

Mary Anne Brown: She helps others find fulfillment

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PROFILE

Mary Anne Brown grew up on her parents Tonie and Jerry Ripp's large dairy farm with nine brothers and one sister. Her brothers still run the farm along with her parents, who are semi-retired. Most of the family still lives within a three-mile radius, so there continues to be a lot of interaction.

"I'm very proud of my family. I grew up in Dane, Wisconsin, on a dairy farm, where I milked cows, harvested tobacco, bailed hay and did all of the good physical farm work. At the time it seemed difficult, but now I realize that's where I got my strong work ethic," she said.

Brown's work ethic served her in other areas as well. After graduating from Waunakee High School she went on to MATC to study computer information systems and currently works as an internet project manager. And, most recently, she has become a self-published author of a book titled "Rise Above," a 300-page volume that encourages the reader to develop "down-to-earth thinking" and life-enrichment.

The book has arresting cover art designed by one of Brown's three children, and is available in CD-listening format as well as print.

Brown's work writing technical manuals for computer use served her well for being easily understood by readers in her own book.

"I've always been told that my communicating skill

through writing was very clear, and that I had a knack for it. About 15 years ago, I signed up for a correspondence writing course," she said.

The correspondence course and other life events and wishes triggered the culmination of Brown's new role as a writer. In her group of friends, she became known as the go-to person for giving clear, concise advice for life issues.

"I found I had a gift for writing advice – I could put things down more clearly in writing than in verbal exchange," she said.

Eventually, Brown's urge to write began waking her at night.

"Suddenly I was waking up at night and writing things down. I would be thinking about how to help people with problems they'd discussed and would want to write about it. Soon, I quit fighting the wakefulness, went to the computer to write, and it just flowed so fast that I could hardly keep up," she said.

Time and again, Brown woke at night and wrote for hours – sometimes her children would rise in the morning for school to see their mother still writing. Instead of feeling tired from her efforts, she felt energized and refreshed – finding that problems of the day ceased to bother her as much.

"I felt grounded when



Mary Anne Brown will do a book-signing at the Farm Toy Show at Waunakee High School April 10. Part of the proceeds will go toward the new FFA greenhouse building. (Photo by Gay Strandemo)

writing," she said.

When her writing began to accumulate, Brown started to organize it into chapters.

"I started separating topics and asking myself, which were the most common everyday problems? I found I had 300 pages of material. I thought, is this what people are getting hit with all day long? No wonder we're so miserable," she said.

At this moment, Brown realized she had enough material for a book and proceeded to write it. The finished product includes more than 50 topics of things that

Brown says holds people back from attaining what they want from life.

"I wanted to help people deal with the things that were impacting them in a negative way—and quickly. Once the obstacles are overcome, it's easier to have the kind of life you'd like to be living," she said.

Brown explains that the first part of her book is concerned with overcoming issues, and that as the reader gets further in, the chapters are more focused on developing the ways and means to achieve the life desired.

"People often turn away from the term, 'self-help' and I prefer to say my book is about life-enrichment. I think people can have their dreams and not just settle for the everyday rut, but instead make something bigger and grander than the usual routine," she said.

Brown emphasizes that small tweaks of change can add up to major life improvement.

"Step one does not have to be dramatic," she said.

Mary Anne intends to keep writing. She is three-quarters of the way towards writing an all-ages picture book, and has begun work on the next of the "Rise Above" series, this one going into "some harder topics." She self-publishes her material to keep costs down, which contributes more money to her passion – enabling non-profit agencies and local businesses.

"I have a strong desire to help non-profit organizations and community businesses. By self-publishing I can control costs and share my profits by donating to these places," she said.

Mary Anne is selling her book to about 50 small retailers, and uses a local printer and a Madison CD manufacturer for her product.

"I really like to keep everything local – as much in Wisconsin as possible," she said. "I let the retailers who carry my book decide the local non-profit organization that they'd like me to donate to, as a result of their purchases."

Brown encourages others

to join her in being aware of and helping local businesses and non-profit organizations. For her own part, Brown favors charities that help children and non-profit agencies that foster interest and work in agriculture—the latter being a nod to her roots.

"Growing up on a farm builds strength and character. You learn all about working together. The farming industry is so important to our state," she said.

In one section of Mary Anne Brown's book she tells the reader to leave the baggage from the past behind, because she firmly believes that each new year can top the previous.

"A lot of people complain about getting older and take a negative view of a birthday, but I always believe that the next year is bound to be the best of my life. Think about it – you know so much more from what you've learned every year, and you then appreciate more because of that," she said.

For Brown, every year she is blessed with is an opportunity for fulfillment.

"You are meant to grow and learn your entire life." Mary Anne Brown will be selling and signing her book "Rise Above" (suggested for ages 13 and up) at the Farm Toy Show at Waunakee High School on April 10.

Part of the proceeds will go to build a new FFA greenhouse for the school. For this and other information, go to anniepress.com.