

A BIG LIFE

(in advertising)

MARY
WELLS
LAWRENCE

 "Executive and compelling...book and forthcoming...You don't have to be in advertising to appreciate a big life in advertising."
—Suzet Elliott, *The New York Times Book Review*

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The first woman president of an advertising agency and the first woman CEO of a company on the New York Stock Exchange tells her "riveting story: How she shattered every glass ceiling and became a Madison Avenue legend."*

From her role as fledgling copywriter at Doyle Dane Bernbach -- the agency that made big-car-obsessed America fall in love with the funny little Volkswagen -- to her brilliant campaign for Braniff Airways that had the flying public scrambling for seats on wild-colored planes to founding the fastest-growing ad agency in history, Mary Wells Lawrence's life in advertising couldn't be any bigger. As *The New York Observer* put it, her agency, Wells Rich Greene, created ads that "etched indelible phrases into the public imaginations: 'Flick your Bic' and 'I Love New York!' and 'Plop plop, fizz fizz, oh what a relief it is.'"

For those thinking about a life in advertising for themselves and for anyone who enjoys being transported by a great storyteller's art, Mary Wells Lawrence is the most energetic, passionate guide to the world of American advertising in all its brilliance, excitement, fun and craziness

A Big Life In Advertising Details

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Jen says

Awesome book.

Aimeslee says

If you love watching Mad Men, you will LOVE reading this book. I am convinced Matthew Weiner read it. Seemed like every chapter had some scene or situation that had me thinking, this reminds me of a scene from Mad Men (I've seen every episode, most more than once. Please don't judge me, LOL.) And I also think Peggy Olsen might be based partially on Wells Lawrence. Also, a little of Don as well. This woman was the first female agency owner on the NYSE. She was a pioneer in every sense.

This is such a delicious read. Well-written and refreshingly candid, with more than a bit of name-dropping of Hollyweirders and Broadway Brats, jet setters, and various celebrities, the reader who can remember tv advertising in the 60's on will get inside dirt on how many of the famous ad campaigns came about. You know the folklore that Good Wife actress Julianna Margulies; dad created Plop plop fizz fizz oh what a relief it is? Well, her dad was working for Wells Lawrence.

Throughout, Wells Lawrence offers tons of great professional advice and models her talented skill set in example after example of how she succeeded in getting accounts, winning the business, keeping the client happy...and even the times she failed. I was just delightfully surprised at how interesting and enjoyable this book was. Highly recommended, especially if you love watching Mad Men.

Amy says

I would like to be her, although maybe a tad less pompous. But nevertheless it was a good read about a woman making things happen in a man's (ad) world.

Molly Sanchez says

A really funny, entertaining, and for the most part still relevant look at advertising. She's a pretty inspiring lady even if some of her hot tips include "sit clients next to the princess grace of Monaco" and "have a diverse agency, hire jews". Still, makes me want to be more creative.

Umar Ghumman says

A truly inspiring memoir.

Meg says

A hero for all women in the advertising industry.

Uwe Hook says

I love advertising, so I enjoyed Mary Wells Lawrence's account of some of the best TV ads were created. YouTube proved great way to see some of the classics I had missed or wanted to see again.

Nevertheless, this book is so messy it's hard to believe it came from a major publisher. It seems not to have had an editor's hand at all. Wells starts the book with her first major job in advertising, which is fine, but then suddenly jumps back to her childhood on page 166. We then get her early life until page 193, when we leap back into the advertising world we left on page 165. What?

And the book is an absolute torrent of names: at some points, it feels like Wells has dumped the Manhattan phone book into her text. Most of these people you never get to know and they are never referred to again. Others just disappear: Wells' famous agency is called Wells Rich Greene, but I'm unable to find any mention of Rich or Greene after page 124 (the book is 300 pages long) and I'm not sure what happened to either one of them. Did they die? quit? change their names? In fact, after slogging through all those other people I met just once in this book, I had to check the index to remind myself what Rich and Greene's first names were. (Dick and Stew, for the record.)

All in all, I enjoyed this book, but it reads like something from a vanity press. Wells needed an editor with a strong hand. Doesn't Simon and Schuster employ those people anymore?

Crissy says

Mary Wells certainly doesn't need a champion, but I feel strongly about recommending this memoir after reading several reviews that had nothing to do with the book itself. One of my pet peeves are reviews that critique the book or movie that the reviewer **wanted** or **expected** to read or see, rather than the one that they did.

Mary Wells Lawrence was one of the pioneers of advertising-as-we-know-it, and even if you abhor every single ad you've ever seen, read or heard, you should be glad that she and her compatriots, like Bill Bernbach and David Ogilvy, **were** the pioneers, or you would abhor ads even more.

During the **golden age of advertising,** roughly the late 1950s through the 1970s, agencies and agency personnel were considered the ultra-chic, witty, sophisticated and (INCREDIBLY) well-financed denizens of the business world. Wells became a celebrity and fashion icon, but most significantly, was the first female copywriter inducted into the Copywriters Hall of Fame, the first woman to be CEO of an advertising agency, and the first woman CEO of a company traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

Don't read this expecting a manual on how to juggle a Fortune 10 CEO job and still spend quality time with your children; how to maintain a loving, long-lasting bicoastal marriage with and without the Concorde; or even how to dress while having dinner with the President, attending the Oscars or dining and dancing at every jet set restaurant or club in New York. In summary, she loves her daughters, is devoted to her (now late) husband and has had an incredibly exciting social life.

She even glosses over the beginnings of her relationship with her future husband, Braniff CEO Harding Lawrence, as much as possible. It must have been a **huge** scandal at the time. He was her client at Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) while serving as VP of Continental Airlines, and was one of her first clients when she started Wells Rich Greene and he was Chairman and President of Braniff. They were, of course, both married to other people at the time. This is her life **in advertising** and the names she drops are virtually all business related.

By the 2/3rd point, you can tell that huge chunks of the original manuscript must have been edited out and not very thoughtfully. Wells does give an in-depth look at the beginning of her career and her rise through the agency ranks, and recounts the behind-the-scene tales of a few of her agency's most well-known accounts, including Braniff, Benson and Hedges and American Motors.

Other sections of the narrative aren't chronological, jumping from account to account and year to year quite rapidly. Whether this was intentional or the result of poor editing, the effect produced a disorientation not unlike the breathless pace of an advertising *creative shop.* Overall, it's a good read and a very rare woman's perspective on the advertising industry at a pivotal time in its history.

You can probably ignore detractors who accuse Wells of anti-feminism for not actively advocating employment equality. It's doubtful that she could have acted differently at the time and been as successful. Some women held influential administrative positions at agencies during this period, but only one other well-known female creative comes to mind, Edie Vaughn Stevenson, the legendary copywriter and executive at DDB. Vaughn actually interviewed Wells for the copywriting job that launched her career.

Other reviewers criticize Wells for neglecting her daughters in order to pursue her own ambitions. Again, this presupposes that she could have approached her career differently at the time and been as successful. Critics with both perspectives are quick to judge the book -- and Wells' choices -- based on parts of her life that aren't included, and were never intended to be included, in this particular memoir.

I highly recommend the book despite the poor editing. It's still a fascinating story for anyone interested in Wells, the experiences of powerful businesswomen or the history of modern advertising.

One note: Uncharacteristically, Wells includes a surprisingly long, detailed account of her **radiation treatments for breast cancer** late in her career. I have a couple of friends who've gone through cancer treatments, and they like the psychological accuracy and matter-of-fact description of her reaction to her diagnosis and subsequent treatment. Although she paints a bleak emotional picture of the experience, she has nothing but praise and admiration for the medical professionals that she encountered. Her treatment was successful and has given her time with her daughters and grandchildren during her retirement.

Diana180 says

This breezy memoir of life as a Mad Woman charts the industry's move from boutique "creative" shops to

global distribution houses, and has good insights for fading brands. Mary Wells and her team really did help furnish our minds in the '70s with among others Plop Plop Fizz Fizz, Quality is Job One, Midasize, and I - heart- New York.

Sara says

Read this a long time ago when I was considering an advertising career. Still not sorry I chose otherwise. Her life is interesting, but I think it would make me miserable.

Connie says

As many other reviewers have noted, the structure of the book is desultory and the tone is proud. Although Mary Wells could have reordered some of the chapters, she did a fine job of telling her story and advertising Wells Rich Greene.

The most powerful message I got from the book, however, is that love makes everything better: love your clients, love their products, having the word 'love' in the copy, elicit love from your customers, spread love, love your job, love your agency, and love yourself.

ba says

Mary Wells Lawrence's self-aggrandizing memoir is probably of interest to anyone who works in Advertising/Marketing and wonders about "the good old days".

Stacey says

I read this on my honeymoon as I laid by the pool. It seemed like a great book, but I may have been influenced by the Hawaiian scenery. :)

Jean says

not the most beautifully written, but a compelling and totally amazing story of a woman's journey to success in advertising. Mary is incredible. nothing like this could ever happen today.

Helene says

I aspire to be this person.

