



# A Big Life in Advertising

*Mary Wells Lawrence*

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## **A Big Life in Advertising** 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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