



“Support the Little Guys” *“Keep in Touch!”*

I have fond childhood memories of growing up in a little town during the 60's and 70's. Our small town was a one square mile gem located 29 miles outside one of the most magnificent cities in the world, New York. My graduating class consisted of about 150 students; most of us whom felt like brothers and sisters rather than co-students, and our neighbors were fondly referred to as Aunt and Uncle or Mr. and Mrs. It was a magnificent childhood and I felt like I belonged.

The feeling I had back then of belonging to our community was not restricted to the feelings I had towards my classmates and neighbors, but also to the local merchants whom WE relied upon for their goods, support and advise. I recall Mom telling me to walk downtown to see Bill; our local Pharmacist, and ask him what to do about the rash on my hand or Dad saying, “Walk to town and ask Mr. Hall”; the owner of the local hardware store, “for a cotter pin big enough to fix my wheel”. As a child and young adult my small world was positively accentuated, secured and supported by the local people that ran the local businesses. There was an unspoken trust and a great feeling in our community. Most of the people that lived there knew each other, which did bother me as a teen as there was always someone watching me that would get in touch with my parents.

Our Mom and Dad were both proponents for patronizing the small shop owners in our area. They often said to us kids, *“Support the Little Guys”*. I guess they felt this way because they too, were small business owners. At that time I didn't understand what they meant and what difference it made who they bought from but ... I surely do now. I recall Dad saying when the big orange “Do it yourself” supply chain came into existence, “Boy, our local hardware stores are going to have a tough time competing with them”. He was right and I sure miss Mr. Hall; there was always something really nice about walking into his store and being asked, “How's the family?” and the sense that his interest wasn't solely my money and his bottom line.

Large businesses have done a great job at bringing consistency, convenience and selection to our consumer purchases. Between individual locations of the big chains it is hard to find inconsistency in their products and quality; (this is due to main distribution hubs that ensure conformity across the country) which is quite convenient. Most of them have carefree return policies; (buying larger quantities creates greater leverage for negotiating lower purchasing prices creating larger profit margins, which in-turn allows for a more lenient return policy), more exposure; (huge advertising budgets) and larger selections; (capital). This puts *“The Little Guys”* at a direct competitive disadvantage; but really “What difference does it make if WE don't have small businesses to deal with?” A question WE can answer defensively being the majority of “Our Industry” are *“The Little Guys”*; WE want to survive and flourish; but other than that, “What importance does a small establishment hold?”

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This country was founded on small businesses. Without the local mercantile, blacksmith or farmer, our country would not have succeeded. Local merchants and suppliers are the thread that tie the residents to their community. They are the schools, pharmacies, delicatessens, mechanics, local grocers, hardware stores, 5 & 10's, piano teachers and book stores (forgive me if I have forgotten some). They are the providers of first jobs, memories, supporters of children and their sport's teams and their buildings often help provide locations for the community to gather. “A farmer must tend to his sheep if he wants wool for his clothing.”

Our amazing country is still full of wealth and opportunity, although in my opinion there is a growing sense of entitlement; it is still a country full of tremendous possibilities for anyone living here or emigrating here. Many immigrants, including our Grandparents, came to this country drawn to the appeal of its freedom, immense opportunities and the idea that they could promote themselves independently in business. They could persevere, work hard and hopefully prosper in owning their own business; at least the possibility is greater here than some other countries. How blessed WE are. So ... “What does it matter if small businesses survive? ... because most of our Auto Trim Industry is made up of them!”

“Support the Little Guys!”

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