

In November I had the wonderful opportunity to spend eight days in “the land of eternal spring”, Guatemala. After traveling to St. Louis for LFA and then down to Nebraska for Hartman’s and taking care of all the farm details to get ready for winter, I was ready for a vacation!

We flew into the modern metropolis of Guatemala City and the next day entered the past in the historic, fascinating town of Antigua, right in the heart of jade mining country. The minute our group stepped off the bus to check into our hotel we were bombarded by street vendors whose arms were laden with jade necklaces. There were women and children of various ages giving us such sales pitches as: “I give you good price, Madame. What you want to pay, you tell me what you want to pay. My mother made this one.” Our guide told us to be sure and bargain as they expected this and that we could always do much better than their initial asking price. As the dickering process began and the prices flew back and forth the final price was never the desired one for the vendors but their answer was always, “Ok, lady, business is business,” and money and goods would change hands.

Once you had bought something, they would follow you down the streets and race around the block to meet you again, always offering the best deal and the best products. They were persistent.

In the market place our guide suggested that if the stall vendors didn’t meet your price just to walk away and wait. I negotiated pretty hard on some T-shirts with some young guys and eventually left the market with my group. After walking a couple of blocks away, one of them came running with my T-shirts in a bag and he was ready to make a deal. Business is business he said as he handed me the bag and I forked over the cash.

In the upscale shops of the jade factories, the jade necklaces were not hanging off the sales girl’s arms but were displayed nicely in

cases and there was no negotiating the price. Where was the fun in that?

In the small, isolated village of Santiago Atitlan, which had been hit by the mud slides caused by “Stan”, the street vendors were many, persistent and persuasive. “Good price for you,” was the start of negotiations. Ranging in age from seven or eight to eighty, these hard working people were trained early. They knew how to sell! In the near by town of Panahachel where the vendors had steady business on weekends and more tourists, the negotiations were less spirited and often the vendors didn’t even get up to chat unless you looked pretty interested in something. There were though, the street groups that followed you with their sales pitches. Succumbing to sales pressure, fun and the desire to support real effort, I bought a few items from two boys that had been following us. The third was so disappointed that I had bought from his friends but not him that he followed me for half an hour hoping I would change my mind. “ Misses, you didn’t buy nothing from me!” Well, he only had two items to sell! One was a rather interesting journal type book with hand made paper pages and the other was a very nice table runner, that “his mother made.” He didn’t have much variety of stock to choose from and I wasn’t in the market for either of his products. Luckily for him, and my conscience, another gal bought his book and we all seemed satisfied.

What was the difference in all these vendors? From the upscale jade shops, to the colorful stalls, to the street sellers covered in their products, they all had something to sell but their approach was entirely different. In all honesty, as our small boat pulled out of Santiago Atitlan, a break from the loud chatter and persistent offers was a relief but as we wandered the street stalls of Panahachel I found myself wondering why the stall vendors weren’t working as hard to get my business. They certainly weren’t as motivated to sell and I didn’t buy.

I began to compare these selling styles with the marketing of our llamas. How motivated are we to sell and create a brisk market? Are we in the “look but don’t touch and this is the only price mode” or are we willing to bargain if the prospective buyer is really, really interested or are we out there hustling and moving and shaking and making the market come to us?

I have a dear friend and partner on a few llamas who is always complaining that he doesn’t sell any llamas. I have asked him what he has done to attract people to his farm and he said nothing. I suggested an ad in the local paper, our national bulletin, an open house in the spring and trying to get out to some shows now and then. People need to know what you have and the chance of them wandering into your “shop” to look around is pretty slim in the size of the countries we live in.

High profile sales can perhaps be compared to the colorful vendor stalls where product is displayed and available for sale and these are excellent marketing opportunities but limited. If we want to get llamas into the hands of buyers they sometimes they need to be hanging off our arms! They need to be out where prospective buyers can see what we have for sale and perhaps we need to be skilled negotiators to make a sale happen because as you know: Business is Business! Let’s get chasing the llama business!

Epilogue: I bought 15 jade necklaces, from my street friends, 3 jade pendants, very beautiful, from a stall vendor and 2, very unique, jade piece key chains from the jade factory shop. I love all my different purchases and all my friends and family that received necklaces were thrilled, especially my nephew, Jade!

We also spent two days in Penetin area where Survivor was filmed at Yaxha and Tikal. Our guide had been the head Guatemalan hired for the show and had 100 Guatemalans working under him to set up the camps, routes and games. He had been working in Tikal since he was eight selling water to the archeologists and he was so

much fun (and did I mention so cute?) He took us to the canopy zip line that the contestants for the show had to do and yes, even I the prairiephyte, took the leap of chance and faith and sailed through the tops of the rain forest on a cable!

Sometimes taking that leap or that chance is what can make all the difference for the quality of our lives. It is like that in our businesses as well. Take a chance, make it happen, go hang some llamas on your arms and now and then take a chance and pick some off the arms of the other guy too!