

CATALYST

RESOURCES FOR CREATIVE LIVING

Community: Shop Locally

When you shop where does your money go?

By **Barb Guy**

I've become friends with Kasim, the man who owns one of my favorite restaurants. Saturday when my husband and I showed up for lunch, he told us, "Long time no see!" Then he said he's trying hard to keep his restaurant open, but he isn't getting enough customers.

He's not the first owner of a small, independent business to tell us, "Long time no see," and it brings a little pain when it's said. I feel a responsibility to people like Kasim.

On September 11, 2001, we drove to Kasim's restaurant to see if he was alright. We went there out of fondness for him and concern for his safety. Like us, he and his staff were terribly shaken by the day's events. A day or two later, a small minority-owned business in Salt Lake City was firebombed by a misguided individual who thought he was getting even for September 11th, so I guess we were right to be worried.

Most days though, small businesses face less exotic threats. When Kasim told us he was having trouble, we asked,

have you tried this, have you tried that? Surely, if we could just figure out what he's been doing wrong, we could help him. But he is a businessman after all, and he's already doing everything we could think of, and more.

Unfortunately, it turns out that the threat small businesses face is me - and people like me. I'm the one doing something wrong. I talk the talk of supporting locally owned, independent businesses, so it hurts to admit that in the last couple of months I have dined at Olive Garden, Famous Dave's, Chili's, and even McDonald's; and I've shopped at Target, Nordstrom, Meyer and Frank, Home Depot, and Barnes and Noble. If I'm a friend of small business, what was I doing at all those places?

Some may argue that a specific location of a national chain can be locally owned and I'll agree that's a special category, but even those places have a carefully crafted homogeneity that I find creepy. When you step inside, are you in Tucson or Buffalo? I like to feel the difference.

So I do support independent businesses; I have recently dined

at Caf? Anh Hong, East Coast Subs, Baba Afghan, Caf? Trang, The Atlantic, The Other Place, Bangkok Thai, Lamb's, Mazza, Miramar, and Big City Soup. While buying gifts, I shopped at Sam Weller's Books, Blue Cockatoo, Caputo's Market, Scentsations, The King's English, Cabin Fever, McKay Diamonds, Orion Music, Ken Sanders Rare Books, and Ten Thousand Villages. But I can do more.

It can hurt to make this commitment. I bought five copies of a book at a small store for \$19.99 each, only to find it at Costco - what was I doing there? - for \$12.69.

Supporting the locals can be more expensive, but I don't want to wake up in a world without all the wonderful independent small businesses that give Salt Lake its flavor.

And we have already lost some great ones. So I accept that loving the indies means I must sometimes pay for the pleasure of having them.

I am making a resolution to do my very best to not visit chain

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stores or restaurants in 2004. I want Kasim's restaurant to be there when I get a craving for his amazing eggplant dish; not just for the eggplant, but for his warm welcome, too. The more I visit his place, the more likely he is to survive. Famous Dave doesn't miss me, but the local folks do.

Pogo, the wise cartoon character, said, "We have met the enemy and he is us." It's a hard lesson to learn that you're not the friend you thought you were. I'm going to remember how important my shopping and dining dollars are, and this year I'll walk the walk to support my community by supporting its independent businesses.

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