

# Bette Clair McMurray Biography

## Bette Clair McMurray

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# Contents

<a href="#">Bette Clair McMurray Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>

# Biography

Betty Clair McMurray (1924-1980) was a typist who invented Liquid Paper.

Bette Clair McMurray dropped out of school when she was seventeen because of disciplinary difficulties. In the 1940s there were very few jobs open to young women. She could not type, but she got a job as a secretary for a law firm because of her personality. The attorneys sent her to night school for her high-school diploma and secretarial training. She married Warren Nesmith in 1942, and their son (Michael) was born in 1943. After she and her husband divorced in 1946, she had to provide for her son and herself, and she attempted to do so, relying on her shaky secretarial skills.

## Tempera Solution

In 1951 McMurray was an executive secretary at Texas Bank and Trust in Dallas. The typewriters used there had ribbons made with carbon film. Erasing errors made on these typewriters looked messy. As an amateur painter, McMurray knew that artists made corrections by painting over mistakes rather than erasing them. So, she began using a white tempera paint to paint over her mistakes.

## Mistake Out

It did not take long for the secretaries at the Texas Bank and Trust to catch on to McMurray's idea. By 1956 she was bottling "Mistake Out" in her garage for their use. She started learning about how paints are made and experimented with changing the formula. She developed a quick-drying modification that was nearly undetectable after use. By 1957 she had patented her product with the new name "Liquid Paper." She had her son fill little bottles with Liquid Paper in a work space at her home. After she was fired for accidentally typing "The Liquid Paper Company" on a letter instead of her employer's company name, she devoted herself full-time to selling Liquid Paper.

## Gillette

It was not until the late 1960s that McMurray's efforts began to pay off, and then it became very successful. Gillette bought Liquid Paper in 1979 for \$47.5 million and agreed to pay royalties to McMurray on every bottle sold until the year 2000. Her son Michael Nesmith, meanwhile, had become a rock 'n' roll star in the 1960s with the Monkees.