

RiverBender Blog: Chilling at the Coffee Shop in Small Town, U.S.A.

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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I enjoy loitering at coffee shops. I've spent a lot of hours settled into my chair, laptop in front of me and iced coffee melting as I write.

Before I started working at RiverBender.com, I probably spent at least one or two mornings a week at a local shop. As I dropped \$7 on a single cup of coffee (ow), I comforted myself by reasoning that I was supporting a small business. And while this was true, my piggy bank is very glad that my coffee shop habit is now offset by a regular paycheck.

But this past weekend, I again found myself at a local shop, where my friend and I met to get some work done. She had homework to complete; I was, as always, writing. We settled into our booth and — after catching up and, yes, some gossip — got to work.

It didn't take long before we were interrupted by a welcome distraction: one of our friends, who just happened to wander into the shop. And then another friend who I met through this job stopped by, and then suddenly our little island of two was a full table.

This is so simple but so wonderful. It is the magic of small towns like Alton. You can be sitting somewhere and before you know it, you're surrounded by friends.

Alton and the surrounding communities are so tiny and tight-knit that it's not uncommon to run into people you know. In fact, you can pretty much expect it whenever you leave the house.

Complete transparency: This used to bother me. Sometimes I just wanted to go to the store in sweatpants and a t-shirt and no makeup. Sometimes I craved anonymity.

But I appreciate it more nowadays, the benefits of knowing the people you live beside. Especially after this past weekend when a small work session turned into a full-blown hangout with so many people I enjoy, I can really see the joy in living in a small community.

Not only is it fun, but it makes us kinder. How many times has someone in our community needed help, and so many of us wrapped around them? Whether that's donating to GoFundMes or volunteering or dropping off a meal, the Riverbend shows up when one of our own needs help. We reach out and pull people up. We're there, even if it's just for a cup of coffee.

This community supports its own. I see us do it all the time, and I hope we continue to be there for all of our neighbors, including the ones that we sometimes forget to see. Community is complicated, but we're all stronger when we have each other's backs.

This weekend's coffee shop adventure was such a mundane experience, really, but that's the beauty of it. For a moment, we all saw each other. For a moment, we all shared something.

I'm grateful for places like the coffee shop where we can gather, and I'm grateful for the people I've met who have become good friends. If you see me around, say hi. I love meeting my fellow community members.