



Women Make History:

Stories we should have learned in school

"Every Woman Has the Right to Know Whether or Not She is Pregnant."

Ad created by Margaret Crane
Inventor of the Home Pregnancy Test



Meg Crane at 24, by Anna Kaufman Moon

Margaret Crane: Mother of the Home Pregnancy Test

In 1967 when 26-year-old graphic designer Margaret Crane took a job with a pharmaceutical giant outside New York, she never imagined that her greatest contribution to the company—and to women worldwide—would be a scientific invention. Using a paper clip holder, reflective mylar, a test tube, and an eye dropper, Crane [developed](#) the prototype for the first at-home pregnancy test and launched a multi-million-dollar industry.

[Born](#) in 1941, “Meg” Crane was hired to create packaging and other promotional designs for the [Organon](#) pharmaceutical company in New Jersey. In one of the labs, Crane [noticed](#) “rows of test tubes with mirrors underneath them” and was told they were pregnancy tests. At the time, pregnancy tests were only administered by doctors in their offices, then sent to labs for processing. The procedure [involved](#) adding a few drops of a woman’s urine to a chemical solution, shaking it, then allowing it to sit for a few hours. The solution would turn a certain color if positive.

The test seemed so [simple](#) to Crane that she wondered why women couldn't perform it themselves in the privacy of their own homes. [According](#) to Crane, she replicated the testing device using a plastic paper clip box and lining the bottom with reflective Mylar. She added a test tube and an eye-dropper and presented her prototype at work. Crane's idea met with firm [resistance](#).

Crane recalls: "They said women should not know this [information] for themselves...It would be used for abortions, someone would kill herself and the company would be sued." Organon was afraid of political and social repercussions and also [losing](#) lucrative business from doctors who held the monopoly on administering pregnancy tests. Although the sexual revolution was under way, in 1967 it was illegal in twenty-six states for doctors to prescribe contraception to unmarried women. To obtain birth control, single women often had to lie about their marital status, wear fake wedding rings, and provide other false information.



Photo by Brendan McCabe

Soon after Crane's idea was rejected, however, Organon began developing similar prototypes. When Crane discovered that the company had hired an advertising agency to determine the product's market potential, she [snuck](#) into the meeting and placed her design alongside the others. The marketing expert selected Crane's prototype as the one with the greatest consumer appeal. Organon filed for a patent and listed Crane as inventor.

Named the Predictor, Crane's test kit was initially marketed in Canada but it took nearly 10 years to receive FDA approval in the U.S. Today, at-home pregnancy tests are used by women around the world and it is [estimated](#) that eight out of ten women administer the test themselves.

Although Crane launched a multi-million-dollar industry, she never benefited from it financially. Organon licensed the product to three other pharmaceutical companies. For the sum of one dollar, Crane signed over the rights to her design. She never received the dollar.

Crane's groundbreaking contribution would have remained unknown, but in 2012 [The New York Times](#) ran a piece about the history of home pregnancy tests. Crane read the article, and when she saw that her name was missing, she reached out to the reporter who had written the story. Since then, Crane is being recognized for her invention.

[According](#) to the reporter, Pagan Kennedy, "She understood what an at-home pregnancy test would mean: It was a way for a woman to peer into her own body and to make her own decisions about it, without anyone else — husband, boyfriend, boss, doctor — getting in the way."

Crane also played an important [role](#) in marketing home pregnancy test kits. In that fateful meeting with the ad agency to explore the product's

consumer appeal, she met the man who became her life-long partner. Crane left her job at Organon and the couple [formed](#) their own marketing company, [Ponzi and Weill](#). Together they created early advertising campaigns that helped to breakdown the many social stigma's surrounding home pregnancy tests.

In 2016, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History purchased the original prototype of the Predictor after it was [auctioned](#) at a price of \$11,875.



Margaret Crane, by Ashley Gilbertson, The New York Times

Ms. Crane is 82 years-old and lives in New York City. Her partner passed away in 2008.

Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

Ask Yourself: Have you ever had to lie to obtain reproductive healthcare?

Ask a Friend: Why does the idea persist that women can't be trusted to make decisions about their own bodies?



[Sharon Spaulding](#) discovered the hidden story of Mary Ware Dennett, suffragist, sex education and reproductive rights activist, when she married one of Dennett's great-grandsons. Today, she curates the family's archives.

Sharon has spent twelve years researching first-wave feminism, the battle for reproductive rights, and Mary's life in the context of politics and social mores from 1914–1947. She received a grant from Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library to support her research and the creation of a manuscript. Her essays about Dennett have appeared in [Ms. Magazine](#), [Smithsonian](#), and [New Hampshire Magazine](#).

Sharon is a popular speaker at women's and civic groups, and also book clubs. She is available to speak on the forgotten stories of remarkable women and the history of the suffrage and reproductive rights movements of the early 20th century. [Schedule](#) a talk with your group!

Sharon lives near Salt Lake City with her husband and two dogs, Gus and Hank.

Help reclaim the lives of remarkable women. Share the newsletter and invite others to subscribe. Follow me on social media. www.SharonSpaulding.com



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