



A Big Life in Advertising

By Mary Wells Lawrence

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A Big Life in Advertising By Mary Wells Lawrence

One of advertising's all-time greats, Mary Wells Lawrence, shows us the American ad world from the 1950s through the 1980s in all its brilliance, excitement, fun and craziness.

She captures the thrill of being a young copywriter in the 1960s at Doyle Dane Bernbach, working for the dazzling, revolutionary Bill Bernbach ("There was something volcanic [about him] . . . a little like being in the company of Mao or Che or the young Fidel"); how he took on a car rental firm that barely existed, announced to the world it was Number Two and therefore it tried harder—and overnight made the unknown Avis second only to the mighty Hertz; how Bernbach's "Think Small" campaign made big car-obsessed America fall in love with the unlikely Volkswagen; how his Polaroid ads explained the mysterious instant camera to the public without saying a word.

She writes about leaving Doyle Dane Bernbach (for seven years her Heaven on earth) for a new ad company, and how she made it her own, producing the simple and unforgettable "Plop Plop Fizz Fizz" Alka-Seltzer commercial by getting rid of the cartoon tablet, Speedy, and creating a frothy, luminous commercial composed of nothing but two Alka-Seltzers dropping into a crystal glass of water; how she gave Braniff Airways brilliant visibility by painting its airplanes fresh, vivid colors—and then fell in love with and married the head of the company.

She writes about her campaign for the French tourist bureau and how she used a single image—a country man on a bicycle—that today is still the symbol of France's rural life . . . how she traveled the world for Betty Crocker's casserole dishes, how she brought theatricality and fantasy to TV advertising.

She tells how she started Wells Rich Greene and ran it like a movie studio. She writes about the clients and the campaigns . . . how she created a new line of cosmetics—Love—for a conservative drug company (it became one of the most successful cosmetics launches in history) . . . how she helped save American Motors from bankruptcy, redesigned its cars and put together an ad campaign that did the unthinkable—compared its unknown Javelin with Ford's beloved Mustang . . . how Midas was "Midasized". . . how, when thousands of Ford dealers had gone out of business, the Ford ads focused

not on Ford's cars but on the dedication of its workers, with the slogan "Quality is Job One"; how she made New York the place to be when it was seen as a sinking ship, with the slogan "I Love New York."

She writes about taking Wells Rich Greene public and how she became the first woman CEO of a company on the New York Stock Exchange . . . how she made a movie with the last of the Hollywood moguls, Jack Warner. She tells how she transformed a dilapidated, once-famous villa, La Fiorentina, at Cap Ferrat (a Nazi stronghold during the war) into a Mediterranean Eden, and writes about her battle with cancer. She talks about her refusal to globalize Wells Rich Greene and her decision, finally, to sell the company she'd built into the fastest-growing ad agency in history, and what happened to it afterward.

Here is the extraordinary story of how Mary Wells Lawrence lived her life in advertising—helped shape her profession, was shaped by it and left her mark on it.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A colorful mix of historical narrative, revealing personal memoir, and sassy industry tell-all, *A Big Life in Advertising* offers up Mary Wells Lawrence's bubbling take on life, love, and plugging products. Well, spills it into your lap, actually. Spanning four decades in the world of advertising and the life of one of its star players, *A Big Life* oozes with juicy details and insider revelations.

After an inspiring stint as one of the infamous Bill Bernbach's protégés, Lawrence really began her career at Jack Tinker & Partners, revolutionizing the images of such brands as Alka-Seltzer and Braniff Airways. But when denied the title of president, Lawrence "let loose the bear," as she puts it, and with the creative team of Stewart Greene and Dick Rich, set up shop as Wells Rich Greene. Over the course of the next quarter century, Lawrence and her cast of characters "made theatre out of the advertising business," giving brands like Benson & Hedges, American Motors, TWA, Midas, and Procter & Gamble's Gleem toothpaste their turn on the stage of stardom. While Lawrence's story is less about her agency's creative work and more about her impressions of and interactions with virtually everyone who was anyone in the advertising world of the '70s and '80s, she does include glimpses into her own childhood, life as a mother, and battles with cancer, adding a touch of reality to an otherwise glittering world. Some readers may feel Lawrence's opinion of her own beauty and charm plays too prominent a role in her reminiscing, but she was, after all, an adventurous queen bee in a glamorous world. Her chatty style of writing, and her ebullient enthusiasm for all she has experienced and accomplished, make this book read more like a novel than a memoir. It's an entertaining, fast-paced tale of a big star's big life. --S. Ketchum

From Publishers Weekly

When an autobiography's first sentence pays tribute to a memory of little black dance dresses that showed off the author's Norwegian legs, you know you're in for something grand. Lawrence doesn't disappoint, with this memoir about her rise in the advertising world of the 1960s, when a Volkswagen ad that cried "Think Small" was considered revolutionary. She writes first about working with the legendary Bill Bernbach at his agency, where she crafted well-regarded, theatrical Betty Crocker ads to sell the first instant casserole mixes, then describes starting her own agency with her mother as receptionist. One of the visionaries of 20th-century advertising, Lawrence was also a woman in a man's business world, and a youngster pitching bold ideas to fusty older corporate types. But her robust approach got noticed, and taglines like "I can't believe I ate the whole thing," "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz: oh, what a relief it is!" and especially "I love New York" still loom large in the public's memory. Her candor in describing her agency's failures and her own problems during the heady, mostly successful run of the company give the book weight and humanity, imparting some cautionary tales for those in the biz. However, it's Lawrence's generally upbeat tone that lingers past the last page. She delivers a beguiling look inside 30 years of the zippy, fast-moving ad culture and does so with the kind of witty, charming self-deprecation often seen in the ads she created. Photos.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

In the nineteen-sixties, the stiff, information-heavy ads of the previous decade were buried beneath a wave of hip, daring TV commercials and print campaigns as the Wasps who had ruled Madison Avenue gave way to a more diverse crowd of copywriters and art directors. Lawrence was the head of the ad agency Wells Rich Greene during this period, and her account is true to the spirit of that revolution: insouciant, ebullient, and, above all, stylish. She provides a behind-the-scenes look at some of the best ad campaigns she was involved in, including "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz," "Flick your Bic," and "I Love New York," and, along with descriptions

of day-to-day combat with clients and competitors, offers vivid sketches of life in the swinging sixties. The result is that most unusual of books—an entertaining business memoir.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dora Champagne:

The experience that you get from A Big Life in Advertising could be the more deep you excavating the information that hide into the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to understand but A Big Life in Advertising giving you buzz feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in particular way that can be understood by anyone who read it because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This kind of book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this specific A Big Life in Advertising instantly.

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Guadalupe McCoy:

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