

"The Best Advice I've Ever Been Given!"

There are many things we have to learn in life that are not taught in schools or universities. Unfortunately, to our detriment, we often learn them the hard way and, consequently, can sometimes lose badly.

This story is about an experience I had that benefited me throughout my life in all the years that followed. When, at age 34, because of the damage done to my body by the disease, polio, I had to make a decision about the rest of my life.

I believe I was being guided by the Lord when a friend, who had just bought a 5 acre property, asked me what I thought he should do about some broken down, but very active, beehives he had found in a small orchard on the property. Well, I had some knowledge of bees from my grandfather who had kept them when I was a young boy.

I got to work and re-hived the bees and that got me thinking...I should buy an orchard! That way when the pain got too much I could simply lay down, where ever I was, for a while or do something else until the pain settled down enough to go on working, without having to worry about some employer.

When I told Margaret what I wanted to do she was horrified. Shortly afterwards her father and mother turned up and she told them. They went away and came back a couple of hours afterwards and said, "Let's do it!" I had instant partners!

Not having any knowledge of managing an orchard, I started visiting a list of those for sale. Almost every orchardist warned me not to listen to the Agricultural Department as they would send me broke.

This was a little disheartening as I had already spoken to the Ag Department and they had told me they helped in many aspects when setting out and expanding an orchard.

Another disheartening thing we found was that many of the orchards for sale were quite run down as, with markets weak, the owners had taken jobs on the building of a tollway that was being constructed from Sydney to Newcastle.

Then a day came when I called in on another property for sale – this one was out of my price range, but looked very well organised and worth talking too.

The owner was quite happy to talk to me, even though I had told him I could not afford his property.

When I asked him about the stories I had heard from others about the Ag Dept, he said in his very Country drawl: "Well, I was a truckie and decided I wanted to settle down. Like you, I knew nothing about running an orchard, so I went to the Agricultural Dept, listened to them, then I went and looked at what my neighbouring orchardists were doing, and then I went home and used my head."

This turned out to be the greatest bit of advice I have ever had in my life. Not just for running an orchard, but in every walk of life...listen to the experts, look at what everyone else is doing, and then use your head.

That is what I did.

I used to employ a young local teenager at times and, I found out, he used to go home and tell his father (an old time orchardist) what I was doing. Occasionally the father would come around - just being

neighbourly – and look for himself. He told me a number of times what I was doing would “kill the trees”. Basically, looking down on what old time farmers often referred to as a “Pitt Street farmer”. (Pitt Street is a main street in Sydney’s centre.) In other words, telling me I didn’t know what I was doing.

However, as his son reported back to him that what I was doing was proving highly successful, he, and others, started to take notice. “Maybe this Pitt Street farmer wasn’t such a drongo after all.”

Consequently, they slowly gave up their road building jobs and started rebuilding and working their orchards again.

The funny thing was, as they followed my lead, they would say, “This is the only way to do this”; as if they had been doing it that way all their lives. I just smiled and quietly thanked the old truckie.

Six years later, as the pain was becoming too great, I sold out for 4 times what I paid for it.

All because of the advice given to me by that old truckie...the best advice I have ever had: “Listen to the experts, see what everybody else is doing, and then use your head.”

This doesn’t mean everything will always work out right but, at least, you will always know you did your best; or, as I usually put it, did your homework!



Stuart Oliver

