

THE SAGA OF HENRY LAMBERT

Having been less than a stellar student in school, Henry began his pursuit of a livelihood at the lower end of the employment spectrum. His first job found him packing apples at Lawson's Orchard. His capacity for learning new approaches fell well under the bar of business innovation standards, but Henry was an innocent soul and there was nary a man that knew him who wouldn't vouch for his character. He worked steadily for fourteen hours a day, six days per week during the packing season. His work habits gained him plenty of odd jobs when apples weren't in.

The widow Jones had 120 acres of farmland to take care of by herself, and she used Henry's strong back many times to help with the chores. She took such a liking to him that she rented him a house in town that she owned for \$10.00 per month. Granted, it only had 2 rooms, but that was all Henry needed. The real plus to the deal came with the two acres of prime ground behind the little shack.

When spring came around, Henry decided to plant his very first garden on those prime two acres

of dirt. Henry made a concerted effort to learn everything he could about gardening. He read and read and reread. He didn't always grasp what the pages revealed, but he still felt confident he could do it.

The first thing he set out to do took him to Acme Hardware in town, where he purchased ten rolls of clear poly plastic to use in solarizing the soil. After carefully laying out the plastic and making sure he sealed down the edges, he started to think.

Eager to get started on planting his garden, Henry figured he needed to speed up the solarization process somehow. After several days of contemplation, Henry came up with an idea that he thought might help move things along. Acme Hardware didn't have what he needed, so Henry drove to Janesville, where he purchased fifty-four sun lamps from the wholesale electric supply house. Now, if you're wondering how he came up with a calculation of fifty-four lamps, well, that quantity was all the supply house had in stock at the time. It's hard to say how many he would have bought had they had more. He also purchased seventy-two extension cords of various lengths.

Henry's heart pounded with anticipation the entire drive home. He worked all weekend setting

up the grid of lamps. With the sun during the day and the lamps at night, he could get twenty-four hours of sunlight for solarization instead of twelve, thus cutting in half the time needed to complete the process. When he finished the last block on Sunday night, he looked at his watch and saw that it was 8:15. A defining moment in Henry's life had come. He flipped the switch and his garden shone in all the spectrum of light that the old sun provided during the day. Henry's grin stretched from ear to ear.

Unfortunately, Henry's glory did not last exceptionally long. The first sign that perhaps something in his plan may have gone awry appeared with the airplane that almost landed in his backyard because the pilot thought the lights were part of the runway from the airport. Then the confused roosters in the area started crowing wildly, and the dogs of the neighborhood started howling simultaneously. The emergency response team had to dispatch four units over to the First Community Church because eleven people collapsed thinking the Rapture had come. Fifteen minutes after flipping the switch, Henry's sunlamps went out, as did one-third of the lights in town.

An angry crowd gathered outside Henry's little shack, but no one really had the heart to yell

directly at Henry. A few calmer heads convinced Henry to just let the sun take care of the job. So, Henry moved on to the next phase of his gardening endeavor.

Having read that coffee grounds and eggshells, among other things, provided nutrients for the soil, Henry took to stocking up on those provisions by clearing the shelves at the local grocery store. He drank ten cups of coffee and ate a dozen eggs at every meal so he would have plenty of goodies for soil improvement. Eventually, Todd Falcon, the manager of the grocery store, limited the quantity of those goods that Henry could buy each week.

Despite his cholesterol level shooting through the roof, Henry remained unfazed by the mounting challenges. He read that earthworms were particularly good for the soil, so he began collecting worms of all kinds and releasing them into his garden. While the idea had merit, it lacked a certain level of discernment. To Henry, a worm was a worm; consequently, the cutworm, grub, and wireworm population increased at the same rate as the earthworm. The destructiveness of the former did not show up immediately, but eventually they wreaked havoc. As Henry walked among the

brown, stripped, and dead plants in his garden, he became disheartened. Then he spotted one shining beacon of green coming from the far back corner of the two acres. There stood a thriving, healthy tomato plant bearing one huge, plump fruit.

Word of this solitary tomato soon got out. From the hardware store to the beauty shop to the funeral parlor, everyone talked about Henry Lambert's tomato. The gardener beamed with pride at every accolade heaped upon him. When the fervor waned, Jed Tolson, down at the feed store, posed a simple thought. He wondered aloud just how much that tomato ended up costing Henry. After assembling the last set of numbers, the boys down at the store concluded that the one tomato cost Henry \$6,487.52. Such a revelation did not seem to have any effect on the gardener. For a man like Henry, there simply was no price to put on the value of pride. At least that's what he thought at the time.

The story does not end there, though. When the news of Henry's tomato reached Janesville, it created quite a stir at the Tomato Grower's Cooperative. Forstner Lamar, head of a big corporate farming enterprise, ended up buying Henry's tomato for \$6,500.00. They used the seeds as

foundation stock for building a whole new generation of miracle tomatoes.

In the end, Henry Lambert made \$12.48 in profit on his tomato, a paltry sum compared to the wealth that the tomato generated in pride.

What, might you ask, did Henry do with his gardening profit? He put it in the collection plate the next Sunday at church. That's just the way Henry was.