



joy RIDE

BY SUSAN R. MILLER

Meet **Joy Mangano**, The Single Mom Who Built A Multimillion-Dollar Empire On A Mop

She's sold everything from Miracle Mops and My Little Steamers to Huggable Hangers and TuffTech Luggage. Come November, Joy Mangano, inventor and entrepreneur extraordinaire, will be selling her life story – so to speak. That's when her new book, "Inventing Joy: Dare to Build a Brave & Creative Life," will be published.

It chronicles Mangano's life, from her days as a struggling single mother of three through her rise to the top of a business empire that spans the world, having sold more than \$3 billion in products since she launched her company.

Her story was told first on the big screen in 2015 in the film "Joy," written and directed by David O. Russell and starring Jennifer Lawrence as Mangano. The role earned Lawrence an Oscar nomination. Other big names in the movie in-

clude Bradley Cooper, who plays Neil Walker (who runs a QVC TV studio where Joy starts hawking her mop), and Robert De Niro, who portrays Mangano's father.

Although she was the inspiration for the movie, Mangano says Russell used artistic license to bring her story to the



Photos by Bryan Kasin, HSN



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masses by weaving traits of other inspirational women into her character. In fact, the opening of the movie starts with the dedication: “Inspired by the true stories of daring women. One in particular.”

“An Oscar-nominated movie is not just the story of my life, but it’s the creativity of those people behind it,” says Mangano, 61.

She adds that working with Russell was a truly cathartic experience.

“It was unbelievable. I say I never had therapy in my life, and, after talking for hundreds of hours with David O. Russell, I

don’t need it anymore,” she says with a chuckle.

The reaction from moviegoers and fans further inspired her to help others become successful.

“After this movie came out, I found people everywhere who said, ‘You gave me such inspiration that I opened the bakery I always wanted to open,’ or ‘I finished that piece of art I started when I was younger,’” she says.

The upcoming book, published by Simon & Schuster, is truer to her own story, and Mangano hopes it will serve as a blue-



print for those who have a dream and help them to reach their full potential.

“I feel like people will have a new romance with their life,” she says. “I am so excited about it. If it’s possible to be more excited about that than the movie, then I am.”

THE EARLY DAYS

Mangano’s dream began when she was a child, growing up in East Meadow, Long Island. She was constantly inventing and looking for ways to make things better – even when life wasn’t going the way she’d hoped. While volunteering at a pet shelter as a teen, she came up with the idea for a reflective flea collar. But, before she could get it to market, a large pet supplier launched a similar product.



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Later, she thought she was living the American dream: attending college, getting married and having three children. But the marriage soured, and, after divorcing her husband, she held down several jobs, including one as an airline reservationist, to pay the bills.

But Mangano says she never stopped dreaming up ideas. Even something as simple as a mop, she thought, could be made better. She proved herself right with the creation of the Miracle Mop, which was born in her father’s auto body shop on Long Island more than a quarter century ago. She says she was partially inspired by the fact that her father had a small sailboat, and he used cotton mops to swab the deck.

“I always thought this was the craziest thing: You are mopping up something dirty, and you are wringing it out with your hands,” says Mangano, who envisioned that her invention would one day be in KMarts across the country.

Thus, the Miracle Mop has easy-to-grip interlocking handles, allowing users to wring it out without getting their hands wet.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

But the best laid plans don’t always work out the way we expect, and Mangano started out advertising her mops in boating magazines and struggled to get them into local retail stores. She eventually approached QVC, which purchased 1,000 mops on consignment. When sales didn’t take off, she convinced QVC to let her go on the air to demonstrate the product. Her belief and enthusiasm paid off: She sold

more than 18,000 mops in less than 30 minutes.

"I often say, 'Take your eye off the prize,' because I had this goal, and I completely took a different path and ended up in a completely different direction," she says. "My original vision was I wanted mops in every store. I have gone way past that – in another direction I never thought of."

Mangano, who began appearing on QVC in 1992, moved to HSN in 1999. It purchased her company, Ingenious Designs, LLC, and she has been with HSN ever since.

Since those early days, she has experienced monumental success selling a host of other products and often appearing on HSN to promote her latest wares. She appears live at least once a month, sometimes more, and is the top generator of new customers on HSN. Her popularity is evidenced in her sales statistics. For example, she has exceeded \$10 million in sales in a single day and generated nearly \$2 million in sales in an hour, according to HSN.

Mangano is in Florida so often

that she considers it her second home. She owns a 7,100-square-foot home in Tampa, near HSN's headquarters, in St. Petersburg. When she's not in Florida, she calls an estate in St. James, Long Island, home.

She's even in the restaurant business, having opened Jema last year, in Huntington, Long Island, with Brazilian-born Chef Franco Sampogna. The restaurant, which features globally inspired dishes with local produce, has been a hit with Long Islanders, and Mangano is often seen there.

HAVING IT ALL

Being a working mother of three wasn't always easy, and following her dreams took "a big leap of faith," she says. Leaning on her family, surrounding herself with those who believed in her and "putting one foot in front of the other" kept her going, she says. Mangano included her children in her work when she could, never seeing them as an impediment to her career.

"My children always were part of everything I did as much as I could have them be, and that manifested itself as life went on," says Mangano, whose three children, Robert, Christie and Jackie,

continue to work with her today. "If you have a passion and you love what you are doing, [raising children] is not a separate world from everything else you do."

Her philosophy is to never lose sight of your customer base and to always work hard. She believes that her financial success comes with responsibility, and sometimes that means working harder today than when she first started.

"My day is even fuller now. If I didn't sleep then with three little kids, I don't sleep at all now," she says, laughing.

On the day of our interview, Mangano was on a tight schedule. She was planning to take part in a discussion at WeWork New York City – which provides shared workspace and services to entrepreneurs, freelancers and small businesses – with Alfa Demmellash, CEO of Rising Tide Capital, a nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming lives and communities through entrepreneurship. The women shared their stories, discussed the vital role of entrepreneurs in today's world and introduced WeWork's Creator Awards to the Big Apple.

"If WeWork existed when I was starting out, I might not have started in the back of my father's auto body shop on a dusty desk," Mangano says.

In 2015, The Joy Mangano Foundation, which she established that year to help aspiring businesspeople nationwide, partnered with Rising Tide Capital. The latter awards entrepreneurs full scholarships to attend its nationally recognized business-management training curriculum, and the nonprofit provides ongoing support as entrepreneurs turn their dreams into realities. The WeWork event is one example of how the two organizations are working together to inspire and assist entrepreneurs.

"The most important advice I give is that you don't have to give up your life to do this," Mangano says. "You should do it in a matter of steps so you are not mortgaging



colors and includes a quick-release removal system, allowing users to wash the mop head easier.

Of course, with fame come copycats, and Mangano's products are not an exception. Take the Huggable Hanger, for example: She's seen a variety of knockoffs come into the market. But she's not worried about the competition.

"Unfortunately, with success, people try to capitalize on it. You can't change that, but you can keep making a quality product at a great value, and that's where the founda-



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Mangano with her children, Robert, Jackie and Christie

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your house or quitting your job. It should be done in a rational and realistic way, and, if it takes longer to get it done, then do it that way. But do it."

She certainly has done it. Today, she holds more than 100 patents and trademarks. Her sales successes have come in spades. As of 2017, she has sold more than 2.3 million MemoryCloud Pillows, 4.2 million Better Beauty Cases and Jewel Kits and 6 million My Little Steamers. And her Huggable Hangers are the No. 1 best-selling product in the history of electronic retailing, having sold more than 773 million units, according to HSN.

Although her customers are primarily women, Mangano says that, when she's designing, she does it

with a universal audience in mind.

"With a customer base that is primarily female, there is no doubt that I pay attention to that, but a pillow is a pillow, and a steamer is a steamer," she says. "I want as many people possible to benefit from a product, whether it's a mop or hanger or a pillow that allows you to have a sounder night's sleep. These are the things I think about when I look at the features and benefits of the products."

Last year, Mangano began selling many of her products in retail outlets, including Bed Bath & Beyond, The Container Store, Macy's and Target.

After the success of her movie, she redesigned the Miracle Mop. The new one comes in a variety of

tion of the Joy brand comes in," she says. "After 25 years, I have built that trust and foundation in the brand, and that's the difference between the Joy brand and a knockoff on any of my products, whether it's a steamer or a pillow."

Despite all her success, Mangano isn't thinking of retirement quite yet, she says.

"We will have breakthroughs in certain categories; I can't tell you which ones, but they are going to transform those categories just as Miracle Mop and Huggable Hangers did in their categories ... and more recently my luggage, where we really did reinvent the wheel. The more the customer says, 'I love it and want it,' the more we want to do. It's a beautiful thing." ◻