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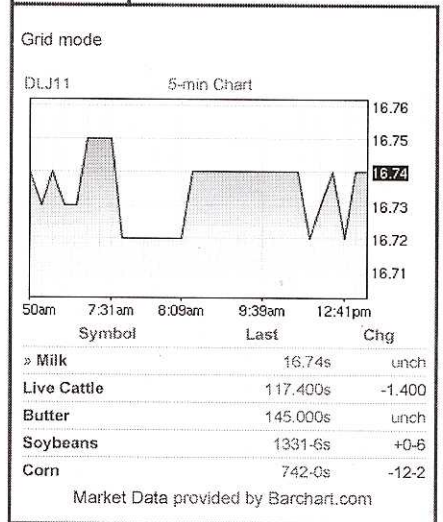
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By Jan Shepel | April 14, 2011 | 0 comments

WAUNAKEE

When Mary Anne Brown sat at a booth at the Waunakee Farm Toy Show on Sunday (April 10), she saw lots of familiar faces. She grew up in nearby Dane on a dairy farm and graduated from Waunakee High School.

Brown, formerly Ripp, was at the show to share her ideas on life enrichment – thoughts she put together over the course of several years as they helped her get herself through tough times. There are so many things people do that stand in their way of being more successful and happier people, she said.

"I grew up milking cows and working in tobacco, baling hay and I still believe that that upbringing gave me a foundation for everything I've done," she said. "It gave me a work ethic that has been with me ever since."

With her parents' permission, she started working off the farm while she was in high school – she had nine brothers and a sister still at home to help with chores – and later went off to college where she studied computer information systems, a field she still works in. "I've always been told through my years of technical writing that I had a good way of putting things together and expressing myself in writing," she said.

Friends and colleagues also praised her concise, helpful advice on personal topics. Brown says she began writing things down, sometimes waking up in the middle of the night to write because her mind kept working on ideas as she slept. As this stream of writing continued, she began to organize the thoughts into what turned out to be chapters.

Though she didn't set out to write a book, she realized she had enough material for one – 300 pages of material – and decided to look into getting it published. She recently self-published Rise Above the Sh**, Down-to-Earth Thinking From Wisconsin.

Brown said she doesn't think she could make herself write on command, but writes when the spirit moves her and when inspiration strikes. She has done a lot of work writing technical manuals for computer users and took a correspondence course for writing a number of years back. This writing was different – she was sharing things that she thinks will help people live a better life.

In her book, she said, she gives advice that gets at the root of things that work against people's fulfillment in life. Brown said she doesn't really like the term "self-help" and prefers to think of her writings as "life enrichment." She said she wants her readers to find ways to make their lives better by dealing with the things that get in their way.

She encourages people to be less negative, make small commitments and make better choices as a first step to achieving things they want to do in life. Any little improvement will pay dividends in a better outlook, she adds.

Gaining confidence and making better choices will move people to a more positive life, she believes. "Work on removing one bad habit, one negative person, one negative influence in your environment or one choice that doesn't make you feel good and just take a moment to notice how much better you feel about yourself," she advises.

Early chapters in the book deal with things people need to overcome to get to a better place. Later chapters lead the reader to focus on things they can do to make their life what they want it to be.

Once the book was written, Brown did research on the publishing business and found that she would be able to achieve another of her own goals if she published it herself. That would keep the costs down and allow her to donate some of the profits from her sales to charities she believes in.

Part of the proceeds of her book sales Sunday went to the Waunakee FFA chapter's fundraising program. The chapter is raising money to build a new greenhouse at the school to replace a small, outdated greenhouse. It was the 25th year the FFA alumni in Waunakee held the farm toy show.

She also recently attended the Lodi FFA farm toy show and others in Ripon and Reedsburg. At Waunakee she also had new copies of the book on CD as some of her friends requested an audio version, preferring to listen to it in the tractor or truck.

Brown, who signed books at the toy show, said she loves the idea of helping people through her book and also being able to share the profits with local businesses and events, as well as donating a portion to worthwhile causes she believes in, like FFA.

The experience of producing the book and the personal journey of publishing it and selling it reinforced in Brown an idea that she has believed for a long time, "When you give you get much more back in return," she said.

As she advises in her book, she is thinking big. Her dream is to raise \$1 million for charity while making the world a better place.

She said she doesn't enjoy the salesmanship involved in getting her book out there, but already has over 1,000 books distributed in about 50 locations, mostly through word-of-mouth. She does enjoy visiting with folks like those who stopped by to chat at the recent toy shows.

For more information, visit her website at www.AnniePress.com or contact her at MaryAnne@AnniePress.com.