

Ding-Dong! Avon Calling!

By Marilyn Reeves

My father owned a store in Salida called Tuttle's Trading Post. When I was around 11, he wanted me to start waiting on customers. Not just ring up their purchases, but follow them around, pointing out various souvenirs and knickknacks, rather than just allowing them to browse around the counters on their own. This sort of thing came easily for my dad, but I would rather have died a thousand deaths than walk up to a group of adults and ask them what they'd like for me to show them. I felt extremely awkward and ridiculous, knowing no one wanted to be waited on by a kid! At least they didn't linger long. I wonder how many dollars' worth of sales I managed to scare away, trying to 'sell' people something they really didn't want. I guess Dad was hoping I would learn a new skill. All I learned from that experience was that I never wanted to sell anything to anybody, ever! Or so I thought.

But during the summer of 1978, while my son and I were living with my second husband Gil in the Dallas suburb of Garland, Texas, I decided to try selling Avon. I'm not sure what insanity brought me to this decision. I must have forgotten that I was never any good at selling anything.

While I was married to Gil I really didn't need to work, but I must have felt bored staying home 'playing housewife' as I had always worked outside the home before. I didn't really want to go back to office work and I hadn't yet been introduced to my future career as a typesetter. I must have been thumbing through one of the Avon catalogs, looking at all the lovely variety of lotions and potions, makeup and lipsticks ... as well as an impressive collection of other merchandise: jewelry and perfume bottles and pretty knickknacks. I must have told myself that selling Avon would be easy. After all, Avon was so popular it virtually sold itself!

So, I signed up to become an Avon representative and placed an order for a variety of products to have on hand for quick sales. As it turned out, I couldn't stand the cloying, sweet smell of their colognes and bath products, but I figured other people must like them. I also ordered a few items just for me. My greatest indulgence was a set of garnet-red cut glass bottles and bric-a-brac, which I still display in my home to this day.

Then I set out a couple of times a week and started knocking on doors. If someone answered, I introduced myself as the new Avon Lady and left a catalog with my number in her hands. If not, I left one inside the screen door and then went back home to wait for the orders to come pouring in. But that never happened. I never sold a single thing! And my ill-conceived attempt at selling Avon put me significantly in the red.

But those red cut-glass items still sit on top of my piano. They're a constant reminder that I was never cut out to sell anything – even things that were supposed to sell themselves!