



July 7, 1967 -- that's when we took over the Hitchin Post Market in Reche Canyon, Colton. Ok, so that's 58 years ago, and I lied. But I didn't lie, because March 10, 1975 is when we opened this store in Lucerne Valley, in the old shopping center, where the clinic is now located. THAT was 50 years ago!

In 1967 my folks, Ernie and Barb Gommel, were led by God to buy the Hitchin Post Market and the property it sat on, as the way He wanted them (and us'ns) to serve Him by serving that little canyon community. Our little group of Followers of the Living God (as we know Him in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit) were not asked to play religion. We were asked to serve our customers in His Name.

Back to 50 years. In 1974 my folks would spend one day a week in a small travel trailer parked at Lighthouse Lodge in Fawnskin, on Big Bear Lake. Then when they returned home, often they would come down the back way, through Lucerne Valley and down the Cajon Pass to Reche Canyon. Thus they



happened to find out that Leo's Market in Lucerne Valley was available as the owner was tired and wanted out.

Our little group got together and asked God what He wanted, and we thought that we should take on Leo's Market (now Lucerne Valley Market & Hardware). From 1975 to 1981, we operated both stores, with Sir William and Lady Jan Lembright staying at the Hitchin Post and the Gommels staying up here in LV. I and others split our time between the two.

My dad had a background in carpentry and construction, plus a Civil Engineering degree from (ewww) Cal Berkeley (so guess where I was born!). His background facilitated the plans and building of the current store, the first half in 1983 and the second half in 1991. Again the motivation was to follow God's lead - to serve the community with the best store we could, and without taking a bunch of money out for ourselves, rumors of Gommel's gold in the back yard notwithstanding. (Our staffers get paid solid wages and benefits, as much as the store can do and still pay its costs.)

As happens in the independent grocery business, the relationship with the grocery wholesaler is like a marriage. You both need each other and you hope that the two of you are compatible over the long haul. In much of this history, that was the case.

When we came in 1975, our partner was Certified Grocers of Ca., a cooperative owned by us retailers, with the right attitude to go with that. They treated us as owners, which, of course, we were. We felt included in deci-

sions and protected by Certified. It provided everything needed, including a dairy program and a bread bakery. Yes there were issues, but overall it was good.

Then Certified started to drift, as so many companies do, and got big ideas of growing into a large west coast operation by acquiring United Grocers in Portland, with plans to enter Seattle, also. Motivations became more to grow and become important than to serve the customers. The name changed to Unified Western Grocers (UWG or uggh 😞) for a while, and then shortened to Unified Grocers.

We left our partnership at that time and wedded ourselves to Fleming Foods out of Phoenix, Az, for about 11 years, which was a whole story of its own. Some may remember that we had the IGA banner during that time.

In 2003, Fleming died at the hand of unprincipled money grubbers, so we returned to Unified. During our eleven years in exile, Unified had changed its spirit and had grown much more positive, exemplified by two things. The motto they landed on was "More Ways to Make It YOUR Market", and they operated on the principle of adopting the best practices of the formerly separate companies, not allowing proprietary pride in the old ways to stand in the way.

But then, things went south again. Unified's new CEO, a lawyer (another ugh!), led the company to its demise with some bad decisions, so in December, 2017, Supervalu, a big gorilla in grocery wholesaling and based in Minneapolis, MN, bought Unified Grocers, and only 7 months later, in July 2018 United Natural Foods, Inc. bought Supervalu.

Our heads were spinning. In the ensuing seven years, we are being run by a huge wholesaler in Minnesota who knows little and seems to care less about the needs and desires of customers in California. To make it worse, Supervalu of Minnesota is run by a significantly smaller company, UNFI, based in Providence, Rhode Island. UNFI's core business has always been natural and organic foods, not conventional groceries like you find in our store or other chains nearby. Sigh!

Why do I bore you with all of this? To give you a little insight into the battle we fight to keep this store supplied with what you need. Pet food is the biggest bugaboo. UNFI (aka Supervalu) refuses to carry the large bags and various assortments of dog and cat food that we need to serve you better. As a result, we now have a NEW supplier, in fact two suppliers: Amazon and Walmart. We are forced to get thousands of dollars of pet food and other items from them due to the failure of the UNFI/Supervalu combination.

The worst part about it is that UNFI gutted the Southern California operations, moved the buying mostly to Minneapolis, got rid of our longtime

friends at Unified Grocers, and have withdrawn almost all of the warmth and spirit of working together that we had with Unified.

Yes, I'm frustrated and upset at the change that is forcing us to struggle against the wholesaler/partner rather than fight the battles alongside them. Yes, I'd do anything to be able to partner with a different wholesaler, but there isn't one.

And more than anything, I hope we here at Lucerne Valley Market & Hardware never fall into that trap but keep on keepin' on serving this community with the God-given spirit of care and concern for each and every one who walks through the front doors.

Linda Gommel



This coming Sunday is Pentecost. So what, you might ask. So everything. This was the day when Jesus' promise of a Counsellor or Helper to be with us was fulfilled.

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. . . .*



*"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. . . .*

*God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*

*"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2 excerpts)*

Why should we care?  
"The New Covenant (New Testament) was with Israel, but all nations were now invited to be grafted in! It was a bit of a culture shock at first, and it took some work getting used to, but suddenly, at Pentecost, the Feast of Shavuot, everything changed. The God of Israel opened up a new and living way for everyone to come to Him through that New Covenant in the Messiah's blood, and His Spirit could now be poured out on all flesh. Now, the Law could be written on our hearts! God's Spirit could now indwell each and every believer, helping us to live His way." (oneforisrael.org)  
Wow! Hallelujah!

Lg

On The Lighter Side of Serious Stuff . . . from the Web

