

Snake Oil

by Frederick Wickert

In the early days of our country, especially in the old west, were people who had a gift. They could talk to crowds of people, hold them spellbound, and sell them alleged miracle cures for just about everything. The "cure" was usually a mixture that consisted mostly of alcohol. It might have had a little molasses mixed with it, and even a little dollop of turpentine sometimes.

Crowds of people heard the dazzling spiel and were taken in by it. They were convinced and quickly parted with their hard earned money to buy the "magic elixir." The peddler soon left town with their money in his pocket. Not long after the peddler left town, the people came to realize they had been swindled and became angry enough to do the man severe bodily harm, had he still been around to get their hands on him.

The term "Snake Oil," became the common term used to describe their product, and the men who peddled it were called "Snake Oil Salesmen." There were others who fell into the same type category. They were sometimes called "Bible Thumpers," and they went from town to town preaching. They were gifted speakers and were able to make people believe anything.

Some of these people claimed to be faith healers. Often they had cohorts with them that pretended to be blind or crippled and they were miraculously healed before the crowds. In every one of these situations people were asked to contribute donations to further the healing work and for the bringing the word of the gospel. It was quite a lucrative operation.

P.T. Barnum, the founder of the Barnum & Bailey and later a merger to become the Ringling Brothers Circus, used to say, "There is a sucker born every minute." P.T. Barnum, of course, was a master at separating them from their money.

The practice continues to this day. The difference is that now the "Snake Oil" salesmen are the ones with the infomercials, selling all sorts of items and medicines and vitamins. They sell weight losing pills and cures for baldness and what have you.

The old time "Bible Thumpers" have been replaced by tent preaching traveling evangelists. Some are a little more legitimate and some are not.

After many generations, one should tend to think people had become a little wiser and know better. They are not.

As I watch the political scene unfold in our nations presidential race, I am appalled at the gullibility of our American people, and how the candidates and their teams take them in. Where did they leave their common sense? How did they allow themselves to be so dazzled against all common sense?

To illustrate what I am talking about, there have been some reporters attending the campaign rallies and going to places where caucuses and primaries are being held. They are approaching people everywhere, at random, and are asking them questions on camera.

They are first asked who they support for President. When they give their answer, they are asked why they are supporting that particular candidate. The answers dumfounded me. I have heard the following answers given:

Because he is good looking. Because he is for change. When asked what he is going to do to bring change, the answer usually is, "I don't know." Others have answered, She has experience. She will give us universal health care. He is going to give all school teachers more pay. He or she is going to get the troops out of Iraq. Because she is a woman. Because he is articulate and he knows how to talk to people. Because he is going to talk to our enemies. I'm voting for him against her. Because he has military experience. Because he is a war hero. Because I believe him. Because we need a woman president. Because we should have a black

president and that will stop racism. Because he is young. Because he is not as corrupt as some of the others. Please bear in mind that there are only two others.

When asked what each candidate stands for, most of the time they can't tell you. They don't know. That's right. THEY DON'T KNOW! How can they vote for someone without knowing what they stand for? How can they vote for someone without knowing what their record is?

It seems to me that in this election campaign, there is an awful lot of SNAKE OIL selling going on. After all that this nation has gone through, I had hoped that we learned something from it. Evidently we have not.

There is so little being discussed about the real problems facing this nation, what to do about those problems, an honest workable plan about how to do it, and just plain common sense, that it astonishes me the candidates can all get away with it. They should be talking about those things. Instead they are talking about who voted for what and what someone's middle name is or what brand of religion they practice. There is a whole lot of symbolism and darned little substance.

In spite of it all, people are getting more excited about this election than any in my memory, and I have seen a lot of them. It seems to me we are being sold a lot of "Snake Oil," and little else. It reminds me a little of Barnum & Bailey, and the Ringling Brothers. It has become a circus.