

To the FTC - workshop on trade restrictions 10/07/02 to "ecompetition@ftc.gov".
<http://www.ftc.gov/opp/ecommerce/anticompetitive/agenda.htm>

My husband and I own a burial vault business in the Cleveland, Ohio Area and have been operating on our own for six years now. We are the only African-American vault company in the State of Ohio at the present time. Greater Cleveland has approximately seventeen African-American funeral homes operating presently, and while doing business with them, approximately nine firms supported us throughout the years. Consequently we needed to add to the goods and services rendered and started offering vaults as well as caskets to the general public.

I am a former funeral director and embalmer with sixteen years experience and can honestly say I was enraged to discover the mark-up on merchandise across the board in the funeral industry.

When a casket store opened five years ago, we were approached about supplying vaults and we decided to try it. We viewed those accounts as we did the funeral homes, however some funeral directors did not. They held meetings to discuss "boycotting" our business if we did not STOP! They not only wanted us to stop supplying the stores, but they wanted us to stop selling directly to our friends who had been buying vaults direct since my husband's parents owned their vault business twenty seven years prior. (Both locally and across the state lines).

We were told by several funeral directors that: "If we stopped, they would continue doing business, if not, they would withdraw." Needless to say, the so called "boycott" was on, but not all of our supporters agreed and we continue to supply the casket stores, other independent retailers , some funeral homes, and the general public.

Our business suffered, but we were determined not to be controlled by the funeral directors in this town. Some are greedy, ruthless and have taken advantage of the consumer long enough. America is based upon "FREE ENTERPRISE" and they should no longer be allowed to use methods of intimidation and lies to try to maintain control of an industry that has clearly taken a different path in this new age of direct selling and buying -- both on the internet and locally, which is eliminating the "MIDDLEMAN". They can no longer sit and wait for a customer to walk in their doors to be taken advantage of! The general public has become more aware and are gaining knowledge daily about their rights as consumers - even in their darkest hour of bereavement. The mystery is fading and the silence has been broken - THE WORD IS OUT! We can buy what we want, where we want and the funeral home can't do a thing about it!

We have been affected by their attitudes and frankly expected everything that has happened -- but we will continue to fight for our rights as well as the rights of our people. We petition you today to take a close look at the methods used by the funeral homes to try to stop what is suppose to be something we as Americans should be able to identify with "FREE ENTERPRISE" -- The AMERICAN WAY?

Thank you, Junora L. Grant of Grant Enterprises, Inc.
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