

WHAT IS LOVE?

Though we launched *PRODUCE BUSINESS* at the PMA Convention in San Francisco in 1985, it is not precisely correct to say that the magazine started 25 years ago. Things never start and finish so neatly; they are built on foundations that stretch back through time and generations; they gain inspiration from people and ideas the “founders” of things never knew.

On the first day of the PMA Convention so many years ago, a small man with white hair came to our booth. He asked me if I was the grandson of Jacob Prevor. I explained that I was actually his great-grandson. The man told me that back in the Great Depression, he was penniless, and my great-grandfather was the only man who believed in him and gave him credit. Because he did so, the man said he had been able to build his business and live a good life. He wanted me to know.

As time has passed, I have come to receive phone calls and letters, even visits from people who started little wholesale or a retail shops or struck out on their own as brokers. Of all things, they said they were inspired by how we launched *PRODUCE BUSINESS* and that they drew ideas and inspiration from what we do.

Trade shows are a funny place for me. A long time ago, I got accustomed to people speaking to me as if we were best friends when the truth was we had never met. I have always written from the heart, and since I was all of 23-years-old when we launched this journey, that means I've been editor-in-chief of *PRODUCE BUSINESS* for more than half my life.

So I've shared the great moments of my adulthood, the business triumphs such as the launch of the *Perishable Pundit*, the personal pride in things such as my first piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, or the first time I was on the BBC or CNN or NPR. This year, my palpable enthusiasm goes to a new industry event: The New York Produce Show and Conference.

But to write only of business would be a falsehood, because when one has his own business, there is inevitable overlap. So I've written about the intimacies of adulthood: Debbie and my wedding; the birth of my two sons, William and Matthew; my longstanding friendship with Ken Whitacre, with whom I launched this venture so many years ago; the excruciating and triumphant battle to save the life of my father.

Back when Bruce Peterson worked at Wal-Mart, I asked him, on exactly one occasion, to make a phone call to an industry member. He

did it almost instantly, and when I tried to thank him, he silenced me and said that I had “earned my bones” in the industry and if he could help, he did so gladly. I've been fortunate to have won lots of awards, been given lots of accolades, but Bruce's line still resonates.

What is the correct relationship between a writer, an editor, a magazine and an industry? In *Fiddler on the Roof*, there is a wonderful scene and a beautiful song that is a kind of brief meditation on the nature of love. The story goes that Tevey, the husband and father of the household, has acquiesced in allowing his first two daughters to marry the men they loved, rather than submit, as was the custom, to an arranged marriage based on money and family reputation.

As Tevey contemplates the new world in which love, rather than prudence, becomes the standard for marriage, it occurs to him that he and his wife of 25 years had an arranged marriage:

After 25 years... why talk about love?

Tevey: *Golde, I'm asking you a question... Do you love me?*

Golde: *Do I love you? For 25 years, I've washed your clothes, Cooked your meals, Cleaned your house, Given you children, milked the cow.*

After 25 years, why talk about love?

Tevey: *Golde, The first time I met you Was on our wedding day...*

But my father and my mother Said we'd learn to love each other And now I'm asking, Golde Do you love me?

Golde: *I'm your wife*

Tevey: *I know... But do you love me?*

Golde: *Do I love him?*

For 25 years I've lived with him, Fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years my bed is his... If that's not love, what is?

They wind up acknowledging that they do love each other and in so doing suggest that love is not so much a romantic fantasy but is expressed through the day-to-day reality of engaging and caring. I think that is what Bruce was saying in the expression, “earned my bones”.

So many have earned their bones with me. My brilliant college fraternity brother Ken Whitacre has had 30 years and many causes to

deck me. Yet we are still in this together. Not too many friends can say that, and I am indiscernibly fortunate that I can.

An incredible team at work: Diana Levine typeset the first issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS* 25 years ago and still works beyond all reason to make us look great.

Twenty-three years with Eric Nieman has taught me the power of his tenacity; 15 years with Ellen Rosenthal has let me see how caring transcends almost everything.

Twenty-one years with Fran Gruskin as my executive assistant has meant 21 years of knowing what trust and loyalty is all about.

Plus the design duo of Jackie Tucker, 10 years, and Freddy Pulido, 13 years, has always managed to make us look beautiful

Jackie LoMonte, 11 years, has kept us all going where we needed to be.

Amy Shannon has taken on our newest project: *PerishableNews.com*; Jennifer Kramer has come to understand produce as assistant editor; and Colleen Morelli has finally found a home at *PRODUCE BUSINESS* after learning each division in our company.

Of course, I couldn't have the job I do, always flying off to some corner of the world to give a speech, if I didn't have a wife like Debbie, who was willing to take on so much. My children, William and Matthew, are a source of constant inspiration and unspeakable joy.

Then, of course, I was born lucky. I was born in America and that is a substantial advantage to anyone. I also was born the son of Michael and Roslyn Prevor. Twenty-five years ago, I already knew I had great parents who had supported me in every venture I had ever proposed and whose unconditional love gave me the courage to believe I could start with a dream and build a business. Twenty-five years later, they are still my biggest fans and strongest supporters, and I only hope I can show my own children the love they have always shown me.

I thought of that *Fiddler on the Roof* song as I sat down to write this because I asked myself what I really thought about this industry after 25 years. And I realized, like Golde, after 25 years of thinking through each issue that has come along, 25 years of trying to help the industry find the right decision, 25 years of identifying leaders and hoping — as our slogan adopted so many years ago demanded, to “initiate industry improvement” — well, as Golde would have said, if that is not love, what is?

Thanks for the opportunity. We've got big plans for the next 25. **pb**