

# Enterprising Lady

by Caroline Bird



Permission pending from Ogden Corporation.

- 1 Have you ever heard someone referred to as a self-made man or woman? Perhaps you've wondered how people "make" themselves.
- 2 Many people today who become leaders of government or industry have gone to a university. In fact, sometimes children in school are led to believe that they must go to a university if they want to get a good job. But there are always women and men who become highly successful in their work without special degrees or formal training. They have their own ideas. They work to make these ideas a reality. They learn by doing. These are the people who are said to "make" themselves.
- 3 Tillie Lewis was a self-made woman. She introduced

the Italian tomato industry to the United States. She also began the dietetic (sugar-free) food industry. And she was a very successful businesswoman.

- 4 Tillie was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1901. Her father was a Jewish immigrant who ran a music shop. Her mother died when she was small. Tillie quit school at the age of twelve to go to work. Then, at the age of fifteen, she married a grocer twice her age just to get away from home.
- 5 Tillie always said the idea of growing Italian tomatoes popped into her head one Sunday when she was helping her husband take inventory in his shop. Looking over his stock, she wondered why the expensive tomatoes and the tomato pastes, or thick sauces, were all from Italy. She knew that the tangy, pear-shaped tomatoes (*pomodori*) make Italian sauces unique. But why couldn't these special tomatoes be grown in the United States?

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- 6 Nobody seemed to know. Tillie asked experts at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens. "Wrong soil and climate," they explained. She learned that people had once said the same thing about French grapes. But wine makers had taken vines from France to California and made fortunes. She had never been to California, but she decided that pomodori might grow there.
- 7 Tillie spent time reading about tomatoes in public libraries. She wrote to experts asking why pomodori couldn't be grown in the United States. Those who replied were not encouraging. Some told her to forget the whole idea. She didn't forget it, but it was years before she could do anything about it.
- 8 Some time later Tillie and her husband were divorced. She worked for a stockbroker for a time and went to business school at night. Soon she was selling stocks and bonds on commission, and she was good at it. She made \$12,000 in 1932, one of the worst years of the depression.
- 9 One day in 1934, Tillie heard in the office that the United States Congress had imposed a 40 percent tax on tomatoes imported from Italy. Tillie knew that it was time for her to do something about her dream of growing, canning, and selling pomodori. She bought a new hat and a book on learning Italian. Then she bought a second-class ticket to Naples on the steamship *Vulcania*.
- 10 Aboard ship she met Florindo del Gaizo. He owned a cannery in Naples and was the leading exporter of pomodori. He feared that the tax would cut down on the amount of pomodori he exported to the United States each year. He was also fascinated by Tillie, who had never been in a cannery, but talked confidently of growing and canning pomodori. The courteous Italian showed her his cannery and the pomodori growing around Naples. He entertained her in his home.
- 11 Two weeks later, Tillie left Italy with a check for \$10,000 and four bags of pomodoro seedlings. Under an arrangement with Florindo del Gaizo, he would send her equipment for the cannery and an expert to install it. Her job was to supervise the growing, preserving, and selling of Italian-style tomatoes in the United States. For this, she was to be paid a salary of fifty dollars a week.
- 12 Tillie named their company Flotill Products, Incorporated, using his first name and her nickname. She went to California, taking with her the names of business people who might be able to help her. They suggested various sites for her to visit. The San Joaquin Valley looked like the best place because it had soil and climate much like that of Naples. Tillie also found a canner who agreed to pack the tomatoes.
- 13 Farmers, however, were reluctant to plant the seedlings she distributed to them. They didn't think pomodori would grow in the San Joaquin Valley.
- 14 Finally, they agreed to plant enough to can, or preserve, 100,000 cases of whole tomatoes and 100,000 cases of tomato paste. Then Tillie set out on a tour of the East to get wholesalers to buy the crop she expected. Before the tomatoes were even grown, the whole crop had been sold.
- 15 The pomodori grew beautifully, but there weren't enough of them. The farmers had been so doubtful the pomodori would grow that they had not been willing to use all their land for the new crop. Tillie had to answer to the angry wholesalers.
- 16 The second year she had her own cannery. The crop was bigger and there was a profit, but there were always problems. Tillie had to learn all about commercial canning. In the beginning, she used secondhand equipment that was always breaking down. Once, just when tons of tomatoes were waiting to be processed, a steam boiler stopped working. At the very moment Tillie was wondering what to do, the wail of a train whistle reminded her that locomotives produced steam. Tillie called up the railway company and asked what they would charge to lend her a locomotive. They let her borrow two locomotives, and she was able to save her tomatoes.
- 17 Florindo del Gaizo died in 1937. Tillie borrowed money to buy his stock and keep control of the company.
- 18 In 1940 there was a strike by union workers in Tillie's plant, even though she was paying more than the union asked and providing additional benefits to workers. The strike was settled with the help of Meyer Lewis, the western director of the union. A year later he became her general manager. Seven years later, he and Tillie were married.
- 19 As the only woman canner in the business, Tillie attracted much attention. But it wasn't until 1952 that she began to establish consumer recognition of her brand name. Her attempts to lose weight led her to produce the first artificially sweetened canned fruit. The diet pack turned out to be popular and profitable. In 1966 she sold her stock in Tillie Lewis Foods, Incorporated, to the Ogden Corporation for nine million dollars. Tillie then became that company's first woman director. The idea conceived one Sunday in a grocery had taken her a long way!

## How Well Did You Read?

Write T if the statement is true according to the story.  
Write F if the statement is false.

- 1 Review paragraph 2. The main idea of that paragraph is that a "self-made" person is one who becomes a success without formal training.
- 2 It would *not* be appropriate to call Tillie Lewis a self-made woman.
- 3 Tillie's interest in growing Italian tomatoes was the result of a suggestion that her first husband made.
- 4 Tillie wasn't discouraged when experts told her that pomodori couldn't be grown in the United States, because she knew that people had said the same thing about French grapes.
- 5 In the first year of Tillie's tomato venture, wholesalers were angry because she didn't have enough tomatoes to fill all the orders.
- 6 Tillie had problems at first with cannery equipment that kept breaking down.
- 7 Tillie got the idea of selling sugar-free fruit for dieters because she herself was trying to lose weight.
- 8 A major reason for Tillie's success was that when she had good ideas, she put them into action.
- 9 A good alternate title for the story would be *Tillie Lewis: Self-Made Woman*.

## Learn about Words

### Vocabulary

- A** You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 a survey of goods on hand (5)
- 2 having a sharp, distinctive taste (5)
- 3 legally released from a marriage; returned to unmarried status (8)
- 4 dealer in stocks, bonds, and other securities (8)
- 5 established or required by law (9)
- 6 factory where food is put into tin containers (10)
- 7 polite; mannerly (10)
- 8 formed; begun (19)

- B** A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a**, **b**, or **c**. Write **a**, **b**, or **c**.

- 9 popped** (5)
- a** exploded or burst open
  - b** suddenly came or entered
  - c** made a sudden, sharp sound

- 10 crop** (14)
- a** riding whip with a loop at one end
  - b** plants grown and harvested for profit
  - c** short haircut

## Word Study

- C**    **counter** + act = counteract (act against)  
      **non** + fiction = nonfiction (not fiction)

A prefix is a syllable that can be added to the beginning of a word to form a word with a different meaning. The prefix *counter* often means "against" or "opposing." The prefix *non* often means "not." Read the definitions below. Add a prefix to each word in **heavy type** to make a new word with the stated meaning. Write the new word.

- 11 an opposing **claim**: \_\_\_\_claim
  - 12 **spy** against spies: \_\_\_\_spy
  - 13 not **explosive**; \_\_\_\_explosive
  - 14 a **culture** with values opposing those of the main culture: \_\_\_\_culture
  - 15 not **fattening**: \_\_\_\_fattening
  - 16 not a **believer**: \_\_\_\_believer
  - 17 a movement to fight against **revolution**: \_\_\_\_revolution
  - 18 not **essential**: \_\_\_\_essential
- D** Many English words come from the Latin language and contain Latin word parts. For example:

**cent** = hundred (as in century)

**lat** = side (as in lateral)

**semi** = half or part (as in semicircle)

Knowing Latin word parts will sometimes help you unlock the meanings of new words. Read the sentences below. The word in **heavy type** is a clue. It will help you find the right Latin word part to complete the partial word. Complete the word and write it in full.

- 19 Does a \_\_\_\_ipede have a **hundred** feet?
- 20 \_\_\_\_sweet chocolate tastes about **half** as sweet as regular chocolate.
- 21 The two **sides** reached a bi\_\_\_\_eral agreement.
- 22 We have another **half**-year to wait for the next \_\_\_\_annual sale.
- 23 The \_\_\_\_enarian was celebrating her **one hundredth** birthday.
- 24 An equi\_\_\_\_eral triangle has three equal **sides**.
- 25 I was only **half** awake, and in my \_\_\_\_conscious state I put on unmatched shoes.
- 26 There are one **hundred** \_\_\_\_imeters in a meter.

- E**            I've been feeling **weak** all **week**.

Words that have the same sound but different spellings and meanings are sometimes called homonyms. For example: *weak* and *week*. Each sentence below contains a pair of homonyms in parentheses. Write the word that makes sense in the sentence.

- 27 Heavy (reign, rain) caused the creek to overflow.
- 28 Hiram is the (air, heir) to a considerable fortune.
- 29 Close the (gate, gait) when you leave.
- 30 He was the building's (sole, soul) occupant.
- 31 Alice has decided to (cell, sell) her car.
- 32 What is the difference between a phrase and a (clause, claws)?
- 33 This island was formed from (choral, coral).

## Use Your Imagination

Tillie Lewis really made something of herself, without benefit of education. There are many men and women like Tillie. Do you know someone who has overcome handicaps of background or education to become successful? If so, write a brief story about the person. If you don't personally know anyone who is self-made, make up an imaginary story about someone.