



MIRANTI FAMILY



McLEAN FAMILY



BROWNING FAMILY

MOMPRENEURS: FINDING A BALANCE

BY FRANCI ROGERS

When her third child was born, Laura Miranti didn't realize that the event would also spark the rebirth of her career. Just 18 months later, her daughter Lucía would be the reason she would become an entrepreneur. Miranti actually became more than an entrepreneur, however, and joined a growing number of women known as **"MOMPRENEURS," ACTIVELY BALANCING THE ROLES OF MOTHER AND BUSINESS OWNER.**

After earning her BBA from Baylor in 1997 with a double major in Finance and International Business, plus a minor in Spanish, Miranti went to work in the energy lending industry. She later earned a master's degree in Accounting and became a certified public accountant.

Until a visit to her daughter's speech therapist in the summer of 2008, she had no intention of launching her own business.

"We started to notice that our daughter wasn't hitting developmental milestones at the right times, and so we started therapy," Miranti said. "By the time she was 18 months old, she was showing improvement and trying to say all kinds of words. That's when the therapist recommended that I make her a photo album of the people and day-to-day things she recognizes, to encourage her speech development."

Miranti learned that until approximately the age of two, children cannot relate a drawing of an object with the actual object. For example, a drawing of a cat would not be recognized as representing the family's cat.

"So, I took a bunch of pictures and went off to the dollar store and bought a photo album," Miranti said. "It wasn't very sturdy and didn't last long. I thought what I really needed was an album board book, like her story books, that she could hold and play with, and it would hold up."

Miranti began to scour the Internet in search of such a product, but all she could find were other parents looking for the same.

"I even went to the craft store and tried to make one of my own, but that didn't work out at all," she said. "I kept thinking that this shouldn't be so hard. So, I looked up companies that made board books and started calling them."

After finding a willing company, Miranti and her husband started making sketches and working out the details of what they thought would be the ideal book. By November of 2008, Miranti had filed for a patent and had her first inventory order, 2,000 books, ready to sell.

BOARD BOOK ALBUMS, LLC (boardbookalbums.com) has now sold thousands of books (without a single returned item). They are being used for kids with special needs, like Lucía who needed speech therapy, or children with autism. They're also used by parents who are adopting a toddler internationally, to introduce their child to the world they are about to enter. Grandparents who live far away send the books to their grandchildren, to make sure they continue to be familiar with them across the miles.

"Parents are the ones giving me ideas now," Miranti said. "All these different ways that people are using them are really exciting."

Miranti's next steps include distribution through major retail stores as well as international

distribution. As the company grows, she is finding new challenges but more opportunities for her family.

"THE GREAT THING ABOUT THIS IS THAT I CAN DO IT AT ANY HOUR," Miranti said. "I can work things into naptime without being interrupted, or I can do things early in the morning while the kids are still asleep."


And it's not unusual for the oldest two of her five children to get involved now, too.

"They ask questions about the business, and follow up with things we've talked about," she said. "They think it's exciting, too, when I have a conversation with a company whose stores we shop in all the time. It teaches them about the way businesses work, and it makes the world a little smaller."

It's also teaching lessons in balance to everyone, Miranti hopes.

"This is a good product and a great business. I could make it huge, but that's not going to happen on the fast track because that's not the most important thing. Being a good mom is the most important thing," she said. "But at the same time, I want it to set an example. **I WANT MY KIDS TO KNOW THERE ARE OPTIONS FOR PARENTS.** I don't want my daughter to think 'I'm going to get married, and so it has to be this one way.' I don't want them to have to settle for just playing one role. I want them to know that they can be good parents and still have a career or create a business, if that's what they want."



A photograph of a home interior. In the foreground, a woman with long blonde hair, wearing a striped shirt and jeans, holds a baby in a pink outfit. She is smiling and looking towards another woman standing in a doorway. The second woman is wearing a yellow and white striped shirt and jeans. A young girl in a pink and white patterned dress stands with her back to the camera, looking towards the women. The scene is set in a bright room with large windows and a wooden floor.

Leslie McLean is also hoping her entrepreneurial spirit will be a lesson to her three children as they see her run the business she founded, **TIME OUT SITTERS** (timeoutsitters.com).

"Right now, my mantra is: I am doing all I can to manage my business, but I can't let my business manage me," she said. "I am a mom first." McLean graduated from Baylor in 1997 with a BBA in Marketing and a minor in Fashion Merchandising. After graduation she began working in advertising. When she got married and later had children, she put her career on hold.

"I made a conscious decision to stay home," she said. **"I FEEL BLESSED THAT I WAS ABLE TO MAKE THAT CHOICE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, I NEEDED SOMETHING TO KEEP BUSY."**

What McLean didn't know was that her children would be the key to her new business venture. Living in a new city, far away from the support system of family and friends, she discovered after her first child was born that it was difficult to find quality babysitters for an occasional evening out.

"When I started looking for sitters, what I found was agencies," she said. "I didn't need a nanny or even part-time child care. What I needed was just a sitter for a date night or a dentist appointment."

That's when she began thinking about an agency type of service for just those occasions. McLean started with a pool of just five sitters and has grown her company into a service of background-checked and CPR-trained sitters, who are available on an as-needed basis, to more than 600 registered clients.

She credits her business background with her company's success and advises anyone thinking of starting their own business to do their homework.

"If you don't have a business background, get educated," McLean said. "Learn about various business principles, like accounting and marketing, as much as you can. Then do a lot of research, make sure it's feasible. Know how to differentiate your business from what's already out there. You can have a great idea, but you need a strong business foundation to make it work."

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A strong business foundation is also what **JORDAN BROWNING** credits for her success, not only in finding her calling, but knowing what wasn't right for her. After graduating from Baylor in 2000 with a BBA in Marketing, Browning went to work in business development.

"But I didn't love it," she said. "I knew there was something else out there that I was supposed to be doing."

A part of her past turned out to be the key to finding her future.

"When I got married, our consultant was a woman named Frieda," Browning said. "We called her Frieda the Bridal Wonder. One day, I told my mom, 'I think I want to be Frieda.'"

Browning called Frieda, who happened to be moving out of state and leaving the business, and asked her what it took to be successful.

"She was great," Browning said. "She helped me know where to start looking and what to research, and I just knew this is what I was meant to do."

Browning started **EVER AFTER** (weddingseverafter.com), a wedding coordinating and personal buying service.

"I CALL MYSELF A FULL-TIME MOM AND PART-TIME WEDDING COORDINATOR," although those roles sometimes get flipped, depending on the season," she said.

Browning now uses her creativity, which is what attracted her to Baylor's marketing program, and her organizational skills, which she honed at the business school, to be successful.

"Wedding coordinating fits so many of my passions," she said. "I get to be creative, yet keep things under control. This wouldn't have blossomed into my business if I hadn't followed my passions."

Although Browning started her business before her three children were born, she's found that being a mom hasn't slowed her down, but rather made her more focused. Renting an office outside their home and setting one day a week (while the oldest two children are in school and the youngest is at a Mother's Day Out program) to be at the office has helped Browning to maintain a balance. And that balance has enabled the family to do things it normally wouldn't.

"This business is not about the money because I'm not making a ton of money," Browning said. "But at this stage in our lives, it gives us the ability to do some special things. By me contributing to our family in this way, we can have extras at a birthday party or a bigger Christmas gift. It feels good."

The biggest rewards for her family, Browning feels, are the intangibles.

"I DO LOVE BEING HOME WITH MY KIDS," she said. **"BUT MY BUSINESS REJUVENATES ME IN A DIFFERENT WAY."** The kids are better off because I feel good. I go home a better mom because I get to use my mind, my gifts and what I learned at school in ways that I wouldn't always use at home with the kids. It's a perfect balance, and I feel like this is what I am supposed to do."



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