SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

When the 14-year-old Bella Weems asked her parents for a car for her sixteenth birthday, they told her she'd have to earn the money herself. So started an inspirational journey that reads like a teen-movie script.

"I have wonderful memories of going with my mom to the bead store and picking out my favorites to make jewelry," she reminisces, before launching into a lively account of her first step into founding Origami Owl, a $250 million business. "I discovered some pretty glass lockets online and had the idea of personalizing them by placing charms inside." Bella then added the $350 she'd earned babysitting to a matched sum from her parents, and bought the wholesale components to create her first collection of Living Lockets.

They were a runaway success, and after selling at house parties and to local boutiques, Bella and her mom, Chrissy, opened a kiosk at the Chandler, Arizona mall. It was just in time for Black Friday 2010, and shoppers loved her ideas: customizable lockets that say "This is me!" and make everyone a designer. "I knew at that moment we had something big." Using a direct sales model, Origami Owl continued to grow at a breathtaking rate.

Mature beyond her years, Weems reflects for a moment: "I also quickly realized that it 'takes a village'. You can't do it alone. I'm thankful for my family; they believed in me. It's challenging to be taken seriously as a young entrepreneur and people will underestimate you, but if you believe in yourself, and that no dream is too big, you'll be successful."

And where did the unusual moniker come from? "When my mom and I were brainstorming names, I thought about what I love: origami is unique and beautiful, and owls represent wisdom and courage."

Today, Bella is 18 and her million-dollar business has nearly 500 employees and thousands of designer-sellers. Not that she's let it go to her head. She remains grounded, working as an intern at her own company to learn all she can about day-to-day operations (when she's not writing songs at her piano or playing the ukulele). "This experience is helping me decide what path I want to take in college."

Finally, this astonishingly early achiever gives her last words to Origami Owl's legion of fans: "Being a part of our annual convention, where we get the opportunity to host over 5,000 people and speak with the designers, makes me truly happy."

Oh, and did she get that car? Of course she did—it's a white jeep named Alice!

Download Bella's latest songs from iTunes: 100% of the profits go to Childhelp's Speak Up Be Safe initiative.