

## *The Second Time Around*

When I saw her on the cover of *Newsweek*, it was love at first sight. She was ten feet wide, ten feet tall and looked like a Martian vessel from a 1950s B-movie. Her name was Satellite Dish. She was going to be the Next Big Thing. With a Satellite TV Dish one could get every television station on Earth, including HBO, Cinemax and Showtime. Forever. All for a one-time purchase price.

I decided to *sell* satellite dishes. And sell lots of them. Soon my chain of electronics stores was the largest dish retailer in Dallas/Fort Worth. I bought a giant house on a hill, five custom automobiles, and a hefty wedding ring for my wife.

Then, on November 1, 1985, a bill sailed through Congress, permitting the premium cable channels, like HBO, to scramble their signals.

No more free HBO for the price of a satellite dish.

You might say that life went downhill pretty briskly after that. One morning I showed up at work to find chains and padlocks around my store's door handles. The house on the hill, the furniture, and the custom cars were the next things to go. If they'd spotted my wife's wedding ring, they would have grabbed that, too.

My wife and I quickly found ourselves living in a trailer home on a remote dirt road somewhere near the Arkansas border. From a mansion to a trailer home, literally overnight.

The first night in our new home I found my wife standing in our empty living home, sobbing uncontrollably. I put my arm around her and made her this promise: "Give me two years. I'll buy you the new home of your dreams." She just kept crying, as if I hadn't said a word. I've never felt so small in my life.

A year later, my downhill slide had become an avalanche. I was two months behind on the trailer home payments. Do you know the difference between a \$2400-a-month house payment and a \$400-a-month house payment? There *is* none, if you don't have the four hundred bucks. I needed to come up with \$800, pronto, or they were going to repossess my miserable little trailer home. What was next? Living in a pup tent?

My wife tried to be supportive but I could see the terror hiding behind her eyes.

At this time I had a couple of buddies in Dallas. They were hounding me to join some Network Marketing thing. I wasn't interested. No way. I believed that all network marketing was the same. It either didn't work or it didn't last.

But these guys were relentless. They kept calling. Every few days. I had to give them points for persistence. One day I was on the phone with them for maybe the hundredth time. As I cheerfully ignored what they were saying, I opened the letter that changed my life. It was THE letter from the bank; you know, the we're-coming-to-get-your-house-on-the-tenth letter.

That letter cured my resistance instantly! "What time is the meeting?" I said.

When the guy at the meeting held up the product we'd be selling, I nearly burst out laughing. Or crying. It was a piece of PVC pipe about a foot long and filled with granulated charcoal. "It's a water filter," he explained. "It takes the chlorine out of drinking water." Terrific. Except there was no chlorine within a hundred miles of my trailer. Everyone had a well or drank from the creek.

I was about to storm out the door when the guy said something about free advertising. Having spent millions on TV and radio spots, that got my attention. "Ralph Nader has been scaring the country to death about tap water," he told us. "It's on the cover of every magazine in America. You don't need to be a salesperson; you just need to tell people you have water filters." Hmm.

When I got home, I announced to my wife, "I found it, Sweetheart. Something I know I can sell. There's only one *tiny* problem. I need to spend \$5000 on water filters."

She looked me in the eye. "Tell me honestly, Earl," she said. "Do you have another good run left in you?"

I told her that I did; I *knew* I did.

"Then give me your hand."

I did. When I opened it up, I found her wedding ring.

I couldn't speak; I knew my voice would crack. But I swore to myself, in that moment, that I was going to sell more water filters than Planters sells peanuts or I was going to die trying.

A few days later, our tiny home was stuffed from floor to ceiling with boxes of water filters, financed with my wife's wedding ring.

A few *weeks* later, I received the largest first month's payment check the filter company had ever written.

A few *months* later, I made good on my promise to buy my wife a new home. I even beat my deadline by half a year. Today we have everything we've ever dreamed of. But nothing will ever compare to the feeling I got the day I strode into a Texas jewelry shop and lay a thick wad of cash on the counter.

The look in my wife's eyes when I gave her a new wedding ring – twice the size of her old ring - was one that no one can take away from me as long as I live. Some things really are better the second time around.

Earl Shaw

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