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# 'Mommy Millionaire' tells it like it is

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**Mommy Millionaire: How I Turned My Kitchen Table Idea Into a Million Dollars and How You Can, Too!** by Kim Lavine; St. Martin's Press, 339 pages, \$23.95.

By Kerry Hannon, Special for USA TODAY

Kim Lavine was a stay-at-home mom with two young boys looking for something clever to give to her kids' teachers for Christmas.

The way the story goes, her husband had been feeding deer in the backyard of their tree-lined suburban neighborhood. She saw a 50-pound bag of corn he left by her sewing machine and a light bulb went off in her head.

She had heard of rice in socks. Bigger grain, she figured, would hold heat or cold longer. She put the corn in a hastily sewn pillowcase and off she went.

You know the rest of the story if you've ever shelled out \$24.95 for a cuddly, 2-pound, fabric-covered pillow, filled with feed corn that can be stuck in a freezer or heated in a microwave to soothe aches and pains.

Lavine called her creation Wuvit, and an industry was born. She is the founder and president of Wuvit-maker Green Daisy.

Just reading about her fight to grow her business in *Mommy Millionaire: How I Turned My Kitchen Table Idea into a Million Dollars and How You Can, Too!* is trying yet strangely exhilarating.

Her whirlwind story: In 2000, Lavine, a Grand Haven, Mich., mother of Dylan, 4, and Ryan, 2, made her first Wuvits.

Within two years, she was peddling her pillows in shopping mall kiosks — making more than \$225,000 in about eight weeks. By early 2004, she was shipping Wuvits to Saks stores around the country.

Lavine traces the first six years of Green Daisy, now a multimillion-dollar business. Her book is loaded with resources for a fledgling businessperson — woman or man — armed with a good idea and boundless energy.

She veers from her own story to offer practical information and resource boxes with Web addresses and toll-free numbers.

Her story hits the age-old themes of stick-to-itiveness, grit and the value of believing in yourself and your business concept.

She learns from her rejections and mistakes and keeps plowing forward persistently — using personal credit cards to fund her business, narrowly escaping bankruptcy, taking \$100,000 out of a 401(k) plan and other financial crises.

Lavine guides you through her process of securing a trademark, landing a patent, registering a domain name and writing a business plan with the help of free resources available online.

For example, the Women's Business Development Center, the Service Corps of Retired Executives and the Small Business Administration offer free business-plan templates on their websites.

She tells how to establish business credit and raise capital, including small-business loans and (the perhaps less-advisable) home equity loans.

"For an entrepreneur, there is never a shortage of ideas, opportunities, work, or eventually even sales. The only thing that is in persistent critical shortage for the start-up entrepreneur is cash," she writes.

"Constantly dealing with a cash shortage at the beginning is not, I learned, a personal reflection of your inability to run a business; it's just a part of business!"

Lavine's naive insider view during her early business stages makes you smile and wince with her. She visits QVC headquarters in West Chester, Pa., where hundreds of hopeful inventors and entrepreneurs wait hours to present their products to its buyers.

You go along on her first stressed-out trade shows in Chicago and Atlanta as she learns to set up a booth, make a sale and not sample other vendors' free food and drink — that's for their buyers.

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Today, Green Daisy sells Wuvvits, as well as a line of whimsical pajamas and handbags, among other goods, through Saks, Bed Bath & Beyond and other major retailers.

But the reader should be prepared for some truly "icky" moments. For instance, under "Mommy Millionaire: The Rules":

"Accept the fact that SEX SELLS. God gave you enlarged mammary glands in exchange for your popping out multiple children in quick succession. Having bigger breasts is definitely an upside to being a mom. Push them up high ... and prepare to do battle."

Moreover, the fly in the ointment seems to be the promise of her story. She begins by stating that her book is "not just about how to become a millionaire, it's about how to become a millionaire while putting your family first." But she comes across as superbusy: meeting with buyers, sales representatives and potential angel investors; trying to get products on QVC; attending trade shows; wrangling with her manufacturer and so on. You are left wondering when her husband and children see her.

She recounts one embarrassing, and potentially dangerous, incident when she left her 2-year-old sleeping in the car while she met with an attorney, only to find her son screaming bloody murder because of a dirty diaper when she returned. "What the hell was wrong with me?" she asks.

And she's lucky her husband is laid off and able to pick up the slack at home and help with some of the financial dealings.

One can only hope that now that her business has moved to its second stage of growth, she's finally enjoying her dream of "seeing my children's smiling faces throughout the workday" — one of the "perks of being a Mommy Millionaire."

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