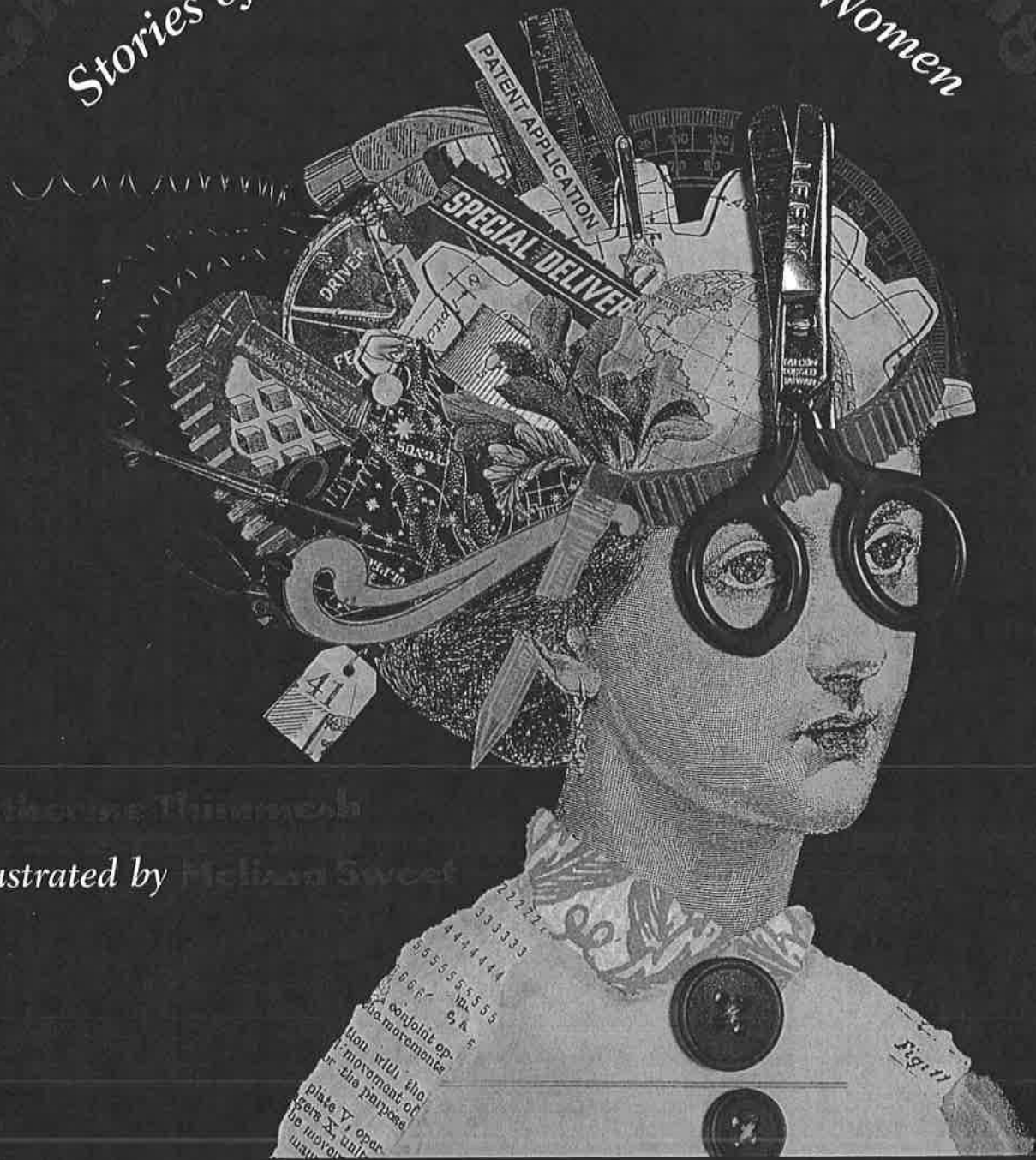


*Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women*



*Illustrated by*

*Melissa Sweet*

## Bette Nesmith Graham **Liquid Paper®**

It all began with a mistake. Maybe she typed a G instead of an H. Or maybe she left out a word. Regardless, in her determination to solve her typing problems, Bette Nesmith Graham developed a most creative solution. She invented Liquid Paper correction fluid—commonly called “white-out.” It was a product that would revolutionize the business world and transform her from an executive secretary at Texas Bank & Trust into a self-made millionaire.



At first, Bette tried to erase her typing errors. But the carbon ribbon used in the new electric typewriter made it impossible. The eraser simply smeared and smudged carbon ink all over her paper. Mistakes were professionally unacceptable, but what could she do?

*“I was doing some artwork for Texas Bank on a free-lance basis, trying to make a little extra money,” Bette explained. “And, in lettering, an artist never corrects by erasing, but always paints over the error. So, I decided to use what artists use.”*

Bette filled a small glass bottle with tempera water-based paint and, along with a miniature paintbrush, brought it to work. She even colored the paint to blend with the stationery she was using. Her boss never even noticed.

Her coworkers, however, knew she had developed a trick and they continually begged her for her “miracle masking mixture.” Finally, five years after she first used her correction fluid, she mixed up a batch of her secret paint to sell to the other secretaries.

*“I used a green bottle,” Bette recalled. “I used things I had on hand at home. I*

Handwritten scribbles and symbols at the top of the page.

Dear Madam:  
Very truly yours,  
Yours very truly,

GREGG SHORTER



BUSINESS ABBREVIATIONS

from, form  
been, bound  
very  
before  
much



labor  
pretty  
even



The Quick Brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.  
The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.  
The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.  
The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.  
The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog!

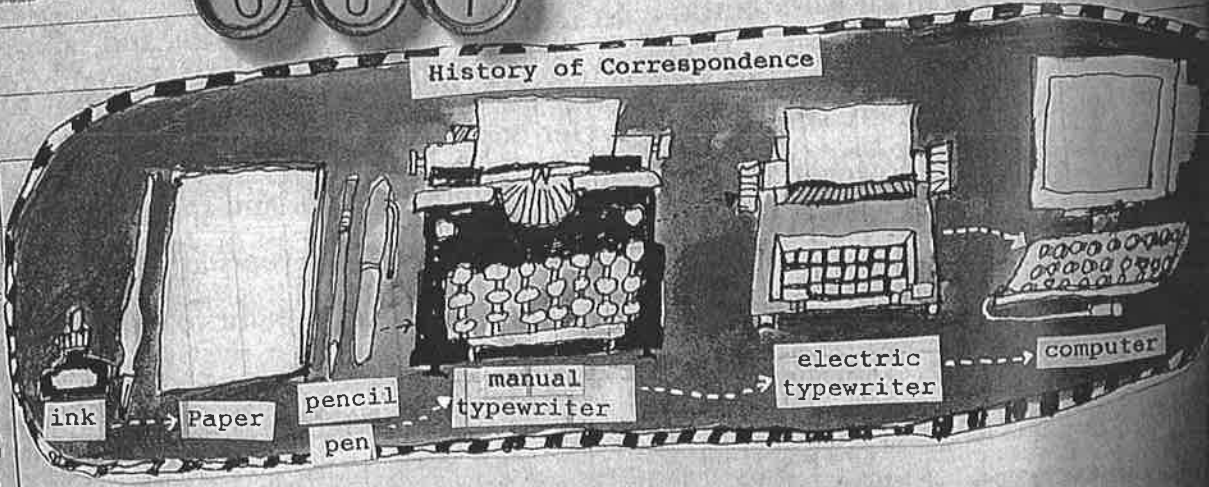
The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

PACKED IN

Barrels  
Casks or  
Crates  
Cases or  
Boxes

How shipped

History of Correspondence



took a file label, wrote 'Mistake Out' on it, and stuck it on the bottle. It was my attempt to be professional."

When she began making batches of Mistake Out, she had a two-room manufacturing plant: her kitchen and her garage. She also had a few employees: her son, Michael, and his friends.



It wasn't long before Bette was supplying all the secretaries at the Texas Bank with her fabulous invention. Several people, including an office supply dealer, strongly encouraged her to market the correction fluid to the general public. However, before she attempted an organized sales campaign, she thought the quality of the paint should be improved. Although it worked, the tempera she had been using took too long to dry and it also left the paper wet. Unfortunately, she couldn't afford to hire a chemist to improve her product.

"I decided I would try to work out a formula myself," she said. "I went to the library and found the formula for a type of tempera paint. A chemistry teacher from St. Mark's School helped me a little bit. I learned how to grind and mix paint from a man at a paint manufacturing company."

Bette changed the name of her correction fluid from Mistake Out to Liquid Paper and set out to market her invention. Less than a year later, a trade publication called *The Office* included a brief article about Liquid Paper in its office supply catalog.

**Liquid Paper was first mixed in a five-gallon bucket and then poured into several plastic ketchup bottles. Bette and her employees then filled tiny green jars by squeezing the paint mixture neatly out of the ketchup bottles.**

More than five-hundred orders flooded in! The wheels of success had been set in motion. It wasn't long before Bette Nesmith

**For several years, Bette signed all her correspondence "B. Nesmith" because, she said, she thought people would take her business more seriously if they believed a man was the president of the company.**

Company for \$47.5 million dollars. In addition to starting several charitable foundations, she left her son, Michael Nesmith, \$25 million. Michael was a popular musician in the 1960s group The Monkees, and he invested much of his inheritance in a production company called Pacific Arts Studio. And, wouldn't you know, Pacific Arts Studio used Michael's investment to become one of the pioneers in the music video industry.

Graham had triumphantly conquered the business world with nothing more than a tiny jar, some paint, and a brush. Oh yes, and a lot of ingenuity.

Twenty years after her initial inspiration, Bette sold Liquid Paper to The Gillette