

How to be in business **for 40 years**



A COFFEE BREAK BOOK

by
JOHN



Dawn tests out the Table Tennis table.
Cover: John practising snooker shots.

Printed by



Adprint Ltd
Commercial Printers

Ph: 04 384 2844 Fax: 04 384 3265
60 Cambridge Tce, Wellington 6011
Web: www.adprint.co.nz

How to be in business **for 40 years**

by
JOHN

When I served my time as a joiner I stayed with the firm for 10 years. I enjoyed working there making window frames and cupboards. But it got to the stage where I thought I would learn a lot more by having my own joinery business.

Meeting the clients and discussing what we could do to make the best job for them. I had a friend that worked in another joinery factory in Miramar.

I was going into business doing joinery. My friend was going on vacation, and was then going into business building houses. At Christmas, on our vacation, I managed to buy a second hand dovetailer and shaper. I already had a saw bench that I had made. With the help from my brother I made a drum sander. I had a 6inch buzzer and later a 12inch planer.

There was plenty of work around, lots of people wanted drawer units and dressing tables. One I did

had lots of drawers and it was all made of oak. My friend who went into building houses started off by buying a spec section in Tawa and building a house on it. I did all the joinery for it.

Having worked in a big factory with big machinery, it was a new ball game working on my own with small machinery. I used to buy the window sills already run and buy 6x1½ or 6x2 and run my own window jambs and mullions out 4x3. There was no tanalising then, so it had to be all heart timber. I used to run my own rebates by deep cutting them on the saw bench, and buzzing them on the buzzer. I used to run all my own sash stiles and rails. I had a small drawer-saw which I used to cut the angle from the bevel on the rails back by about ½inch. Then I set the saw bench



up for the tenons by clamping a block of wood on to the fence of the saw bench as a stop. I would then drop the rails of the sashes onto the saw to cut the tenons. For mortising I had a special bit that went into the end of the saw spindle which had teeth only on one side, which, when set up, drilled through the stile. Then pulling the style along, it would mortise the stile to take the tenon for making the sashes, then when assembled, I could put the glass in for the windows.

In the end I did work for four builders. I learnt a lot about reading plans and scaling joinery and tendering for jobs. My father helped me to start reading plans because he had his own business as a brick layer. One job I got was making three coffins for an Undertaker. It was quite interesting work because you



had to bend the sides to fit around the shoulders of the person so I had to cut saw cuts in the 12x1 about halfway through so I could bend the sides. Also there was an angle on the front and the back of the coffin and with the sides not being parallel, the mitres were a difficult angle to cut. When I got them all finished, my mother was a bit embarrassed about people seeing them when I took them out to the road to put on the trailer. Every time I went to take them out the lady across the road was looking out of the window. At last I got my chance, putting them on the trailer and putting a cover over them. But as I went up Crawford Road to Newtown, a bus passed me and all the people were looking out the windows at me. Just then I noticed that the cover had blown off the coffins, and I thought to myself “No use looking at me, no, no. No use looking at me!”



At one time I priced a job for building flats, but I didn't get the job. I later found out the builder went bankrupt over that job so thank the Lord I didn't get it. I worked on my own doing joinery for about three years, but in the end working on my own was not good for my health. So I took a break and went to work for McKenzies in Cuba St, Wellington for two years.

The people were really nice to work for, I had my own counter and I sold hardware tools and electrical items. I had my own till and it was just like having my own little shop in a big department store. I loved every minute of it and got to know many of the customers. We had an hour for lunch so it was nice to walk around town for a break.



After two years another chap and myself went on a world tour by ship and stayed in England for a year. On the return voyage I thought I would like to go back to my trade and got the idea of specialising in making table tennis tables.

I don't know why I got this idea because I had already made two tables earlier on and they had both been a disaster. One was out of solid timber which cracked when the 12x1 dried out. The other was made out of ¼inch hard-board on a 3x1inch frame but that did not have enough bounce. So when I got back to New Zealand I started looking for suitable materials to make table tennis tables. When I was looking in the newspaper I saw some resin bonded recycled ½inch ply. On enquiring I found that the size was ideal to cut the table tennis tables out from. The full size being 9ft x 5ft, 2ft 6inches high off the floor and a regulation bounce dropping the ball from 12inches bounced between 8-9 inches. The ½ ply gave us adequate bounce. So I went into business making table tennis tables. I put the ½ ply onto a 3x1 frame and also was able to obtain scantlings which were 3x3 inch Baltic Pine 5ft long for only 1 shilling each. I would deep cut them on the circular saw to make 3x1s. For trestles and table tops, we had three trestles to a table which was in two halves with two cleats on one half, to rest the other half on. We had metal 'U' clips that went

where the tables joined, which being 1½ wide by 4 inches, then bending the 4 inch clip around the join on the table. Then we clamped the net posts onto the clip which held the table halves together.

Later on we designed joining the tables differently by having a three inch loose pin hinge on each side. Then we had a piece of quarter inch metal, which we put in where the loose pin went on the hinge and bent it in on a right angle upwards. We used a bead that fitted on the top of the ¼ inch round metal post. Then a string through the bead was adjusted to keep the net tight. I worked in the workshop at my father's place.

By this time he had retired, so he was there for company and encouragement. When we put an advertisement for the tables in the Evening Post, my father would take the calls. It was an answer to our prayer for there seemed to be so many people wanting table tennis tables that we were inundated with orders. I found out there was nobody else making them in Wellington, the nearest was Auckland and Christchurch. So we virtually had the run of half of both the Islands of New Zealand. Our tables started at £14.10 shillings and went to \$29 with the decimal currency change. We had set up in our workshop a show room for display and also had a little shop where we sold table tennis bats, nets, posts and guess what? Table tennis balls!

Just about the time we started making the tables, I met my future wife and we got married not long after. She was very good at clerical work, so she handled all the books and accounts. This goes to prove every good man has an even better woman behind him. As the orders for the tables rolled in, we rolled out more of the finished product. We brought more materials and a better range of nets and bats to suit any player. We had sponge bats with pimples in, and those with pimples out, everyone had their own preference. As the demand got greater we started buying 18mm super fine particle board, from which each half of the table could still be cut out in one piece. We had a contract with Evans Bay Timber to cut them out to size and enough to make four tables per week. Then I was buying in bulk 3x1in pine from Crighton's in Levin which gave us the best price. This continued for 16 years, making four tables a week. And our oil well for table tennis tables still did not run dry.

As I stated before, the full size tables were 9x5ft, a blessing for us which meant people could not go into a timber merchant anywhere and buy the right size and make the tables themselves. Apart from a very expensive board that was called 'shore board', which was mainly for club play and competitions, and which was the right size. Our market was for the families that played at home in their rumpus rooms or garages. Our price was just right for them. Never the less,



believe it or not we tried again making a table out of 1/4inch hardboard on a 3x1inch frame,. But this time we used tempered hardboard which the Lord showed me would give the right bounce. These were very popular because they were light and could be erected speedily in likes of a garage, or for playing in the lounge. We also made a 8x4 for smaller rooms. So we stocked shore board tables, super fine particle board tables, lightweight tables, oil tempered hard board and the 8x4 table.

We now had a contract advert in the Evening Post six nights a week. It was very special when families

would turn up having come all the way out to Miramar for the table of their choice. It was a great feeling to see them choose just the right bat for each member of their families; this was a very personal thing. Over the years we had 3 Holden station wagons, which we could carry four tables on the roof rack and the trestles in the back of the station wagon. By this time we only had 2 trestles per table and two 7ft beams that went long ways with a keyway to rest the table on. We made brackets to carry the beams on the side of the roof rack. We mostly delivered the tables because they were not easy to transport. People were very friendly and we would set the tables up for them. There was big excitement for the kids, quite often we would have a game with them and finish off with a cup of tea, while the children had a go on the table. I must say it brought the families together because instead of watching the Box, they would be playing each other, because this was one game parents could play with their children. We even had a ladder with their names on, to see who would be at the top of the family competition. From the time the children picked their favourite bat in the show room till about now, perhaps they are World Champions. Who knows?

We got calls from schools to supply tables, colleges, work places, clubs, table tennis clubs. Some went overseas. We had an advert "Wheatley's the name, Table Tennis is our Game".



At one time we might drive past Redwood Avenue, and we would say “That house has one of our tables.” But now, years later, we drive past and say “Oh, they haven’t got one of our tables yet.”

Most of the houses in Redwood Avenue were owned by bank managers, these sections were on a slope. So when the bank manager went home at night, they would pull the curtains and get into their old clothes and spend the evening digging out the basement

so they could have a table for their children. We have sold tables to politicians, tv personalities and to All Blacks. A lot of people would pick them up themselves on a trailer, truck, vans, and roof racks. Four men arrived one day to buy a table, and were very keen to get it home and have a game. They took it home on the top of their car. They had no rope, so they wound the four windows down and put their arms out the windows and held the table down with their hands while they drove home. So after that I always kept rope handy in the shop.

Christmas time was a biggy. It was nothing to sell fifty tables in the last two weeks before Christmas



as presents for the family. We were out every night delivering. My wife worked it out in areas, hoping that the weather was suitable. We had special covers to go between the tables so they would not get scratched. A table was not an easy thing to hide until Christmas Eve. Some people would get it delivered to a neighbor's garage. It used to fit under a double bed



quite well. Some would get it sent to work and hide it there till the big day. Painting the tables and lining them was an art. I found in the end a paint roller was the answer.

I designed a 6x3 pool table which I made several of. And also about 5,000 book cases. After forty years of lifting 5,000 table tennis tables 20,000 times I can't lift anything now. But it was worth the sacrifice for having the experience doing all this, but I can still write books about my achievements. One Friday night my wife and I were in the city. We thought we would have some fun so we went into a sports shop and asked them if they had any table tennis tables for sale. They said they did and they came from Auckland. The price was quite expensive, so we said we could not afford one, the man serving us in the shop said well there is an old chap out at Miramar that might make you one. We nearly burst out laughing, but we did not, I thought surely I don't look that old but we did not say anything.

The Chinese like playing on 8x4 tables because when they get good on the smaller size, they play on the larger 9x5 and the ball never goes over the edge. I did make friends with the chap, Bob Jackson, who made the tables in Auckland, and we actually stayed at his house while he was on holiday. We were able to help him by selling his tables for him while we were there on holiday.

We obtained our house with the table tennis tables. Don't get me wrong, we did not build it out of a table tennis tables. Although having made 5,000 tables we probably could have built two houses with the timber.

Two days ago I was up at the Wellington Cable Car. I was looking at the exhibits. There was a sculpture of a life sized woman. She looked amazingly real, I looked at her for a long time and she did not even blink. I thought she could at least say hello. Curiosity got the better of me, so I quickly looked from side to side then gave her a prod but no, she did not move! Just imagine if this had been me sitting there hour after hour, day after day, year after year. Then I remembered what the Bible said. "In the beginning, God created the Heaven and the Earth and made Adam out of the dust of the ground and, wait for it, breathed into him the breath of life and Man became a living soul". This makes it so wonderful that we have the gift of life in us to be able to do these things. Thank God.

If I won the biggest prize in Lotto, I would be the poorest person in the world. Because after I had spent all the money, I would have no money left. For as it is for me and my wife, the Lord has always supplied all our needs. Praise the Lord! When Jesus met the Samaritan Woman at the well, he told her that if she drank from the water at the well she would thirst again. He told her that he could give her living water, so she

would not thirst again. She said “Master give me this water that I may never thirst again, never come hither to draw.” Jesus was talking about the power of the Holy Spirit that comes in when a person believed in Jesus and receives him as Saviour, which is like a spring of living water that keeps springing up in us and satisfies all our needs.

People love talking about the creation of the world and the wonders of it. But the Bible says they deny the power thereof. Give God the Glory of Creation and the power thereof.



‘Wee Camper’ designed and built by John



Follow this car to Coffee Break Book country!

If you have enjoyed this Coffee Break book, please share it with your friends. For more exciting true stories in the Coffee Break series write to John, or see them on his website: www.coffeebreakbooks.com

Getting the best out of life? You can do what I have done, and even better!

Life is for living, so trust in the Lord and
Go, Go, Go!

Phil. Ch.4, v13:

*I can do all things through Christ
that can strengthen me.*

The complete world famous range of **Coffee Break Books**
written by John
www.coffeekbreakbooks.com

