



Susan Smith, Fish Window Cleaning

At age 54, my husband, Doug Smith, was downsized and faced the realization that not too many employers were interested in someone in his age bracket. What seemed like a stressful, negative time in our lives, turned out to be a "blessing in disguise." We were forced to look at alternatives to being "employed" and instead, become the employer. After much research, Doug investigated a franchise opportunity that "fit" our lifestyle and income needs. We purchased Fish Window Cleaning in the spring of 2002 and were the first Fish franchise in Michigan and this far north in the US. It is exciting to look back and see how we "paved the way" for many more to follow in Michigan.

Although I wasn't looking for additional work, I agreed to help Doug get the business started by agreeing to do sales for the first year. When I think back to what "inspired me" it really was to help Doug be successful and find his "niche." He truly loved the business from the very beginning! He was a great manager, bookkeeper and a fair and honest man to work for. I love people and found it easy to offer businesses a free estimate for window cleaning. We had no bench mark to go by as we were one of the few "small market" franchises within the Fish network. We just worked diligently to succeed and offer great service, regularly, to businesses in and around Traverse City.

We were rewarded at the end of that first year by winning "Franchise of the Year" in the small market category. We also won an award for Top Producers the first four months in business. It was a wonderful time of success for us. We continued to work hard and grow the business by expanding into the surrounding areas of Suttons Bay, Kalkaska, Cadillac, Charlevoix, Petoskey and Gaylord. We have won the Franchise of the Year award each consecutive year.

I decided to write "our story" because a new chapter is being written with Doug's sudden death at age 59 in February of 2008. I want to encourage other women who could be in a situation like mine. I want them to know that even in the deepest loss we can reach down and find the strength to "continue" what has begun. I have a passion to keep the business strong and growing, so all our efforts together, were not in vain. I attended the Fish Window Cleaning Convention in July, alone, which in and of itself was very difficult. I was so proud to see us win the Franchise of the Year award for the 6th time and know Doug finished "on top." I have truly surprised myself with all that I have learned to do. I have made decisions that I never had to be part of until Doug was gone.

The business grew 17% this year and I think that is remarkable in our economy. I am committed to stay involved. I am learning more about the business each day. I want my staff to know they can count on me being actively involved. To keep the business strong I

have also made a decision to partner with another Fish franchisee out of Ohio that was a close, personal friend of Doug and mine. I know the areas where I am strong, but also recognize where I need direction. This new team should only help me grow the business to the next level and provide the income I need to be independent and prepare for the retirement years.

I love to network and learned a lot of skills as an ambassador at the Chamber. I appreciate the fact that I was one who was sent this letter from Mary to salute women in business. I hope I can inspire others to not give up in the most difficult of circumstances.