

Topic: Fuller Brush Man

The Many Faces of Sales
by Liz Gibbons

One spring day when I was probably five or six I was playing outside and saw a man walking down the street with a big box balanced on his shoulder and yelling over and over again, "Strawberries. Get your fresh strawberries here. Fresh strawberries for sale." That surprised me. I wondered where he came from, and where he got the strawberries. Up to this point in my life I had only been aware of people buying items in stores.

Thus began my introduction to other home sales. Vacuum cleaner sales people sometimes appeared at our door and the Fuller Brush Man. My Mom bought a few brushes and other items from him, but she was not a big customer. The Curtis Company had young people create routes to sell the weekly Saturday Evening Post, so they were another sales person we encountered at our front door.

Then when I was married I was introduced to a new type of selling: home parties. Amway, Tupperware, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Discovery Toys. I tried my hand at all of these. I was not a very good sales person. I did develop some Mary Kay customers and a small down line. I attended one of their conventions in Dallas led by the remarkable namesake for the products. All of these companies had good products, so I could eventually use most of my demonstration products.

When we lived in Colorado Springs a friend knew a woman who was selling Aloe Vera cosmetics. The company had a local distribution center and was looking for a branch manager. She asked my friend if she knew anyone for the job. She suggested me. Now, don't let the idea of a distribution center mislead you. This was a small operation; actually, a **very** small operation. Anyway, I got the job. The distribution center was a place where the sales people picked up products for their customers. I had to order the product to keep the shelves stocked, send in a daily sales report, lead monthly sale meetings and attend a branch managers meeting in Dallas once a month. At the monthly sale meeting I recognized the leading sellers, and always gave a talk on something related to selling. What a hoot. Someone who was not very good at sales encouraging others in sales. This was a job I liked. It suited my personality better. It had variety and yet stretched me a bit, and I got to chat with the sales people, mostly other women, when they stopped in regularly.

So you would have thought I had learned my lesson about sales. But when we moved to Atlanta in 1983 I sold Encyclopedia Britannica for awhile. The company gave us leads. Occasionally I was the top salesperson of the week. I think the others went on vacation those weeks.

Now much selling is done over the internet with Amazon being the biggest. I have very mixed feelings about Amazon. It is convenient. But it also, like Wal-Mart, has caused the demise of many small stores. So if I can, I buy products I need from other sources, even if it costs a bit more or is a slight inconvenience, as I choose to support those other businesses. I read a comment about twelve years ago that has always stuck with me. Watch out, some day Amazon will have such a monopoly on book sales that they will start banning some books. Sadly, that time has come.

