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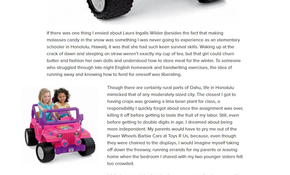
By Kimberly Lew on February 5, 2016 in FAMILY

The Plight of the Small Business Owner



Though there are certainly rural parts of Oahu, life in Honolulu reminished that of any moderately-sized city. The closest I got to having crops was growing a lime bean plant for class, a responsibility I quickly found out was far more the assignment even kids killing it of before getting to taste the fruit of my labor. Still, even before getting to double digits in age, I learned about being more independent. My parents would have to pry me out of the Power Wheels Barbie Car to get me to eat, because, even though they were chained to the displays, I would imagine myself taking off down the freeway, running errands for my parents or leaving home when the bedroom I shared with my two younger sisters felt too crowded.

While I accepted the fact that I was not cut out for the country life, I quickly latched onto another concept that could lead to self-sufficiency: money. I received a small allowance ranging from $1 a week to eventually $5 close to my graduation from elementary school, which meant independence came less in the form of paying my own room and board and more in being able to afford a new comic book or block of clay from the art supply store on my own. Even those items, however, took patience to save up for, a quality that I was almost always in short supply of. Birthday and Christmas money was almost always put into some mysterious "college fund" or whatever, so I always felt like, if I really wanted to start amassing a fortune to be able to afford luxuries like a bulk box of Fruit by the Foot from Costco or clothes for an American Girl doll, I would have to take matters into my own hands.

Our house was on a hill and did not really have a sidewalk, so simple dreams of a lemonade stand were not an option. I did what I could, though: I attempted selling homemade books (complete with yarn-tied-three-hole-punch binding), laminated dried flower book marks (that was really just smashing weeds from our yard onto a strip of paper and putting packing tape over it), jars filled with water and ferns (an exercise which I still, to this day, am trying to figure out where I got that idea from), and pencil grips for a school market project that just consisted of Sri Sai that had been wrapped around a pencil– no one bought it, go figure. I even once tried to construct a rudimentary vending machine a la Carter's Arcade to take the few quarters my little sister might be able to spare.

My most steady patron was always my mother, who eventually commissioned me to make homemade gift tags for her. Holidays, of course, were the most busy season, though I also exercised my marketing skills by coming out with a hand-drawn catalog once when business was slow. All of the gift tags involved a hand-drawn present template, which I would outline and then color myself. I only charged about $0.50/tag, which, upon reflection, would be gotten me eaten alive on Shark Tank, as I was only making about $2/hour and those Gelly Roll pens I was using were not cheap.

Once in a while, I found opportunities to expand my customer base. When my family was preparing to move from Hawaii to Georgia, we got a booth at the swap meet to sell off some stuff from storage, and a friend and I made a basket full of scrunchies to add to our wares. We only sold one, but it received rave reviews when the woman who purchased it declared enthusiastically that it wrapped exactly twice around her hair, the biggest compliment a scrunchie can receive.

I experienced many of the trials and tribulations of my entrepreneur. I had very little startup capital to work with – working materials were pretty much limited to things laying around and near the house. I also was notoriously impatient when it came to acquiring new skills, often losing interest if I couldn't pick them up right away. Many a knitting attempt has been left in uneven patches and artwork sloppily finished in frustration. Then there was just the difficulty of managing the funds. Sometimes having a pocket full of change made me feel almost too confident. I had a devastating $10 or so once in a game of blackjack against my dad, a moment of hubris that bought me the evil underbelly of gambling at a young age.

Even when business was good, I learned that money could not surmount any problem. One year, my uncle and aunt visited from California, and I thought I would be able to treat them to a lunch of $1 Whoppers. I could never afford to throw in some fries and a couple of drinks! When they revealed that they weren't interested in eating at Burger King, their Hawaii vacation, I threw an epic tantrum, tears and snot running down my face and sobbing so hard that I couldn't form words. In a matter of minutes, my attempt at a very adult gesture had devolved into the definition of childishness. The very thing that made me feel so big also had the capability to make me feel so small. This, too, was a hard lesson learned at an early age.

Currently supporting myself with both a full time and a part time job, in addition to some freelance gigs, I benefit from having learned in the art of the hustle long ago, selling origami birds out of cardboard photocopies or stalking swords from our downstairs neighbor's yard. While I am hardly building log cabins or sewing my own clothes, I manage to keep myself sheltered, fed, and generally content. And when I have a little extra, I indulge sometimes in the little luxuries dinner with a friend, a movie or new book, or even a bulk box of Fruit by the Foot–and I can smile knowing that I got it myself.

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Kimberly Lew *is the proud writer of pitcs, blogs, and the monthly rent check where it is due.*

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Mizzie · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I too once threw an epic tantrum when I thought my parents were not treating me like the budding adult entrepreneur I was. It was maybe seven, and my "business" was making used soda cans look like Captain Hook.)

Reply · *active 2017 weeks ago*

Mizzie · *2017 weeks ago* +0

using I love you gaze

Rebecca-Hugh · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I once sold shares in my bamboo brewing project. Pay the the cost of the wire I used to make my wire cages, and a bit of the wood shavings and dog food that made up the rest of the setup, and reap the rewards of one hamster's sale price after the litter got sold off.

Then I discovered that just because the super rare in-this-city hamster could be sold to me for $17, it didn't mean anyone else was going to buy one at that price. Especially if they were all poorly socialized and nipped.

cathsanna · *2017 weeks ago* +0

You are not missing out on that molasses snow candy. That shit is one of the biggest disappointments of my childhood. It turned my whole world upside down.

Reply · *active 2017 weeks ago*

KarlMay · *2017 weeks ago* +0

Nooot A dream deferred!

SlowCloud · *2017 weeks ago* +0

Maple snow candy, on the other hand, surpasses all expectations.

GoodFellaGlourry · *2017 weeks ago* +2

This is objectively true. I had no idea people tried to make it with molasses!

Mizzie · *2017 weeks ago* +2

Maple snow candy was worth moving from Australia to the UK for. First time it snowed I fulfilled a childhood dream.

DPWinterwatcher · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I was all about the adult-like control of goods and services, but never managed to monetize it. I did create a very well-ordered (& my) lending library of my own books, complete with a sign in/sign out sheet for any potential borrowers, and also would type up a pamphlet every holiday season detailing how Christmas morning gift distribution and unwrapping would go.

(Yes, I am the oldest child, why?)

Reply · *active 2017 weeks ago*

lemonadefan · *2017 weeks ago* +0

Please share with us your typed pamphlet.

EuclidMaria · *2017 weeks ago* +0

The closest I ever came to running a business of my own was smuggling an entire suitcase of Thin Mints to trained every summer and selling them to my family members at an unfortunate markup. Monopolies FTW.

jess_gaedeke · *2017 weeks ago* +1

This reminds me of the time when I tried to sell friendship bracelets to my friends (which probably defeats the purpose of friendship bracelets). I tried sold them for about $2, and it was definitely not worth the time it took to make them. I did find a niche market through boys though - they bought them for their sisters/mothers, and I had a couple of weeks where I probably made $50+!

CrowdEd · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I used to sell crabapples and bluebells to my family members in the back yard at the rate of one leaf each. None of them, also, properly appreciated my entrepreneurial spirit. I think that might be because I understood my wares.

super_mario · *2017 weeks ago* +0

Once my cousin and I cut all of my grandma's roses and sold them to the neighbours at 5 cents/stem.

No one bought them AND we got in trouble. Terrible business plan.

Lonestyr · *2017 weeks ago* +1

I made growing cards (nice onest at least for an 8 year old) but my mother forbade me from selling them door to door to our neighbors. She was horrified that I'd thought of doing that.

gritethanedeath · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I used to have a plan that involved selling "perfume" aka soapy water dyed a color by a dipping a magic marker in it, and then handsomely packaged in a little paper bathroom cup with some wrap over the top. I vividly remember that the logistic had something to do with not having time to shower (which I still remains a problem). I'm not sure if I ever actually made any money because I spent most of my time in my parlor (pretty). Unfortunately, I had to stop production when my mom discovered a pond of soapy water in my closet because (surprise) paper cups don't hold water indefinitely.

Betsy Margelopat · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I really wanted a Pinterest camera as a girl and my only chance of getting one was by selling boxes of growing cards through an offer in the back of some kids magazine. Oddly, this actually worked. I used door to door and sold cards to my very accommodating neighbors (god bless us). They actually had their cards sent to them and I actually got my camera, so it must have been a legit offer. Unfortunately, Sim for those things was prohibitively expensive, so I didn't get a lot of use out of it.

gritsalthepest · *2017 weeks ago* +0

When I was younger, I went door to door selling pompoms with google eyes that I had glued to branches and pieces of bark that I found in the park. My inventory included pompoms that were just sitting on twigs looking at you with their google eyes, and also pompoms with were camping or reading books. I thought this would make me incredibly wealthy (Probably a better plan than my current career path, actually.)

everjeremiadam · *2017 weeks ago* +0

My brother and I used to sell Otter Pops on the corner in front of our house for 25 cents a pop. Our mom made us buy the big box of popsicles ourselves, and then we kept the profit. We did pretty well. All the neighborhood kids would buy them and the place was packed with kids. Never had to try anything more creative.

My kids have a massage business going. Services range from 25 cents to $1 and they do a decent job, but the market is limited to just their dad and I so it's not very lucrative for them. Also.

Cookiebiko · *2017 weeks ago* +0

Aaah this reminds me of the summers my brother and I set up TV trays on the sidewalk and tried to sell all the crappy toys we'd dug out of our closet. Sometimes we'd mix it up and sell Kool Aid and Pop Tarts.

I don't remember making any money though...

WhoseMountain · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I remember selling cross-stitch greeting cards that were semi-decent (I was good at cross stitch and my mom took me out to get nice cardstock to make the cards out of) but only were even sold to my mom. I also once grew herbs in pots and sold them by the roadside. I think I made a few bucks? I am too lazy to be an entrepreneur, though, even as a small child.

cagouse · *2017 weeks ago* +0

My friends and I tried all sorts of fairly successful business launches. Our city had huge fireworks celebrations every July, and we took advantage of all the pedestrians to sell lemonade and souvenirs with a substantial profit. All baker gang once parked in front of our house and we became super excited. They were selling cupcakes, and we immediately started baking cupcakes and lemonade, and we made the oven, and stirring and colouring cookie and selling those. A gap once paint $5 for our sign, which was really exciting. We also made "junk" out of the mulberry bushes (potential recipe: mashed berries, latex sprays, sugar. Stress, not cookies).

Jessie · *2017 weeks ago* +0

I remember selling cross-stitch greeting cards that were semi-decent (I was good at cross stitch and my mom took me out to get nice cardstock to make the cards out of) but only were even sold to my mom. I also once grew herbs in pots and sold them by the roadside. I think I made a few bucks? I am too lazy to be an entrepreneur, though, even as a small child. Nice post in this.

New Time_Chicks · *320 weeks ago*

Nice article Kimberly. Makes me appreciate all the hard work that the entrepreneurs of this world do.

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