



From Your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

HAVE YOU ATTENDED a TOI event in the last 28 years?

If so, you most likely received a “goodie”, or “giveaway”. Maybe it was a computer monitor calendar; maybe it was a pen. Maybe it was a bag or portfolio. Maybe it was a water bottle?

I could go on and on but I think you get the picture. All these things had to come from somewhere so I hope you will indulge me for this month’s column, as I write a little more “personal”.

When I started working for the association back in 1987, one of the first things I started working on was our Annual Conference. George Miller, executive director at the time, handed me a catalog from a company called Crestline that specialized in things for organizations like TOI. He encouraged me to find something in the catalog we could order and give to our attendees. In what seemed like before I could even set the catalog down on my desk, I had a telephone call. It was from a man named Donald Fischer who was a salesman for Crestline. From that first conversation, I knew I was dealing with a “pro” salesman who knows his stuff!

That first conversation with Donald or “Don” turned into usually multiple telephone conversations each month over 28 years. Don would always ask what we had coming up, what our theme was, etc. He always was full of ideas/suggestions on things we could use. Each time Don would call, I didn’t always place an order but we would end up talking about our lives. We talked about and went through job changes, wives, sickness, marriage, childbirth, divorce and death. Our conversations strayed into personal likes and dislikes from time to time and even politics. But no matter what the subject was, I always enjoyed talking with Don.

Don also went above and beyond for every order to ensure its accuracy and my requests for “Made in America” items.

Don eventually changed companies and left Crestline to go to work

for Shads Advertising in upper Maine. When I got the word he had left Crestline, I no sooner had hung up the phone when Don called on the other line to tell me of his move and to offer to continue to work with us. Of course, I had no problem and our monthly conversations continued. Don’s move to a new state certainly didn’t change his sales calls but it changed his personal stories because he was now living in a state where he had to shovel snow, sometimes off the roof and sometimes waist deep.

I always joked with Don that I only knew his voice (and believe me, everyone in the TOI Office knew Don’s distinctive voice when he called), and would someday like to meet him in person. Back in 2006 when I attended a conference in Boston, I asked Don if he could travel from Maine to meet. While he liked the idea, a previous family commitment prevented him from coming to meet me in person. We always joked that I was walking around Boston looking for Don, but never found him.

The years have gone by and I worked with Don on ideas for TOI’s 100th anniversary celebration in 2007 that we used and received many compliments on. But as they say, all good things must come to an end. And in May, I received a call from Don to tell me he was retiring and moving to the warmer climate of Florida. He explained who would be the new person I would deal



AFTER NEARLY 30 years, Bryan meets “old” friend Donald Fischer

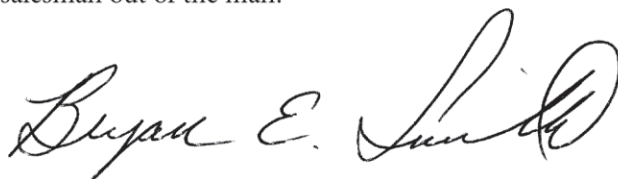
with and gave me his contact information. Don also gave me his cell phone number and said we would stay in touch.

Sure enough, toward the end of June, I heard from Don and that he and his wife were settled (not all unpacked) in their new home near West Palm Beach, FL. It was good to hear his familiar voice and we talked for quite a while. Don has continued to stay in touch and last fall, when I mentioned we were taking a family vacation to Florida the week of Thanksgiving, I asked Don if it would be possible to finally meet in person. I explained that we would be vacationing on the Gulf side of Florida with no vehicle, about three hours from his home, but after checking the date with his wife, we set a date to finally meet. We were staying at Holmes Beach, FL on Anna Maria Island so I suggested we meet for lunch at one of the island's popular restaurants where we could eat and visit.

So after 28 years, on Nov. 24, 2014, I stood in the doorway of Peach's Restaurant and in walked this gray-haired man in shorts. We looked at each other, smiled, said each other's name (I recognized that all so familiar voice) and instantly hugged. To finally meet the man

and hear that familiar voice coming from an actual person instead of a phone after 28 years, was honestly hard to believe. It was kind of like when you were a kid and had a pen pal and finally getting to meet that person. Don brought his lovely wife, Karen, and she had to listen to us visit and joke and reminisce about the last 28 years. Don's outgoing personality I'm sure was the key to his success as a salesman for so many years. Just sitting there listening to him talk made me realize how lucky I've been to work with such a person who has had the ability to have had a successful career in sales.

Our time went by fast and we soon had to leave, but we both said how wonderful it was to get to meet in person after all these years. And not to be outdone, Don had a catalog for me to take home as well as a couple of ink pens for my daughters. I guess you can't take the salesman out of the man!



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