

Resonate

by Craig Lancaster

In September of that year, our neighbor Wayne had this idea that he could get rich by selling groceries Amway-style, and he booted his 12-year-old boy out of his own bedroom and put up shelves loaded with packages of spaghetti, cans of roast beef, soda pop by the case and other non-perishable goods.

Soon after, Wayne came over to our house and gave my folks the pitch, showed them how, if they just signed up a few friends and those friends signed up a few friends, and so on, they could make as much as \$10 million a month, all by making a little bit on every transaction.

"Everybody needs groceries," Wayne said, mopping sweat off the folds of blubber on his neck. "It's the perfect plan."

My pop liked Wayne, liked going out with him occasionally and tossing back a few beers, and he paid the \$10 membership fee and accepted the tabbed folder that contained the list of goods and prices, as well as several pages of helpful hints for enrolling friends in the program.

"We'll see what we can do with it, Wayne," Pop said, showing him to the door. "It's an interesting idea you have here."

The old man had said something similar a few times before. We still had a shed full of cleaning chemicals that Wayne had foisted on Pop in an earlier scheme. The stuff was supposed to get rid of deep grime on contact, and sure enough, it performed as advertised. It also ate a hole in our carpet. Pop put the stuff in the storage shed because, I think, he didn't quite know how to dispose of it, and he didn't want to hurt Wayne's feelings. A similar sensibility had driven him to sneak out of the house one night and open the door to the pigeon coop Wayne had insisted he build. The next morning, the flock had flown away, and Pop went across the street and told Wayne that they wouldn't be making that killing on squab.

"You're a soft touch, Leonard," Mom scolded him, and Pop mumbled something about how it didn't hurt anything. Mom often

said that the old man “enabled” Wayne's irresponsible behavior; most of Mom's vocabulary came from the self-help books she consumed with the fervor of the newly touched religious. Anyway, that idea never seemed to resonate with Pop.

Mom thumbed through folder. “This isn't going to work, you know.”

“Why not?” Pop asked. “Seems like a decent idea. Like Wayne said, everybody needs groceries.”

“Yeah, but look at this.” Mom thrust the folder at him. “Now just look at that: Cheer laundry detergent for \$2.49. I can get it for a dollar less down at Skaggs. And \$1.50 for a two-liter bottle of Coke? I got it for 99 cents yesterday!”

It went on like that for another half hour or so. After the first few broadsides by Mom against Wayne's plan, Pop just looked for an escape. He tuned in to the Texas Rangers game on the radio, while Mom sat at the kitchen table and lingered over the list of products and prices. Their interplay was a series of exclamations in one room and knob adjustments in the other.

“Two-ninety-nine for Sanka!”

Pop turned up the volume on the radio.

“A buck eighty nine for Doritos!”

Pop flipped over to Bill Mack on WBAP.

“A dollar ten for a can of tuna!”

The old man turned off the radio and went outside.

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“Rangers lost,” I said. I held open a lawn bag so Pop could scoop a load of early fallen leaves into it.

“Figures,” he said.

I shook the bag to settle the leaves and then tied off the top. Pop fished his smokes from his front pocket and lit up.

“I guess Wayne's idea has a few flaws,” I said.

“Guess so.” Dad exhaled a string of smoke from the side of his mouth, upwind of me.

“You know, he kicked Ethan out of his own bedroom so he could put food in there.”

Dad didn't say anything, but I could see his jaws clench. He was chewing on something that was giving him trouble. Whatever it was, I knew I'd never hear about it.

"Men sometimes lose their way, Jon."

He crushed the cigarette into the brick of the house, behind the hedge where no one would see the mark.

"Come on," he said. "It's getting late."

