

# Biography

**W**ith passion, determination, humor and hard work, Jill Blashack Strahan has become a captivating speaker, author and one of the nation's leading female entrepreneurs.

## Starting Small & Dreaming Big

Born and raised in rural Minnesota, Jill grew up on her family's farm, where she was deeply influenced by her father's entrepreneurial spirit. "Dad was typically before his time," she says. "He was an ideas man."

Like father, like daughter.

After earning an associate's degree in sales and marketing, Jill co-owned and managed a cafe with her father called "Jill's Grill" and later started her own retail gift basket shop. And then her story took a whole new turn.

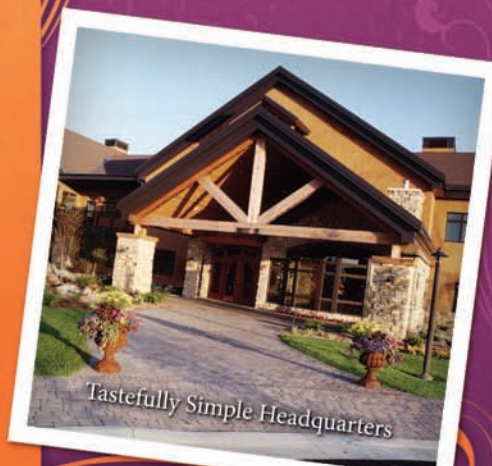
In 1995, she founded Tastefully Simple on what she often calls "a dream and a shoestring." In fact, the company started in a 1,200 square-foot shed with no running water, using a pool table as a packing station.

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A Small-Town Girl  
with Big Dreams.

A Brilliant  
Entrepreneur.

And a Woman  
who Never  
Looked Back.



### Finding Strength in Tragedy

Then – just three years into the business – Jill was rocked by tragedy. Her brother was killed in a fall, and only a few months later, her husband died suddenly. Jill was then faced with raising her 5-year-old son alone and a skyrocketing business.

The decision to continue was difficult. However, Jill pushed herself and developed a new appreciation for living one day at a time. She says, “You always have a choice. You can get better or get bitter.”

### Burning Bright

Today it's easy to see how Jill Blashack Strahan's passion and perseverance paid off. Tastefully Simple has become a \$100 million-plus, award-winning company in the Inc. 500 Hall of Fame. Thanks to her outstanding leadership and spirit, Jill has also been personally recognized with many honors, such as:

- 2010 *Twin Cities Business* “200 Minnesotans You Should Know”
- 2009 Minnesota Business Professionals of America – Outstanding Business Executive of the Year Award
- 2008 Minneapolis/St. Paul Women in Business Industry Leader Honoree
- 2007 Minnesota Entrepreneurs, Inc. Entrepreneur of the Year
- 2006 *Twin Cities Business* Hall of Fame
- 2005 *Inc.* magazine's list of “Inc. 500” CEO All-Stars
- 2005 *Fast Company* magazine's 25 Top Women Business Builders
- 2004 Small Business Administration Entrepreneurial Success Award
- 2003 Ernst & Young® Entrepreneur of the Year National Finalist
- 2000 Ernst & Young Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year for Minnesota & the Dakotas

### Inspiring Others to Shine

In 2007, Jill Blashack Strahan also became a published author with *Simply Shine: Stories That Stirred the Fire* – a collection of inspirational stories about her life and journey with Tastefully Simple. And in 2008, she began sharing her powerful and uplifting message with the nation as an inspirational speaker.

Today Jill makes her home in Alexandria, Minnesota, with her husband, Gary, and her son, Zach.

