



*Success*

# TURNAROUND

Sam and Melba Washington rarely work an eight-hour day. As extraordinarily successful sales reps, they enjoy life to the max. Things weren't always this good. • By Carla Merrola

Sam and Melba Washington couldn't sleep nights back in 1991. Not only had their investments soured; they were costing the couple thousands of dollars a month. Their savings gone, the only way to keep collectors from the door was for them to pay their bills with credit cards. But making even the minimum payments on those cards became a struggle, and the banks cut them off. Forced to move from their 5,000-square-foot house in Bakersfield, Calif., to a tiny two-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles, they sold some of their furniture and put the rest in storage. "We were frustrated and worried, wondering what was going to happen to us," Sam recalls.

So when a network marketer walked into their lives and told them about a business opportunity, they figured they didn't have much to lose. Today, as distributors of nutrition products for Salt Lake City-based Shaperite Concepts, the Washingtons have an annual income well into the six digits, live in exclusive Bel Air, Calif., and work only about four hours each day.

## From Shattered Dreams . . .

When Sam and Melba married, in 1988, she was an airline employee with a young daughter, Nicole, from a previous marriage. Sam, an investor in the stock market, had four grown children. "I'd made some small real-estate investments, and I *knew* we were going to be millionaires," says Sam. "But that's not how things worked out." As the years passed and the California real-estate market dried up, they were unable to resell houses they'd bought and refurbished. Eventually their only income came from a small clothing-and-jewelry line Melba sold from their apartment. It was barely enough to pay for food and rent, let alone to save for Nicole's college education. "But we had faith,"

Melba says. "We knew something had to come along."

That something was someone: Odile Gayten, a woman who had seen Melba's merchandise and wanted to buy. Toward the end of January 1992, Melba brought samples to Gayten's home. The two got to chatting, and Gayten told Melba about the business she was in. "It was a little herb business," Melba says with a smile. "She showed me her bonus check, and I thought, That's a lot of money, and she's not working that hard. She was putting around her house, listening to symphony music, serving tea and little cookies, and talking about going out to lunch."

Desperate to lose the 50 pounds she'd gained eating out of frustration and anxiety, Melba took home a few of Gayten's Shaperite nutrition and weight-loss products. Two weeks later she was 14 pounds lighter and feeling terrific. Sam, seeing how well Melba was doing physically and Gayten was doing financially, didn't need much coaxing to get involved. Using the only credit card they had left, they ordered \$500 worth of products to sell: "Because of our belief in the product, we knew we could pay it back."

Up with the sun each morning, the couple didn't call it quits until 11 at night. "We used the three-foot rule," Melba says, "talking about the products to anybody who came within three feet of us." "We were up against the wall," Sam adds. "We had to make this work." So, slowly — talking to people anywhere they gathered, passing out samples, trading business cards, giving presentations — they retailed more and more products and built a downline of distributors on whose sales they made commissions.

From their first home "office" — a card table in the bedroom — they watched their money woes disappear. Their first bonus check, residual income from sales by distributors in their network-marketing organization, was \$1,204; their second, \$3,476;



Starting from opposite page: Melba and Sam in the top-floor office, where they conduct most of their business; architectural etchings in their home's main entry; the formal dining room, where the couple sometimes dine with Shaperite leaders; Sam and the Mercedes alongside the Spanish Mediterranean-style home; the master bedroom, with its scenic mountain and golf-course views; Sam, daughter Nicole, and Melba on the patio, in spring and summer the place for business lunches and presentations.

the third, \$5,273. "Add what we sold as retail" — 33 percent more than what they were selling wholesale to downline distributors — "and we were rolling," Sam says. About a year after they'd started their business and met their first goal of paying off all their balances, Melba said to Sam, "I want a house."

#### ... To the Good (Home and Work) Life

A guard waves the Washingtons through the gates of their private community, where houses start at around \$800,000. A half mile up the road, with a waterfall fountain in back and views of the Santa Monica Mountains all around, is the Washingtons' tri-level, contemporary residence. Framed by bursts of magenta and lavender from Melba's beloved flower garden, the house has a subdued color scheme indoors: much of it is platinum, the designation of the high level they've attained in Shaperite, having sponsored at least 20 salespeople who've reached executive level (making \$5,000 in sales, based on wholesale prices, within two consecutive months). The carpeting throughout their house, as well as the leather interior of her 500S-series Mercedes and his Toyota Land Cruiser, is platinum. The fabric of choice is silk — furniture, pillows, and a hundred yards of lush dining-room curtains alone. A shimmering rock-crystal chandelier crowns their dining room, and Waterford-crystal goblets, bowls, and vases of fresh flowers accent nearly every space — except for "Sam's Room," described below.

The oversize desk in the home's top-floor office is high-tech granite laminate with chrome borders; there are match-

#### TECH TOOLS IN TWO OFFICES

Sam has furnished the lower-level den with a leather sofa and a 52-inch wide-screen television, a Mitsubishi stereo system, and, outside, an 18-inch RCA satellite dish. In this room he, Melba, and members of their downline watch training broadcasts from Shaperite.

The couple's top-floor office houses Canon and Samsung fax machines, which they use mainly to communicate with their 8,000-plus downline of distributors, who sell about \$650,000 worth of products each month.

ing file cabinets and credenzas. Sam stocks and operates the volume center here, from which \$25,000 to \$30,000 worth of product is wholesaled monthly. Melba handles correspondence with their downline. She also coordinates retail-sales meetings and recruiting and training classes — held at their home, the community clubhouse, or a nearby Holiday Inn.

Workdays, once endless, have been whittled down to — well, here's how they describe a typical day:

"We rise at 8 or 8:30. We made a promise that when we became successful, we wouldn't get up early," Melba says.

"We open for business at 9," Sam chimes in.

"And we shut down at 4," Melba finishes.

But that doesn't mean they're working 9 to 4. Hardly, Melba says with a laugh. "We're out in the middle of the day, having lunch, browsing around for items for the house, or driving to the beach."

Adds Sam, "She likes the ocean, even when it's raining, to look at and listen to." They return to their office at 3 or 4.

For play there's the Bel Air community clubhouse, with its full gym, steam room, sauna, and swimming pool. But when it's time for serious R&R, the Washingtons are off to the California Riviera — Laguna Niguel, an hour's drive to the south — where they stay in the Ritz-Carlton's luxurious Crown Suite, overlooking the Pacific. Laguna Niguel is where they're planning to build another house, after their upcoming vacations to Italy, France, and the Black Sea.

Today Melba's daughter, Nicole, is a pre-med student at California State University, and her tuition bill is one her parents are happy to get. Though they would be happy to pay for medical school, too, they might not have to. A Shaperite distributor herself, Nicole, at 20, has risen to executive level in the company.

The real motivation behind Sam and Melba's efforts? "We have five children," they respond. "We want to support, help, and have fun with all of them. We want them to enjoy what we're enjoying and never have to worry. We want to leave a great legacy." 🏠

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