



Amy Stahr Hawking

The Little Shop on Main Street

AMY STAHR HAWKING RECOUNTS THE SPECIAL MOMENTS OF HER 30 YEARS IN THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Quintessential Barrington caught up with Amy Hawking, owner of Little Shop of Papers, to talk about the business her mother started three decades ago, and that she runs today.

QB: *How did the Little Shop of Papers get its start?*

AH: My mother, Jean Stahr, started the shop 30 years ago. She was an active, driven lady and after my brother and I were out of the house, golf and philanthropic work wasn't quite enough to keep her busy. So, she decided to open a shop to sell fine stationery and invitations. Little Shop of Papers opened in a tiny space in the Ice House Mall in 1988. I think my wedding invitation was one of Mom's first orders. Gold engraved on cream stock. Still looks good today! The shop was a success from the start. Barrington has been a community that loves its parties and social graces. The shop definitely filled a niche! And my grandfather ran a print shop, so I guess it's in the genes!

QB: *What was your role when you worked together?*

AH: I was with my mom from the very beginning, going to the New York stationery show, the Atlanta gift show, naming the shop, and helping with some of the shop design. After my daughter, Dana, went to first grade, I came on as a regular employee and learned every aspect of running the business. My mom would go to Florida for 3-4 months every year-leaving me in charge. It gave her great peace of mind to know that I could take care of things and she could enjoy her retirement. As she aged, I took over more and more responsibility but—trust me—the shop was HERS until the very end!

QB: *Was the transition difficult when you took over the store?*

AH: The transition after Mom's passing was understandably difficult on many levels. I missed her first and foremost as my mother—the most loving and supportive person you ever have in your life.

But at the shop I missed having her by my side to consult, to share, to commiserate. That is one of the reasons I decided to move the shop into the Village. Not only was the Village becoming a more vibrant, active town center, it also helped me transition into my own space. I think Mom would approve and the mannequin we often use in the window, "Jeanie", was her mannequin, so she's there watching every step of the way!

QB: *How did you update the store's products and reflect your style?*

AH: The shop's product mix has changed a lot in 30 years! Internet and email did not exist, so paper was the only game in town for social and business correspondence and for party invitations. There were no Evites, emails, or texts to announce a grad party, a shower, or even a simple dinner party. I think there is a return to graciousness—at least I certainly hope so. There's something very unremarkable about receiving an invitation to an event that you can "swipe and delete". I refuse to believe that there will come a time when people no longer send out a gorgeous paper wedding invitation. It's the most important party you'll ever throw! Why not commemorate it with a timeless paper invitation?

QB: *You've mentioned that you have a personal legacy with customers, that you've been with them during the special moments of their lives. What are some of those events you've helped with?*

AH: Oh my gosh! We have many customers who started with us for their baby announcements, birthday parties, graduation parties, and now we are doing that same baby's wedding invitation! Then we've gone on to do that baby's baby shower! Kinda makes me feel old, but happy to be here for it all.

QB: *What services do you offer?*

AH: Since we carry all different kinds of invitation stock in the shop, we can help a customer with the wording, then print them-in house. There is a lot of comfort, for our long-term customers especially, that we can get it done for them reasonably quickly and always tastefully. We also carry the

custom albums from the top stationers in the country. Engraving, letterpress, and thermography are printing processes that are more typically called for with a formal invitation or stationery. Those jobs we source out to our custom vendors. There has been more importance of late for “day of” custom accessories—place cards, programs, menus, napkins, cups, and even matches! We do ‘em all.

QB: *Times have changed since Little Shop of Papers opened in 1988. What changes have you seen with your customers?*

AH: The long-term customers are so much more than customers. They are truly friends! We have the greatest customers in the world and that’s what makes it so fun to go to the shop each day. However, with the advent of Amazon and internet shopping the expectations have changed a bit for people who are not as familiar with our services. There is a sense of immediate need and unrealistic expectations that we try very hard to meet, but a small family-run brick-and-mortar can’t compete with the immediacy of a drone-delivered Amazon item. That being said, when you need a gift last minute—maybe you procrastinated and have a party that night—you can come into the shop, select something perfect, and have us wrap it up in some stunning paper and ribbon and voila, you’re golden! That is something that little shops like mine will always have over the internet. Not only the timing, but the personalized service and willingness to go the extra mile for our customers. We have a few corporate clients who give us their lists and we will offer gift suggestions (often at a discounted price), wrap, and ship for them. We welcome special orders!

QB: *What is your favorite item in the store?*

AH: It’s like picking a favorite child! But if I have to choose, I have a hard time NOT buying the snarky/funny towels and cards. Some make me laugh out loud and I’m not sure who is going to buy them, but they’re funny so I can’t resist! I’m also partial to our gorgeous candles. We have from luxury-embellished to simple and delicious! I’m also a dog freak, so there are a lot of dog inspired items, too. And the serving pieces by Beatriz Ball and Michael Aram are so elegant and are the perfect gift for many occasions!

QB: *Little Shop has been a big part of your life. When you look back one day, what will be your fondest memory?*

AH: Working with my mom is my favorite memory. And I have to say working with everyone who ever worked at the shop has been a gift. These women I can count as my very dear friends and we will always stay in touch. Same with the customers. I love to see them walk through that front door! I’ve also learned so much—running a business, the printing process, purchasing inventory. One memory would be at our 25th anniversary party! My mom “holding court” sipping wine and customers from all of our 25 years coming in to toast our long-term success! I can only hope that our 30th anniversary celebration will be just as joyous!

Little Shop of Papers is located at 118 W. Main St. in downtown Barrington. Stop by or call 847-382-7733. U

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