

On October 27, 1994, Ankeny had approximately 17,000 residents, 3 established banks and a newcomer, a substantial credit union and 2 weekly newspapers. The *Ankeny Press Citizen* was the long established, free newspaper that everyone received and read and it's rival, *Ankeny Today*. *Ankeny Today* was a struggling subscription newspaper that felt Ankeny needed more than one source for print media. To help fill the space and sell more papers Buck Brock, owner, publisher and editor was looking for substantial, local writing. Instead he found me.

1994 is also the year the Friedman family moved to Ankeny to help start that newcomer bank, and get it established. I tried to get involved in just about everything to help make a name for that bank and get some business. During that time I called on Mr. Buck Brock, owner, publisher and editor of the *Ankeny Today*, trying to persuade him to bank with my bank. Buck and I hit it off right away; we were both upstarts trying to make a dent in the established business of our competitors. But Buck was also very honest with me, telling me I really didn't want his business.

After fifteen years, my memory is a little foggy, but I think Buck and I started talking about marketing and he asked me how I would feel about writing a column about small business issues. It could be a win-win situation as it would help him connect with some of his potential advertisers, and help me become more widely known in Ankeny. He asked me if I could write. In the back of my mind I knew that I had written a little bit for my high school newspaper and editorialized on a weekly radio show, but nothing of consequence or importance. Without thinking very long I said yes, and we agreed that I would begin writing a bi-weekly column for *Ankeny Today* to be called Small Business Today.

The ground rules were pretty simple; I could write about any small business issue I wanted, but I couldn't be self-serving and I had to keep my writing between 300 and 600 words. His advice to me was to write about what I knew and keep it simple. Very good advice.

Less than a year later, *Ankeny Today* folded. My friend, owner, publisher, and editor of the newspaper found he couldn't continue to compete. To this day I will deny that my column contributed to his demise. Fortunately for me, the *Ankeny Press Citizen* decided that my writing was good enough and interesting enough that they would be OK with me continuing my bi-weekly ritual of writing. Through several different owners, several different editors and several different employers on my part, I have been honored to have my column continually be published. After fifteen years I have written almost 400 different columns,

My family has been the subject of countless columns, and they have been great sports to allow me to write about them time and time again. 1997 brought the first public reaction to one of my columns, a letter to the editor criticizing my opinion. I was both happy that I finally knew someone was actually reading and reacting to what I was writing, and sad that they disagreed with me. Over the years others have written me letters, including an anonymous submission that I immediately threw in the trash.

Thank you for letting me share my thoughts and my life with you over these past fifteen years, what started out as a marketing ploy has truly become a hobby that I love. I hope that you allow me to write, share my thoughts and experiences with you for many more years. It truly is an honor.

*Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, president of First National Bank, Ankeny.*