

Karen Smith, below left, with her knife sharpener. Right, Julie Winston sells camp packages.



## Consider the humble toilet brush—the brainchild of Dorothy Rogers

mined to make a go of it. And she made every demonstration a theatrical event. "When I finished sharpening a knife, I'd slice a circle out of a sheet of paper or shave hairs cleanly off a man's arm. After that everyone was glad to pay."

Today Karen makes about \$2,000 a month on her sharpening service. In addition, she sells her sharpening wheels for \$29.95 and expects to open franchises nationwide in the near future.

Karen's low-key approach to business is in direct contrast to the busi-

# Got a household problem? Find the solution and... Earn yourself BIG BUCKS!

## How four mothers each solved a nagging problem—and made a fortune

**T**weedy Prager of Springfield, New Jersey, had a problem. Her three-year-old twins needed glasses, but Mom couldn't find any they would wear. They were either too heavy, too big or just too old-fashioned.

So Tweedy took matters into her own hands and designed special glasses for the kids. To her great surprise, the idea caught on and a booming business called Spiffy Specs was born.

Mary Anne Jackson, a 35-year-old mother of two from Deerfield, Illinois, hated the idea of feeding her one-year-old daughter Katie

store-bought baby foods. "They had too many preservatives and too much sugar and salt," she says.

So Mary Anne cooked late into the night, making nutritious meals for little Katie. Her daughter loved them and Mary Anne's prepared children's dinners proved so popular among other working moms that she decided to market them. Today Mary Anne is well on her way to becoming a millionaire.

Tweedy and Mary Anne are part of a great American tradition of people who turn seemingly straightforward ideas into great inventions.

Consider the humble toi-

let brush: the brainchild of Dorothy Rogers, wife of Oklahoma composer Richard Rogers. Dorothy hated housework and the job she loathed most was cleaning the toilet. So in 1946 she invented the "Johnnymop," or toilet brush—a product we couldn't dream of living without today.

Tweedy and Mary Anne also set out to solve a simple problem and never dreamed they would become entrepreneurial success stories. But sales of Spiffy Specs hit \$50,000 in just three months and Mary Anne's My Own Meals rang up over half a million dollars in sales in its first year.

Karen Smith of Sedro-Woolley, Washington, hated dull knives about as much as Dorothy Rogers hated cleaning toilets. She lives in a hunting, fishing and farming area where sharp knives are a necessi-

ty. With her father, she developed a knife-sharpening system that uses a spinning wheel made out of cardboard rather than the usual metal.

It took the father-daughter team several years to develop their novel system. But in 1986 Karen tested the machine on the open market. She patented the product, began sharpening knives at trade shows and invested a few hundred dollars to get the business up and running.

"It wasn't easy," Karen says. "In our part of the country people do things for themselves, and they didn't exactly rush to bring us their knives to sharpen."

But Karen was deter-

ness-school approach taken by Mary Anne. She dreamed of opening her own company and put a great deal of thought into making it work. She spent 18 months planning before her products hit the market. When she'd worked out every detail, she sold stock in the future company, raising more than \$1.3 million. She needed that investment. Start-up costs for My Own Meals ended up well over \$100,000.

But you don't have to have a lot of money to get started. Julie Winston, a 48-year-old mom from Rockville, Maryland, set up her successful care-package business on a shoestring.

It was the summer of

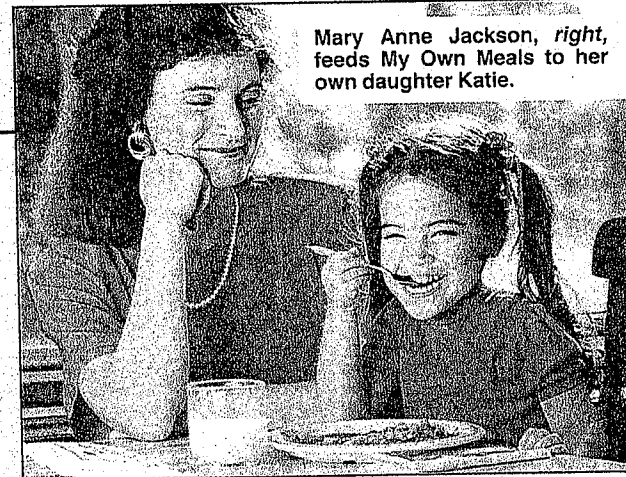
## Essential rules for beginning inventors

The following advice is given by the Inventor's Resource Center.

- **Don't use a company to sell your invention.** Some companies offer marketing services for new products, but they're often fraudulent, and even when they're not, their success rate is very low.
- **Keep quiet about your idea.** Discuss it with anyone and everyone—and you may lose it to them.
- **Test your product thoroughly.** You'll have to iron out all the kinks

before you put it on the market.

- **Protect your idea.** An attorney can advise you on the time and costs involved in getting a patent.
- **Find out if the idea has business potential.** Not all good ideas make good products. Some products may be too expensive to produce; others might prove too difficult to market or ship.
- **Be prepared to work hard.** Anyone who tells you there's a shortcut is probably after your money.



Mary Anne Jackson, right, feeds My Own Meals to her own daughter Katie.

1979, and Julie's 11-year-old son Evan was away at camp. Julie sent packages of games and goodies so he wouldn't be homesick, and they became the hit of the camp bunkhouse.

Soon Julie was besieged by other camp moms wanting packages for their kids. So she founded Sealed With A Kiss.

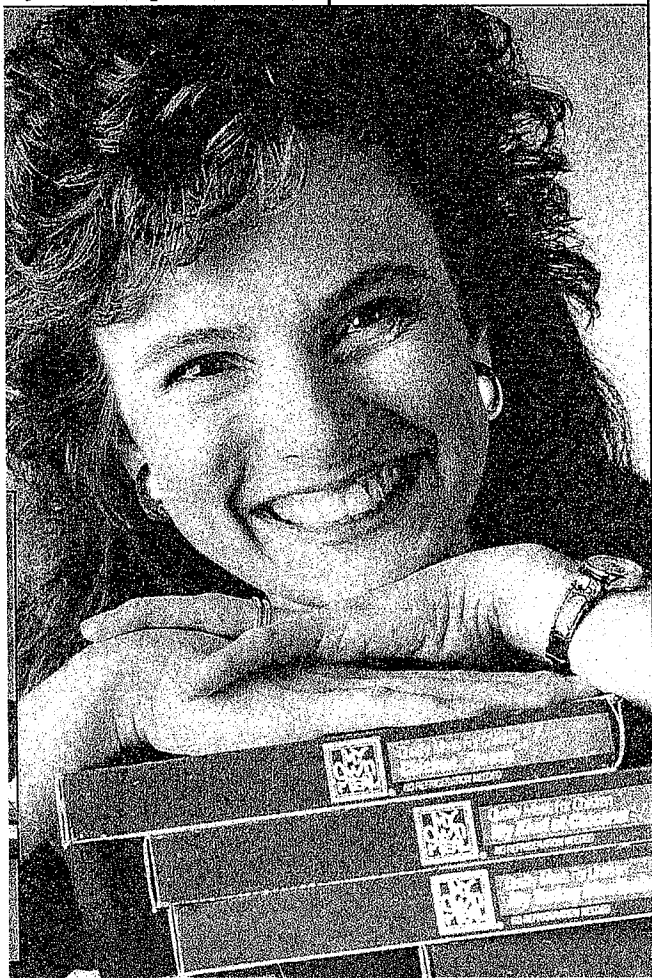
"I went out and bought the toys and spent hours wrapping them. It was a lot of work. A typical package for a 10-year-old girl might include a stuffed animal, a printed pillowcase, puzzles, a deck of cards and a game.

"I thought I'd be doing pretty good if I got a few hundred orders, but before the year was up I had gotten more than 500."

This year Julie expects to send out over 10,000 packages at \$20 each, plus postage. She works seven days a week, employs dozens of teenagers and has converted her home into a factory. Every room is crammed full of boxes and toys.

"The business takes over our house," Julie says. "But my husband Ed never complains. He knows the joy this business brings me. And, of course, both of us are more than pleased with the extra dollars this puts into our bank account." ❖

by Steve Kaplan



## Where to find help with your ideas

• **Contact your local inventor's congress.** There are more than 60 inventor's organizations across the country. For a complete list, write: Inventor's Congress, Box 71, Redwood Falls, MN 56283; phone 507-637-2344.

• **Check out your public library.** It has information on patents and trademarks, plus connections to your local inventor's groups. Librarians may be able to do computer searches to find companies and manufacturers compatible with your ideas.

• **Get professional advice.** The following can help:

1. National Assn. of Small Business Investment Companies, 1156 15th Ave. SW, Ste. 1001, Washington, DC 20005; 202-833-8230.

2. Small Business Administration, Information Office, Office of Public Communications, 1441 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20416; 202-653-6832 or 800-368-5855. They'll connect you with your local SBA office and nearest chapter of Service Corps of Retired Executives.

# PSYCHOLOGY QUIZ

## Can you take advice?

Dear Reader:  
Trust us—if you have trouble asking for aid, this quiz will help you accept your friends' word of wisdom

by Katherine Morrow

### PART I

1. When you find yourself puzzled by a problem of mammoth proportions, do you . . . ?

- a. Talk it over with a perceptive pal to gain a new perspective.  
 b. Consult "Dear Abby."  
 c. Perpetually ponder your predicament.

2. Lawyers . . .

- a. Are totally useless. Most of them only create problems.  
 b. Are necessary when trying to settle certain legal difficulties.  
 c. Usually make matters worse.

3. The girl at the cosmetics counter of your favorite department store chooses you for a complete makeover. Do you say . . . ?

- a. "Okay! But no drastic changes."  
 b. "Forget it! I don't want anyone tampering with my looks."  
 c. "Take me! I'm yours."

4. Your favorite television talk show host is:

- a. Oprah Winfrey  
 b. Geraldo Rivera  
 c. Johnny Carson

5. You're supposed to sign a lease today, but your horoscope cautions you against making any major decisions. You:

- a. Laugh out loud and sign on the dotted line.  
 b. Sigh . . . and sign a little apprehensively.  
 c. Say "No way, José—not today!"

6. After reading about the hazards of the sun and the depletion of the ozone layer, you've decided to:



a. Slather on a heavy-duty sunscreen whenever you leave the house—even if it's only to go to the mailbox.

- b. Worship the sun as usual.  
 c. Sunbathe—but only in the late afternoon hours when the sun is less scorching.

7. You see a new recipe in your favorite magazine. When preparing the new dish, do you . . . ?

- a. Consult the recipe to get you started but season it to your personal taste.  
 b. Read the recipe and stick to it like a bee to honeysuckle.  
 c. Improvise.

8. Your boss warns you that if you don't shape up, he'll ship you out. Do you . . . ?

- a. Tread water and search for the nearest employment agency the next morning.  
 b. Forget his harsh words and float on by, figuring he was just in a bad mood that day.  
 c. Buoy yourself with a new attitude and become a model employee.

### SCORING

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
A	7	3	5	7	3	7	5	5.
B	5	7	3	5	5	3	7	3
C	3	5	7	3	7	5	3	7

### PART II

Give yourself 3 points for each of the following statements with which you agree.

1. If I'm lost while driving through unfamiliar territory, I usually stop to ask directions. Agree  Disagree
2. My best friend really understands me—I can tell her anything. Agree  Disagree
3. If I'm not feeling well, I usually see a doctor rather than trying to cure myself. Agree  Disagree
4. I believe families in trouble can be helped to work out their problems if they get some professional counseling. Agree  Disagree
5. I like to browse leisurely through the self-help section of the bookstore. Agree  Disagree

Add scores from Parts I and II, and turn to Page 55 for your analysis.