

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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A Bit More History

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Because the May Anniversary Issue was going to press in mid-April, I was thinking about the recent Spring Trials from which I'd just returned rather than about the 75th anniversary, which is why I wound up writing my column on "Dumb Questions" instead of reminiscing about my 29 years in the business.

But hey, we're celebrating 75 years all year long, so you don't mind if I look back at my own brief bit of history, do you? What's that? You'd love to hear about it? Good!

My fate is determined at age 7 when I appear in the Waterbury (Connecticut) Republican, admiring a garden club exhibit. That's my little brother, Philip, with me.

May 1983 | My wife and I graduate from the University of Florida, she with a degree in horticulture; me with a degree in journalism and a minor in hort. A few days after graduating, we work Mother's Day weekend for Tropical Treehouse, a Florida florist. Those two days make up our entire horticulture work experience thus far.

June 1983 | Indian River Ornamentals is born. We build a shadehouse and fill it with V-10 Amy and V-14 Glory poinsettia stock plants from Ecke. We also attend our first Florida Nurseryman & Growers Association meeting. Afterwards, I'm asked if I'd like to be vice president next term. I'm honored ... until I learn I'm the first new chapter member in years (I'm still honored, however).

July 1983 | Jasper Reed builds us a 6,000 sq. ft. double poly, fan and pad greenhouse. I build the benches and drip system. Blackcloth is PVC frames and black poly pulled by hand twice a day.

December 1983 | Our gorgeous poinsettia crop quickly sells out to the local florists and garden centers. Then, realizing Valentine's Day is coming, we scramble to find plant material on short notice. Gloeckner's Paul Daum proves to be an invaluable resource, thanks to his ever-present stack of files. We also begin growing

weekly pot mums with the help of Yoder Brothers, including Bob Humm, still an Aris stalwart. Earl J. Small Growers was a dependable source for gloxinia and exacum seedlings, each wrapped in paper and housed in a Styrofoam shipping box.

July 1984-July 1985 | Business booms and we double our greenhouse space each summer, from 6,000 sq. ft. to 12,000 sq. ft. to 24, 000 sq. ft. Remembering the nightmare of pulling blackcloth by hand, we invest in a Simtrac automatic system.

December 1985 | I get my picture in the paper standing among my poinsettia crop. I'm famous!

December 1989 | I'm delivering poinsettias when a reporter from *GrowerTalks*, making a trip up the East Coast, stops in to see our crop. My wife lets him photograph it. He calls me later for an interview. We appear in the February 1990 trip report.

January 1990 | Florists are going away and box stores are coming up. We're not sure we want to serve that market. And a recession hits. This business is tougher than it looks.

May 1993 | Having decided that greenhouse ownership is not my thing, I pursue a writing career and take a part-time job with a small weekly newspaper. A few months later I'm promoted to editor.

October 1993 | *GrowerTalks* finally reads my resume. They like my unusual combination of journalism training and greenhouse ownership. They offer me the managing editor position. We look on a map to see where Chicago is. I take the job anyway.

December 1993 | First grower visit for *GrowerTalks*, to Texas, accompanying legendary Vic Ball. He wears a coat and tie. I try it one day, then change into khakis and a polo. Only Vic and Marvin Miller can get away with a coat and tie in the greenhouse.

November 1995 | First trip to the Netherlands, Ground Zero of the floriculture world. I never view flowers the same way again. Multiple international trips follow, including Australia, China, Japan, South Africa and Central America. Passport becomes well stamped. I learn that this business is tough in any language.

September 1997 | Vic Ball passes away. The end of an era, and I'm grateful for the chance to have worked with him.

July 2008 | Promoted to editor & publisher. Barely able to spell P&L, now I have to read one. I become almost as adept with Excel as I am with Word. But I'm still a storyteller, not a numbers guy.

November 1993 to current | Scores of fellow editors have come and gone, but I stick on, hoping nobody ever discovers how much fun I'm having.