

LAST WORD

SMART COOKIE

After a 15-year career as a television producer and exec, Sara Leand left it all to create the Sara Snacker Cookie Company. Here, she talks about what inspired the transition and why the cookies she bakes are one of a kind. — *Rachel Bowie*

New York Resident: Where did you get your sweet tooth?

Sara Leand: Ever since I was a little girl, I've always loved baking. Growing up, I definitely baked more than I cooked. Plus, it was always fun to make desserts! I've never made traditional desserts though. Instead, I like to change it up.

NYR: When did you start the Sara Snacker Cookie Company?

SL: My friends in college used to encourage me to sell my cookies so I actually started Sara Snacker when I was in college. I did it for two years while I was a student there, but decided to put it on hold when I graduated and moved to LA.

NYR: That move to LA launched a 15-year career in television. Was Sara Snacker always in the back of your mind?

SL: I always said that I wanted to do it one day, but I never knew when that day would come. I was so immersed in TV and it's very scary to leave an industry that you know so well, not to mention one that you're succeeding in. But cookies were always my true passion. It wasn't until I moved to New York that I began to think that I wanted to go back to Sara Snacker. Once I found out I was pregnant, I decided the time was right to make the switch.

NYR: So Sara Snacker was reborn. How had the company evolved since college?

SL: When I was in college, I literally did everything out of my dorm. It was a very small-scale operation — I was just doing it for fun. This time, the whole project snowballed literally overnight! While I was still working in TV, I spent time doing research on the baked good industry and worked on developing the perfect cookie recipe. Just as I was perfecting my first recipe, the Fancy Food show was happening...I got accepted to be a part of the New Brands on the Shelf division, which is basically this amazing program for companies that have only been in business for less than one year. You present your product and a panel critiques your work. I was selected as one of 25 participants.

NYR: What was the recipe that you entered with?

SL: It was for the Chipn'etzel. I wanted to launch with something that was different. My husband loves my chocolate chip cookies, and he kept saying, "why don't you just do that?" But I couldn't be another chocolate chip cookie on the shelf — there are so many! It is such a competitive industry that you have to stand out. Once I tasted the Chipn'etzel, I knew I had created something different.

NYR: And it sounds like your recipe was an instant success...

SL: The whole thing has been such a whirlwind. I thought that I would do the website first and take baby steps into the wholesale business, but it all happened backwards. At the Fancy Food show,



I was extremely fortunate to find several distributors nation-wide that were interested in my product. I decided that the best plan was to start slowly and get to know the Metropolitan area first. The show was held in late June '09 and, since then, my cookies are now sold in nearly 20 stores throughout the city!

NYR: I know family is extremely important to you. Has your one-year-old daughter tried your cookies?

SL: She actually has! My husband gave her the white chocolate dipped and it was hilarious! She loved it. Her face was covered in white chocolate. I wouldn't suggest these for one-year-olds, but it was really fun. Don't they say you are never too young or too old to love cookies? I don't know how great it is that a one-year-old is eating these, but it was very cute!



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