

A productive holiday

The story of Leyland Minter

I have made contact with Leyland on the phone. After leaving Port Macquarie he is passing through the mountainous tropical coast of Coffs Harbour, taking in the ocean air on his way back to the Sunshine State. If you follow the old adage "Find something you like to do and you'll never have to work a day in your life", it's been a productive holiday.

"It is very fortunate in one's life that you are able to work on projects you really enjoy," comments Leyland. Technically he has been working. He tells me of his successful meetings with Bunnings over the last few days, developing Organic Crop Protectants' (OCP) home garden range. As he edges closer to familiar childhood surroundings,

insect and disease control.

"These were major problems because one, Mum did not like spending money, and two, there was not much you could really find to control mites, powdery mildew and the dreaded *Monolepta* beetles," he recalls.

"I was given the job of pesticide manufacturer, formulator and applicator," he explains. This involved developing a homemade insect spray. For the small insects they used a mix of tea tree oil, soap flakes and peanut oil. For the larger insects such as caterpillars, grubs and the dreaded *Monolepta* beetles they went for a more toxic brew of nicotine and arsenic – made from brewing up cigarette

Leyland is in the middle of his trip across the eastern seaboard, which will take in a total of 36 Bunnings stores. It's the latest step in Organic Crop Protectants' foray into the home garden sector – a step that will see OCP at the forefront of its industry once again.

As Leyland reaches the peak of St Helena's Hill and its breathtaking view of Byron Bay, he can picture the trips in the old Holden panel van. He and Ada used to drive along this very road on their trips there years before.

"Whenever there was reported to be rough weather down at the beach, we would take Mum's trusty Holden panel van and get a load of seaweed. This old Holden never rusted as she had painted it inside and out with mutton fat, a coating that dust and blowflies seemed to like."

Though he might not have recognised it at the time, Ada's innovations and her use of natural products to overcome problems were developing Leyland's organic mindset. Another important influence would shape this further.

A year or two before Leyland left high school – towards the end of his tenure as 'unpaid farm hand' – Ada had picked up a book by Dr Steiner on biodynamic farming. He recalls that the knowledge gained from this book led to a few changes in their farming practices and a great deal of skepticism from his mother's friends.

"I remember one of my jobs was to collect cow's horns from the local abattoir, bring them home and stuff them with fresh cow manure, bury them for a few months, then retrieve them and empty the contents into Mum's liquid fertiliser," he says.

Leyland relinquished his position as unpaid farm hand to attend university and spent time in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea before "falling into," as he explains, "the development and application of agricultural chemicals. "It was a very interesting time with many interesting and unique products being developed. The first modern synthetic pesticides were being discovered. At one stage I was the only 'industrial agronomist' in Australia – my



Leyland Minter with Dr Doreen Clark, co-founder of OCP.

Leyland begins to tell me of his days growing up on a small farm on the outskirts of Lismore in Northern NSW.

His mother Ada had embarked on a flower-growing project which involved Leyland as the 'unpaid farm hand' and the growing of about five acres of gladioli, gerberas, statice and various other flower species.

It was this flora culture farming background that led to Leyland's early interest in insects, plants and sundry other living things – particularly

butts collected from the 14 pubs around Lismore.

Fertilisers were also homemade recipes. To get the flowers to perform to their genetic potential they were liberally doused with a concoction of liquefied cow manure, dead fish and rotting Lucerne hay. "This brew had a great odour so was only applied on Friday afternoons, when no flowers were picked. This gave time for the smell to disappear before the Monday pick of flowers."



job was to develop weed control practices and programs for the Australian railways, main roads, airports and power companies."

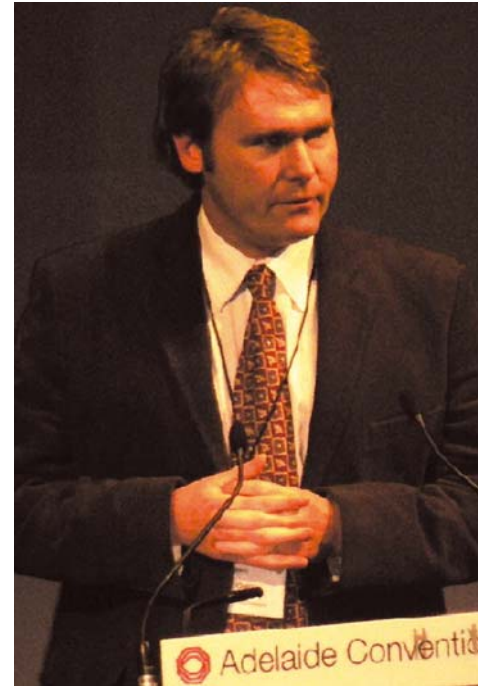
Leyland eventually found himself working with and developing application methods for insect pheromones, insect contraceptives and aspects of modifying and controlling insects by interfering with their hormonal system. Leyland studied how to get a slow release mechanism, especially in cotton, so he could attract or confuse the insect over the whole season. This started his interest in emulsifiable vegetable oils as pesticide carriers. It was this interest and two very bad poisoning accidents that would secure his future.

"This helped me to realise the future – for me at least – was to start my own business in the area of what I call environmentally sustainable farming.

I wanted to research and develop products that had minimal impact on humans and the environment – for quality produce at an economical price. This is how Organic Crop Protectants commenced."

Dr Doreen Clarke was a big part of this – her knowledge of formulation chemistry and analysis saw her become an equal partner in the business. Leyland also praises other staff members James Gardner and Melissa Ryan, as well as fellow directors Liz Lucas and Gary Leeson. "Without these committed people OCP would not have survived. In a small company such as ours, people have to multifunction and all the people at OCP have achieved the 'Everest' of multifunctionalism."

Over the past 17 years this multi-skilled team has researched and developed over 25 products. Eight of these products have been approved as



Above: Gary Leeson, OCP Executive Director and General Manager.

registered insecticides, fungicides and spraying oils with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA). This is a major achievement for such a small company when you consider the expertise and research costs required to satisfy the APVMA and Department of Health that your product is safe and effective for its intended use.

"The recent introduction of our eco-organic garden range has also been a great adventure. We never realised the level of interest for organic products in the home garden sector until we started dealing directly with home gardeners. However, it also opened our eyes to the level of misuse of the word organic. It has been a real education process for us to teach home gardeners that there's a great difference between products that are registered as inputs for organic gardening and those that simply use the word to sell products. Organic gardening really connects consumers with the organic industry and it's this experience that needs nurturing and protecting if the organic industry is to prosper."

As Leyland continues his journey north he says he has another call coming in. Before long, he returns to me. "Its Bunnings in Cairns, I'd better go," he issues, and hangs up. Lucky bugger – a holiday in Cairns... ◆