

Derek Smith & Associates

CONSULTANTS IN PAPER AND THE ENVIRONMENT

I live halfway along a quiet country road in Howard County in Maryland. My wife and I have lived in large cities all our married life and we wanted to change to a more peaceful environment when we came back to live in the United States in 1997. Howard County is a beautiful agricultural region in Western Maryland and the road we chose to live on is a reflection of rural peace.

At the end of our road is a country intersection originally zoned for commercial development. There are two of three small country shops there and several months ago a used car company applied for development rights on the only empty corner of the intersection. Permission was provisionally granted along with the right to erect a two story building, housing about 160 used vehicles. Quite why this was allowed when there are perfectly good developed commercial centers within five miles of our small village is beyond me, but, with many of my neighbors, I went to speak at a meeting with the council members at our local community center and to protest at this invasion of the way we had chosen.

Many people spoke about the potential danger to our children of used car carriers traveling around the many twists and turns in our road to reach their destination and others spoke of the runoff from the car washing which was part of the project. As I was preparing myself to talk about the environmental issues, two little girls aged eight and ten years, were called to the microphone as they had requested an opportunity to speak.

Doubtless those two children had been prepared by their parents, but facts are facts whether they come from the mouths of children or not and the story of these little girls and the question they asked struck me with real impact. They told the audience that they were part of an environmental club which had been formed in their elementary school some while ago and which was involved in many initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of the school. They added that they were now linked to the environmental clubs of five other elementary schools in the district.

One of their key initiatives was to walk to school once a week instead of taking the bus and avoid whenever possible the use of school buses to try to bring down their Carbon emissions and consequently reduce the size of the school's carbon footprint.

The question they asked was why, if they were taking these measures as children, the council could even consider allowing a two story used car lot to be erected within a mile or so of their school. They suggested that the carbon emissions of the trucks carrying the used cars, the automobile traffic to and from the business, and the running of the business itself would completely

obliterate the children's efforts and in fact leave us far worse in our small village than we were before.

Was it the children, they asked, who were irresponsible, or the parents? 'Out of the mouths of Babes!'