

real**LIFE**

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Jami at work
in her Portland,
OR, kitchen

HOW SHE DID IT

CANDY GIRL

Jami Curl's new line
of all-natural sweets
is kid-tested —
and mom-approved

Photographs by Maggie Hudson



A Quin employee mid-creation. Right, blackberry-and-tangerine and mimosa gumdrops



IN 2012, after owning a bakery in Portland, OR, for seven years, Jami Curl was ready for a change. Business was great, but clocking 14-hour days making cupcakes by the thousands “was a grind,” she says. “Cupcakes just weren’t doing it for me anymore.” She loved working with sugar and had a sweet tooth, a trait she’d passed to her son, Theo, now 7. But the artificial colors and other additives in his favorite treats worried her: “I wanted to figure out how to make candy, but with real stuff.”

She began playing with sugar and flavors, roasting fruit to infuse her confections. In 2013, she closed her bakery and launched Quin Candy, a line of handcrafted sweets made from all-natural ingredients. Jami’s kid-friendly best sellers are spins on classics — like Dreams Come Chew, Quin’s tangy take on Starbursts. Her mimosa- and espresso-flavored gumdrops, meanwhile, cater to a more grown-up crowd. “I love seeing a kid respond to the candy and then a parent respond to our top-notch ingredients,” she says. Thanks to an appearance on Cooking Channel and blog buzz, Quin is now sold in more than 100 stores in the U.S., Japan and Canada. We asked Jami what it’s like to play Willy Wonka. — *Rachel Bowie*

NIGHT KITCHEN “Before I closed the bakery and launched Quin, I used the bakery’s kitchen to mess with sugar. After school, Theo did his homework there while I tinkered; I’d go back to the bakery after he was in bed, working as late as 2 A.M. I’m self-taught, but I research a lot. The big difference between baking and candy-making is understanding temperature control to get sugar to become hard, like in a lollipop, or soft.”

BIZ ON A BUDGET “For the first six months at Quin, I was still running the bakery, working out of the same kitchen for both businesses. I was married [she’s now divorcing] and was the breadwinner. To start Quin, I used savings and took out a \$15,000 loan to pay for ingredients and equipment. At first, we wrapped every candy by hand. It takes a person an hour to finish a batch (144 pieces); a machine can do it in three minutes, but the machine costs \$40,000, so I had to wait.”

BIG RISK, BIG REWARD “The decision to close the bakery was scary. I kept saying to myself, *The worst that could happen is you’ll have to find a new job.* I’m lucky. Two months after we opened, Cooking Channel asked me to be on their reality show *Unique Sweets*. It helped put us on the map.”

TRIAL AND ERROR “Many of my first attempts at lollipops containing real fruit were failures. I’d get through the cooking process and the chore of using a candy funnel to pour them out, wait for them to set and then pick one up, only to see it slump over onto itself! It took ages to find the right balance of fruit so the lollipop would stay upright. But I didn’t give up!”

LITTLE HELPER “Theo helps taste-test the candy and name our products. He came up with ‘Twizzlie Rolls’ [Quin’s version of Tootsie Rolls]. He definitely gives feedback, especially about what kids like. Sometimes he worries that the things I make are too adult. For Valentine’s Day, we make Aleppo-pepper and dried-grape caramels. I couldn’t pay him to eat one!”

JAMI CURL

Age: 39

Hometown:

Portland, OR

On prioritizing:

“My son, Theo, makes me aware of what’s worth my time and what’s not. I try to be half as amazing as he thinks I am!”

Key to great management:

“Outline expectations daily. No one will ever care as much about your business as you do. Accept that and act on it.”

On hiring fab talent:

“Do working interviews. We give candidates projects to show their skills.”

Best piece of career advice:

“Take responsibility for everything you do, good and bad. My dad taught me that!”