

Before Elon Musk was thinking about Mars and electric cars, he was doing chores on a Saskatchewan farm

His family's roots in the province are deep. It's enough to make one wonder if Elon Musk's family has a genetic predisposition for ambition

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SpaceX CEO Elon Musk unveils the company's new manned spacecraft, The Dragon V2, designed to carry astronauts into space

Article content

It was 1989 when Mark Teulon first met his 17-year-old cousin.

The boy came all the way from South Africa to stay at Teulon's farm near Waldeck, a village east of Swift Current. He spent a mere six weeks on the farm, but it was enough to give Teulon the impression that he was a little sharper than your average teenager.

"He was a pretty smart guy," says Teulon. "We had that figured out pretty quick."

His cousin, who celebrated his 18th birthday on the farm, was Elon Musk.

Yes, that Elon Musk.

Musk is now an inventor, engineer and entrepreneur who has revolutionized several high-tech industries. He is the CEO and product architect of electric car manufacturer Tesla, as well as the founder, CEO and CTO of SpaceX, one of the leading private aerospace companies.

His most recent business venture, Neuralink, intends to create devices that can be implanted in the brain, allowing humans to interface directly with computer software.

Musk's face and name have become inseparable from discussions on the future of technology. He's seen as an authority on subjects that once resided in the realm of science fiction, such as artificial intelligence or colonizing other planets.

But before Musk was thinking of how to send people to Mars or plug our brains into computers, he was doing chores at Teulon's grain farm while waiting for his mother Maye to arrive in Canada.

Musk's time in Saskatchewan was brief, but his family's roots in the province go much deeper. Looking his grandfather's story of political intrigue and international adventure, it's enough to make one wonder if the family has a genetic predisposition for ambition.

Musk's grandfather, Joshua N. Haldeman, moved with his family to Herbert in southwest Saskatchewan from Pequot, Minn., in 1906 when he was four years old. Haldeman would pack up and move his own family 44 years later, albeit on a much longer trip than Minnesota to Saskatchewan. In 1950, Haldeman

took his wife and four children — including Musk’s mother — and left Regina to seek new adventures in Pretoria, South Africa.

Haldeman’s time in Saskatchewan was far from boring. He joined forces with a new political movement called Technocracy, which was temporarily outlawed. He worked to establish the country’s first chiropractic association and school, and waged a public health campaign against Coca-Cola.

Haldeman was born on Nov. 25, 1902 to John Elon Haldeman and his wife Almeda Jane at a log cabin in Pequot. Almeda studied chiropractic care in Minneapolis, and after the family moved to Saskatchewan, she became Canada’s first known chiropractor. Her son would eventually follow in her footsteps.

In 1926, Haldeman graduated from the Palmer School of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa. He ran a chiropractic practice for only a few years before trying his hand at farming in Waldeck. He lost the farm when he was unable to pay for equipment purchased on credit from a local bank.

Haldeman was briefly married during that time to Eve Peters. The two had a son named Jerry Noel, but due to financial pressures and Haldeman’s political commitments, the marriage didn’t last.

Haldeman returned to chiropractic care in 1936 when he established a practice in Regina. He met his second wife, Winnifred, in 1942 while taking dancing lessons. The Moose Jaw woman had previously studied dance and dramatics in Chicago, New York and Vancouver.

Haldeman and Winnifred’s first son, Scott, says his father’s determination wasn’t broken when Winnifred told him she had no time to teach him how to dance.

“It’s one of those romantic stories,” says Scott, who is now 73 and lives in Orange County, Calif.

He waited until she was finished work at 9 p.m., and proceeded to pay for several dancing lessons. Six months later, the two married a day after Haldeman proposed.

“The story goes she called up her mother in Moose Jaw and (asked) would she arrange a wedding and her mother said, ‘Yes. Who are you marrying?’ ” recalls

Scott, born in 1943. Four more children would follow, including Maye (Elon Musk's mother) and her twin sister Kaye born in 1948.

In Regina, the family lived in a three-storey home at 2302 Cornwall St. Haldeman's practice was located at the Broder Building at 1809 Rose St., which is now a parking lot.

It's safe to say Haldeman's second marriage was more successful than his first.

"I can't remember once hearing them ever argue or disagree on anything throughout my life with them. She supported everything he did, and he supported everything she did," says Scott.

Like his father, Scott also began his career with an education in chiropractic care. He went on to become a neurologist, and is currently a professor at the University of California and the chairman of the Research Council for the World Federation of Chiropractic.

More than just choosing the career path of a chiropractor, Joshua Haldeman was pivotal in building organizations and legislation to cement the profession in Canada.

As Scott described it, his father built up the profession "from zero." Haldeman is credited with drafting a chiropractic law to provide legal protection, which was approved by the Saskatchewan government in 1943.

Ken Goldie, a semi-retired chiropractor now living in Lumsden, says Haldeman was highly respected for the work he did in solidifying the profession.

"It was essential to incorporate chiropractic into a legislative body that provided the equality that other health care professions have, with respect to serving the public, and that onus of responsibility that comes with legislation," says Goldie.

Haldeman also participated in the creation of the Dominion of Canadian Chiropractors (DCCC), the precursor of the Canadian Chiropractic Association. While with the organization, he was involved with planning the creation of the country's first chiropractic college, which opened in Toronto in 1945.

Haldeman was also passionate about politics. Scott described his father as staunchly anti-Nazi and anti-socialist.

“He was very much a freedom-oriented guy. He would have made a good American,” says Scott.

In fitting with his independent spirit, Haldeman didn’t align himself with a mainstream Canadian party. Between 1936 and 1941, he became involved in Technocracy, and eventually became the leader of the Canadian branch of the party.

Technocracy is a political philosophy that advocates government by skill, rather than by opinion. The government is designed to use science and technology to distribute services to citizens, instead of relying on human opinions or traditions.

The movement was temporarily banned by the Canadian government out of fear that its members planned overthrow the government by force.

Haldeman defied the ban by placing an ad in the Leader-Post that featured a statement by the Technocratic party’s Canadian branch. An essay Scott wrote on his father years later says he faced three charges as a result of the ad.

Haldeman later joined the Social Credit Party and ran in several provincial and federal elections, but never won a seat.

His activism extended into health concerns. Haldeman had a particular disdain for Coca-Cola, and conducted a campaign against the soft drink company in Regina.

After the Second World War, Haldeman became dissatisfied with Canadian politics, believing the country was becoming too socialist. However, Scott thinks the main reason his father decided to move the family to South Africa was his thirst for adventure.

“He was getting bored with Canada. He had been all the way across the country, he’d been a cowboy, and he’d been done everything in Canada, and he wanted some more excitement,” says Scott.

Haldeman packed up his family, a single engine airplane and his Cadillac, and boarded a freighter for a 30-day journey to Cape Town.

During their time in South Africa, the Haldeman family embarked on adventures that sound like they're straight out of an Indiana Jones movie or an episode of Jonny Quest.

Scott Haldeman in South Africa in an undated photo. Haldeman moved his family to the country from Regina, Saskatchewan in 1950. The family went on numerous excursions into the wilderness, and searched for the legendary lost city of the Kalahari Desert. Photo Courtesy Scott Haldeman.

The Haldemans made an annual trek into the uncharted wilderness in search of the Lost City of the Kalahari desert. The legend involves a theory that the ruins of a long-forgotten city exist somewhere in the desert.

"I can remember being on top of the truck and a rifle across my legs, and when a deer came up I would have to hit it, or we ate sardines that night," recalls Scott.

The family made a total of 16 expeditions into what is now modern-day Botswana.

"In those days there was nothing there," says Scott. "We'd go into the bush for a month and just camp. There'd be nobody. I mean, we'd just bush bash for a month."

Haldeman's other adventures in South Africa included becoming, at one point, the country's pistol shooting champion, with Winnifred winning the women's pistol championship. The couple competed in The Cape to Algiers motor rally, which spanned more than 12,000 miles, and tied for first place.

Scott says the race was then considered "the most strenuous motor rally the world."

In 1954, the couple embarked on a 30,000-mile, round-trip flight in Haldeman's single-engine aircraft up the coast over Africa, over parts of Asia, and across the sea to Australia.

Haldeman's passion for aviation would lead to his death in 1974. The 72-year-old and a friend were coming in for a practice landing when the plane got caught on a power line.

“They came down, there was a power line between where both poles were hidden in trees in forest, and as they came down to land between them...the wheels caught on the power line and the plane flipped over and killed them both,” says Scott.

At the time, Scott was studying at the University of British Columbia. Although his father’s death was sudden, he thought it was a fitting end to the life of an adventurer.

“I think given a choice, that would have been a way he would have been very happy going,” reflects Scott.

Winnifred later followed her children back to Canada, and lived in Canmore, Alta., until she passed away three years ago at the age of 98. Kaye, the twin sister of Elon Musk’s mother Maye, still resides in Calgary.

Regina-born Maye now makes her home in California. She grew up to become a fashion model and dietician, appearing in Revlon ads, on boxes of the cereal Special K, and in a Beyonce video.

Elon Musk and Maye Musk attend the 2011 WSJ Magazine Innovator of the Year Awards at the Museum of Modern Art on October 27, 2011 in New York City.

A sense of adventure and dreaming big appears to run in the family. Nowhere is that currently more evident than in the latest generation with Elon Musk, who has set bold goals for the future of space travel and Mars colonization.

“I work about 70 hours a week. He makes me look lazy,” says Scott.

Teulon, who watched Musk do chores at his Waldeck farm 28 years ago, got to see his cousin’s dreams on display when he visited Maye last fall in California. He got a rare opportunity to tour a rocket production facility belonging to Musk’s aerospace company, SpaceX.

“It was pretty cool. It was like walking into a science fiction movie,” says Teulon.

While he hoped to meet the man who once stayed on his farm as a teenager, Musk’s commitments as a billionaire entrepreneur kept him too busy for a reunion.

“We were kind of hoping to (meet), but he had so much going on when we were there,” says Teulon.”He was unveiling those new solar shingles and stuff like that, so he had media shoots and all that going on.”

Not surprisingly, Musk himself was unavailable for an interview with the Leader-Post. However, a representative with Tesla did pass along Musk’s answer to one of our questions.

When asked why he chose Saskatchewan when he returned to Canada, Musk replied,”Mark (Teulon) was the closest person who had answered my letters.”

An adventurer, a world-renowned doctor, a super model and a titan of technology. There could be something in the family’s genes that breeds this success, or maybe it goes back to the way Haldeman brought up his children.

“Dad always said there’s nothing a Haldeman can’t do,” says Scott.

“I think that carried on through Maye and Kaye and myself. That seemed to be something we brought into our kids,” he adds. “Give them tremendous freedom to do whatever they wanted.”

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<https://www.mj-independent.com/lifestyles/2018/9/15/elon-musks-fascinating-history-with-moose-jaw>