

realLIFE

INSPIRING STORIES. GREAT READS. EVERYDAY ADVICE.

HOW SHE DOES IT

A MOM'S NUTTY BUSINESS IDEA

WHEN DANIELLE DIETZ-LIVOLSI and her husband, Kevin, adopted their son Greg from Ukraine in 2002, they were concerned about how malnourished he was. Then 3½, Greg “was a little peanut,” Danielle recalls, “the size of an 18-month-old.” His pediatrician told her to feed him protein, so she tried, serving him beef and chicken at mealtime. But after having been raised on porridge, “Greg didn’t like the texture of meat,” she says. A lifelong creamy peanut butter lover, Danielle thought Greg might like it, too. So she began experimenting with making her own to feed him. ➔

Danielle with Greg, left, and Matthew

Hair and makeup by Claudia Humburg

→ Then a radio sales rep, Danielle was also a passionate home cook who regularly read books on food and nutrition. That was how she discovered that peanuts were an incomplete protein, missing some of the essential amino acids Greg needed. So, to add those vital elements, she bought a variety of ingredients, such as hazelnuts and flaxseed, from local stores. Then she mixed them with the peanuts in her food processor. Greg gobbled up the first batch.

In 2005, Danielle and Kevin, a medical-device salesman, adopted another son from Ukraine. Matthew, then 1½, was also malnourished and also loved Danielle's nut butter. One night, after cleaning the food processor, a messy job, Kevin asked her why she didn't just buy a similar nut butter at the store. The answer was because there wasn't anything like it available. "Right then," says Danielle, "the idea [for NuttZo] hit me."

About a year and a half later, Danielle quit her job and launched her organic seven-nut-and-seed butter company, NuttZo. Her boys, now 16 and 11, are thriving (Greg is almost as tall as Danielle, and Matthew plays lacrosse and baseball), as is her million-dollar brand, which is available in almost 2,000 stores across the U.S., including Whole Foods and Costco. Below, the mom of three (including Jackie, 26, her daughter from a previous marriage) reveals how she turned a nutty kitchen project into a booming business. —*Rachel Bowie*

FEEDING FRUSTRATION "When we brought him home, Greg was the pickiest eater I'd ever seen. Meals took hours. We would cut things into itty-bitty pieces and he would chew and chew, only to end up spitting it out. We could get him to eat really thin mashed potatoes, rice, broths

and eggs. I would sneak things in, like cooked carrots in the potatoes, but it was hard."

RECIPE PERFECTING "The first time I fed Greg NuttZo, I served it on sliced banana. When he ate it, I felt like I'd hit the jackpot. As time went on, he gave me a lot of feedback: He liked the peanut taste, but he wanted it to be smooth and not too thick. Matthew liked it crunchy. We also sent samples labeled 'A,' 'B,' 'C,' 'D' to friends, family and their spouses to help improve the recipe."

SUPPORT FROM HOME "By summer 2008, I was working late into the night on NuttZo, which made it tough to give 100% to my job and my family. I was miserable. That fall, Kevin said, 'Give your notice. If we have to downsize to another place, we'll figure it out.' The idea of quitting my job and going down to one income was scary. Thank God I have my husband!"

THE POWER OF OZ "We were in 40 stores in Southern California when I decided to send Dr. Oz a jar of NuttZo. A month later, he e-mailed me to thank me. For the next two years, I sent him packages of NuttZo. When he got his own show, I reached out again. Within months, he featured NuttZo! We blew up overnight."

SUCCESS WITH MEANING "We have three different flavors: original; Power Fuel, which is peanut-free; and chocolate. We launched to-go packs (huge for athletes) in 2014, and we're working on a line of snack packs, too. It's mind-blowing to see Greg's eating habits today: He eats everything! He says he's not only Ukrainian, but also Japanese, Spanish, Italian and Mexican, because he loves all kinds of food now."

DANIELLE DIETZ-LIVOLSI

Age: 46

Current home: San Diego

Family: Husband Kevin, 46; kids Jackie, 26; Gregory, 16; Matthew, 11

Definition of downtime:

"Bodysurfing with my boys at the beach or getting a pedicure with my daughter."

Favorite gadget:

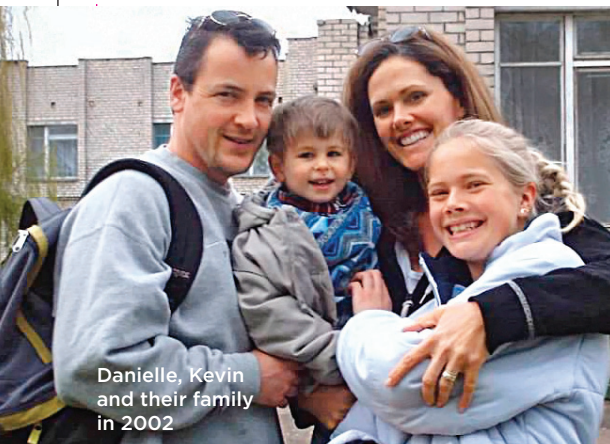
"I love my Vitamix! I make a smoothie almost every day."

Weird talent:

"I can hold a glass of wine with my toes (and drink it)!"

Currently reading:

Crazy Is a Compliment: The Power of Zipping When Everyone Else Zags by Linda Rottenberg



Danielle, Kevin and their family in 2002

ADOPTION OPTION

AS SEEN ON TV

"In 1999, Kevin and I saw a 20/20 episode about the horrific conditions in Romanian orphanages," Danielle says. They were so moved, they decided to adopt. Though Romanian adoptions have been closed to U.S. citizens since 2001, the LiVolsis found an agency that connected them with a Ukrainian orphanage, where they found their sons.

ADVICE FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Like the LiVolsi boys, many children who have lived in orphanages have difficulty adjusting to new foods, says Joint Council on International Children's Services CEO Tom DiFilippo. He recommends contacting a doctor with experience with internationally adopted kids who can speak to your child's specific nutritional needs. For a list of providers, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics at aap.org/sections/adoption.