the earth? No. But if I have to manage my animals, then somebody needs to manage theirs, too. There has to be a balance, but if the BLM comes out and monitors this range and there’s not enough feed, do they gather the horses? No. They send me home and say you can’t go up there any more because there’s no feed. And I’ve only been in there for three weeks.” The power of the advocacy groups stifles the BLM.

Old-time mustangers kept the numbers down. They caught and trained the good ones and sold the others for dog food. Ranchers often put a good, tough stud in with a



Rancher/horseman/roper Fred Garrett, left, visits with Dana and Hank over lamb chops, a toddy, and a whole lot of scintillating conversation. Hank says, “Fred savvies the burro, has danced with the bear, kissed the elephant, knows his onions. Fred’s one of the top 10 cowboys in the world.” When Fred saw Hank’s work after clearing his piñon/juniper, he said, “I’ll be damned, this is beautiful. I can’t believe it’s this good.” RIGHT: Stensen enjoys breakfast before heading out to sheep camp to deliver groceries with camp-tender Jaime.



else wants and they help keep the resource healthy. They are creating a garment to keep you warm, and we now prefer to walk around wearing Saudi Arabian oil on our backs. Synthetics come from oil. What in the world is wrong with using a renewable resource, a natural fiber?”

Times have changed from total production with reckless abandon to the opposite, “no production, no nothing, just *au naturelle*. The problem is so many people are invested in a story that’s wrong. If you have spent your entire career piling up money for some congressman and you own him, it’s tough to change direction. Henry Miller, the largest cattleman the United States ever knew, gave as much money to Democrats as he did Republicans. He didn’t give a damn who won, he just wanted to own their butt when they got elected. If we don’t pull the pendulum back to the middle, we are headed for disaster.”

Hank points below the road. “Look at this reservoir. Are you going to tell me that Alejandro and Jose years ago said, ‘Hey, man, let’s go down there and dig a big hole and maybe water come.’ Before this PJ encroachment they used to lamb out here. They had no water trucks and you couldn’t lamb without water but they had catch basins all through this district. Dirt tanks everywhere. The sheepmen built those with a horse fresno and they damn sure were not going out there in the desert somewhere and dig one for shits and giggles. There was aboveground water here at one time.”

Hank hasn’t lambed in this particular area for a few years because wild horses have kept it so skinned up that there is hardly anything left. The BLM is in the wild horse business, and Nevada has more wild horses than any other state. The government appropriates \$38 million for the program and most of that



Carlos is at Muncy Creek in the Schell Creeks in eastern Nevada, elevation 9,000 feet. He's checking the ewes and lambs that have shaded up in the aspen groves. He's worried about fire, praying for rain, and waiting for the camp tender to bring him more groceries. Utah is in the background.

bunch of mustang mares to improve the stock. Across the flat between the Schell Creek and Antelope ranges, a dozen mustang bands can be seen. Pairs of young satellite studs loiter on the fringes, watching a dominant stud and his band of mares and foals, waiting for an opportunity to kick his butt, breed their own mother and sisters, too. There is so much incest that feral-horse genetics are getting weak. Eventually, if there is no management and culling, they will self-destruct.

Becky Peak at 9,882 feet is one of the new wilderness areas in the Schell Creeks. Three states can be seen from the top. It burned

years and years ago and now there's brush up there that's 10 feet tall. The browse is decadent and an extreme fire hazard.

"We are just one lightning storm away from all this country burning down. Mother Nature will just come by and cook it so why not use the resource before that happens and benefit the entire country?"

A few years back, the Smithsonian Institution gave a grant to follow Gen. George Armstrong Custer's trail. "He was kind of a proud thing," says Hank. "He had his own fife and drum corps and the news corps traveled with him. He had a photographer take pictures as

they traveled and the Smithsonian found his old pictures and were going to shoot them again at the same points. They had a hell of a time because most of them in the Dakotas were in the pine trees and they couldn't even find the spots anymore. There were too many trees."

Hank is struggling to walk through the PJ on the government land that joins his 800 acres. There's nothing growing between or under those trees. They have completely canopied up. Not one drop of water is entering the aquifer. Where Hank has cut the trees across the fence, there is lots of feed with numerous game birds pecking through it.

He crosses back to his place and gestures up a steep hill. "See my fence, the straight line? Everything inside the fence is private property, where all the trees are cut. This shows what you can do when you open up the PJ. There was nothing here but mud seeps and I fixed them. If wilderness means mud seeps and unsanitary water for animals and I make a nice little pond with a Cat in a couple of hours, which do you think is best?"

He found an old U.S. Geological Survey map, dated 1923. It shows Sampson Creek running to Lages, which is the crossroads of Highway 93A and 93B to Wells or Wendover. "Why would a bureaucrat in 1923 draw a blue line on a map unless water was there?"

On the north face of the slopes there is more moisture, so more trees grow. There is mahogany, piñon and juniper and, where the



Leo, front, from Chile, is the boss of the outfit, according to Hank. He's been with the Need More Sheep Company for 20 years. Camp tender Jaime, from Peru, left, has worked for Hank 16 years.

snow gets a little deeper, fir. Hank doesn't cut it all. He leaves a few trees, including the monarchs, for shade, and some dead limbs for the benefit of small creatures.

"We set up a sheep camp here so we could use the country better. The sheep have sure destroyed this place haven't they?" He is looking at thick grass and forbs. His dog Rosie lay down and is almost hidden by the forage. There is no sign that sheep have ever been here.

SNWA has leased a ranch to someone with no dog in the fight and no financial worries. He is competing against real ranchers who don't get the same tax breaks, but Hank continues to try. He's working to encourage Pat Mulroy and SNWA's entire board of directors to help open up the PJ canopy.

"That will immensely help everyone and everything that's out here. And it will mitigate the damage, potential damage, of them taking water south to Las Vegas." He knows that everyone can win if the PJ canopy is opened up to get water into the aquifer. He's already proven that dirt tanks will fill and creeks will start running.

Hank believes that anyone who destroys agricultural land should be shot on sight. "End of story, no uncertain terms," he says. "But there's nothing I can do about it. It's a capitalistic and a private property right so I have mixed emotions about ranchers selling their water rights. How would you like to have a ranch that cost you \$3 an acre and it was suddenly worth \$50,000 an acre, and you owned several thousand acres? When you have been living like a wood rat in a stovepipe in an old tarpaper shack for years and years and years, and then, all of a sudden, you have the capacity to smoke big cigars and drive big motorcars, it's a terrible temptation."

Hank says that your answers to two questions reveal whether or not you qualify to be a rancher. "First question is, 'Which would you rather have, a million dollars in the bank drawing 10 percent interest or owe a million dollars on a bunch of cattle?' The correct answer—if you have the double recessive mutant gene—is 'Hereford or Angus?'"

"The next question is, 'Which would you rather do? Go to college, become a lawyer, be just a fire-breathing dragon, retire at the age of 45, get a 20-year-old trophy wife and spend the rest of your life traveling the earth, or marry your high school sweetheart, move to Fallon, Nevada, beg, borrow, steal enough

money to get a down payment on 40 acres, start hanging around the auction barn trading rabbits for goats, goats for sheep, sheep for dairy calves, dairy calves for British-cross calves, get the kids a paper route, get the wife a job at the courthouse in town, you get two jobs, shoe horses in the headlights, shear sheep, and on your 65th birthday you sell everything out in Fallon and you put a down payment on a rabbit farm in Eureka, Nevada, and run cattle?' You know what the answer to that question is? 'Hereford or Angus?' Or maybe—if you prefer sheep—"Rambouillet or merino?"

Hank gets his contract sheepherders

cordwood and fence posts, and two sheep wagons for overnight visitors. Dozens of sage hen drink from the lawn sprinklers.

Leo's brother Luis is the yearling herder. "He's on the fire detail up in Elko. It takes a special man to care for the young sweethearts. If they don't learn to stay together as yearlings, they won't herd right their entire lives."

Jose is at Piermont in the wilderness, with his camp packed in with mules. Vito is camped at Indian Creek; Carlos at Muncy Creek; and Justiano is at Second Creek. The herders start out in tents in June and when they get out of the wilderness they live in sheep wagons. The moving sheep camps



Hank stands in front of a dirt tank that used to be just a mud hole before he starting cutting trees on his private ground. "The water in the dirt tanks is a hundred times cleaner than it used to be. It was brackish-brownish mud all the time and now there are some grasses growing in it because we fenced out the horses."

"Riparian means Rip A Rancher In A Nanosecond."

through the Western Range Association. Most come from Peru. They all have herding border collies and big white guard dogs—Great Pyrenees and Akbash—to protect the sheep bands from mountain lions, bobcats and coyotes.

Leonet "Leo" Rivas, from Chile, "is the real boss, along with Dana." Leo has been with Hank 20 years. Jaime Pena, from Peru, is camp tender and has worked for the outfit 16 years. They live across a lawn from the Voglers' tiny house in the old, log bunkhouse, with few comforts except Spanish satellite TV and a phone Hank supplies so that they can call home. There are a dozen outbuildings, trucks and trailers, piles of

stretch 185 miles north of headquarters, 65 miles south, and a couple of mountain ranges east and west. Jaime or Hank deliver groceries to the herders every few days.

A pretty crop of halogeton, a poisonous plant to sheep, and white sage, which is high protein and good for livestock and wildlife, have been trashed by unmanaged horses. "We used to take our sheep through in fall or spring and they liked this old white sage flat. Some of it's been destroyed and the BLM cut my numbers. You screw up, I screw up, and there are consequences. We have to pay for that. If we have enough screwups, the bankers come and roll our stuff up and say you guys can't play anymore. But no matter what you do, when you are in a government agency,

there are no consequences. Nobody is accountable. Who is going to get to make up for their mistakes?"

This country didn't get wealthy by wasting entire forests and letting them turn into ash. "Mother Nature is about the crankiest bitch out there. Doing absolutely nothing is the stupidest thing. Have you heard of the Black Forest in Germany? They have been cutting trees in Europe for about 80 bozilian years and that forest is just fine."

Average annual precipitation in North Spring Valley is eight inches; elevation is 7,500 at Barrell Springs. Unused natural resources—trees—are choking the moun-

Hank Vogler has spent decades watching, listening, learning—trying to do something better for his and other ranchers' livelihoods and better for the resource, which is why he serves on boards for the Nevada Department of Agriculture and the Nevada Rangeland Resources Commission. He's tired of proving that grazing is not destructive. "What's destructive is no management. The healthy ground is being managed by sheep or cattle ranchers. I don't care what it is, whether it's private land or public land, we do not have the luxury of not doing something."

Opening the PJ canopy will guarantee that Hank will have a sheep operation, there

has all been irrigated out of the different creeks by white man. A woman's wagon-train diary included: "It's our turn to be the lead wagon. The sagebrush is so tall and so thick that it's dragging the bottoms off our wagon and we are so far from timber that we don't know that we'll find timber to replace it." In that place today, there are big trees right down to the valley floor.

"If you don't take care of a garden, it will be all weeds," Hank says with a bit of frustration. "If you plant a monoculture like the BLM used to do with crested wheatgrass, it's not as healthy as a mosaic of several different species of plants 'cos there are different times of year and different animals that take different plants." He's not in favor of putting three million sheep back on Nevada's ranges like there used to be, "but there's got to be better balance than 50,000 head."

Hank's taking supplies to Carlos in the high country, who is riding Charlie and followed by two border collies. He's been checking the sheep which are shaded up in an aspen grove. "Lambs lose their bloom when it's hot and kinda stall for a little while if they can't shade up," Hank explains. "If we get an August monsoon to soften the feed up, it can add 10 pounds to the lambs. Shepherders might be a long way from church but they are close to God 'cos they are talking to him all the time."

Stensen is already at the camp. He likes working with the herders. Bowhunters on four-wheelers are combing the country looking for elk sign for opening day on the morrow. Enormous patches of green identify the irrigated hayfields in Steptoe Valley 5,000 feet below. "Nevada Power wants 40,000 acre feet of water for their coal-fired plant; LS Power wants 25,000 acre feet for their power plant; right over the hill, Uncle Harry [Reid] wants to go south with 200,000 acre feet of water for the casinos in Vegas."

Hank looks over the huge, high country where he runs his bands. Dozens of mountain peaks can be seen in all directions. "A guy asked me one time why I went into the sheep business and I told him the line was shorter. Everybody wants to be John Wayne and nobody wants to be Juan Pedro. Everything I know, I know by doing it wrong enough times and I finally caught on how to do it right. Old Basque shepherders were my professors—Ajurria, Andueza, Itturiaga, Madriata, Ancotiegea. They showed me all the little tricks and nuances they had picked up from being with the sheep for years and years and years.



Opening up the piñon-juniper canopy improves habitat for wildlife, horses, birds and livestock. These sage hen are getting close to being listed as an endangered species, but there are plenty on Hank's piece of ground. "You think buffalo and elk and deer can live on dry ground and prefer to lay up on an old bare hillside where the horseflies can really eat them up?"

tain. "No wonder the world hates us. We are the most wasteful bunch of people. Why can't we selectively harvest like we used to?"

Hank cut dozens of cords of PJ last year and the resource is rebounding, even after two years of drought. Millions of gallons of water were released into the aquifer. They haven't reached Lages yet, but streams started to flow. Dirt tanks filled. Elk, deer, antelope and sage hen moved in. There is Indian ricegrass, bluejoint, sedges, forbs, basin wild rye, grasses of every kind. "I don't even know the names of half of that stuff. I didn't know they existed." And Hank earned extra money for his family by selling fence posts and firewood.

will be income from hunters, from livestock, from woodcutters, from all angles, and the water will be available for guys from Chicago to flush a toilet, laze by a monstrous fountain, or play golf on soft, thick, green grass in Las Vegas. And much of it will be Spring Valley water. "The only downside," Hank says, "is if you happen to be a piñon or juniper."

When the first wagon trains passed through northeast Oregon where his grandpa used to ranch, it was open savannah. "Things have changed and everyone's a little bit to blame. We have this collective guilt. Baker Valley is surrounded by timber now and the flat

“Whatever was supposed to happen, happened, and here I am. It’s been a good ride, some snags and bumps in the road, but I’ve made some wonderful friends. Pete Paris Junior, Gracian Uhalde, Fred Fulstone, Buster Dufurrena, Fred Garrett. Bob Carlson was my mentor when I was a kid and cut me no slack. He said, ‘There’s only two kinds of bosses, kid, them that are and them that ain’t.’”

He laughs, which is easy for Hank. “Those were the people who taught me things—

whatever it was that I needed to know to satisfy my desire to do this. And I don’t wish it on my son. I don’t wish it on anybody. If you don’t have that desire and the double recessive mutant gene you shouldn’t do it. There’s nothing more miserable than a person doing something he doesn’t want to do.”

Hank claims he’s never worked a day in his life. “I’ve been on vacation because I’m doing what I always wanted to do, so how in the hell can you call this work?” ■

C.J. Hadley is editor and publisher of RANGE magazine. Hank says that CJ, an advocate for food producers, is being punished because she, too, has the double recessive mutant gene—“otherwise she couldn’t have survived the pressure-cooker that’s RANGE for the past 19 years.” For more information on SNWA and water, check “To Move an Ocean,” by Tim Findley, Fall 2005, www.rangemagazine.com.

Fumes from the Farm

By Hank Vogler

I went to a water conference in Winnemucca, Nev., last November. Rancher Dean Baker made the most sense. Why am I not surprised? He has the double recessive mutant gene to be in agriculture and that gene tends to give you common sense.

Southern Nevada Water Authority, or SNWA, which is an acronym for Screw Nevada With Abandonment, should be glad that my mom wasn’t at the meeting ’cause they would have been sent to their rooms and their mouths would have been washed out with soap. Clark County folks make a basic mistake when looking at country folks. Just because your hat and boots or your seed-corn cap didn’t come from Gucci, doesn’t mean you are a rube. Large calloused hands and a red neck, doesn’t spell stupid. If knowing which tool to eat with at a fancy Vegas resort is the measure you use when judging people, you will be doomed in rural Nevada. We may not know how much to tip the waiter, how to catch a cab, or which fork to use first, but we know *water*, and we know the big dog eats first.

SNWA’s Patty “Pah” Mulroy (Pah is Shoshone for water) has put together a crew of people who are trying to build a pipeline that will rival any modern wonder, not unlike Hoover Dam. The hard sell is going to be looking at rural folks who hold water rights in the same reverence as God, mom and country and trying to tell the aforementioned that it won’t hurt. I used the same line after my 16th

birthday on back roads.

If you look at the statistics, by the time the three- or four- or six-billion-dollar pipeline is built—target date 2015—Las Vegas will be out of water, again. Demographers say Vegas will double in size by 2035. That means, in addition to the Spring Valley pipeline, another 800,000 to a million acre-feet of water will be needed. So the solution will be no closer at hand than it is now. Run, Forest, run!

Let’s get real. Anybody heard of Dubai? All



the water there is from desalinization. Israel does the same. The more you use a particular practice, the more innovation comes along. But draining the driest state in the nation’s rural water supply so you can have one more golf course may make the future archeologists surmise that the use of whacky tobacco must have reached a crescendo in the early 21st century.

We are building coal-fired power plants in Mexico to avoid regulations. Why not take the spent nuclear fuel rods headed for Yucca Mountain, Nev., to the Sea of Cortez, build a nuclear desalinization plant and ship the water to California in exchange for Colorado River water? Or some combination thereof. Even though we seem to be bound and determined to become a Third World country, at least we should try not to act like one just yet.

Buying ranches in Spring Valley for five times more than they are worth might make good cocktail conversation in Vegas, but here it looks like you are hiding something. Could it be, if you buy them all, there will be no witnesses?

Enter Dean Baker. His ranch, over several generations, has accumulated as much adju-

icated water as SNWA has purchased for a gozillion dollars. I asked Dean if he wished to buy Nebraska or Kansas. He said he just wanted to be left alone.

I am on the opposite end of the spectrum. My Mickey Mouse dried-out desert outfit doesn’t have enough water to fill a birdbath. So, as the courting ritual goes on, I’m just the ugly redheaded stepkid. More convinced by the rude behavior than the rhetoric from Patty Pah that SNWA will be a good neighbor, Rodney King and “can’t we all just get along” hasn’t been shown to my family.

Well enough whiny crap. How about a solution? White Pine and Lincoln counties are the Saudi Arabia of renewable energy resources. Piñon and juniper (PJ) trees abound. Estimates are that 50,000 acres can be harvested yearly here and you would never run out of trees as they grow back; i.e., it’s renewable. This natural resource could make wood alcohol, biofuels, biomass energy. Maybe Harry Reid would have a little pull in the U.S. Senate and get a pilot project?

Texas A&M did a study and said that once PJ reaches 50 percent of canopy, no water enters the aquifer. The reality is that the aquifers in eastern Nevada have been in a negative recharge for 50 years or more due to PJ encroachment. By using this resource, wildlife, wild horses, and domestic livestock would all benefit. Not to mention job creation. Plus, the aquifers would recharge. This would help to mitigate the damage of the water headed south to a flush toilet on the Vegas Strip. And it would make more sense than casting dispersions on Dean Baker. He just wants to be left alone. Or trying to intimidate and destroy Hank Vogler. Bad idea on both counts. People who live at the end of the road got there by choice. They have strong wills and firm convictions. Just remember that if you never do anything, you will never make a mistake. More importantly, if you never do anything, you will never know when you are done. ■