

real **LIFE**

HOW SHE DOES IT

TURNING LITTLE FEET INTO **BIG** BUSINESS

Susan Petersen,
founder of
Freshly Picked,
at home with
Hattie, *left*, and
Gus in Provo, UT

FORMER EXECUTIVE assistant and waitress Susan Petersen started her multimillion-dollar childrenswear business with a simple sketch. The idea came to her one day in 2009, after a frustrating shopping trip for shoes for her newborn son, Gus. Everywhere she looked, ➔



“I’ll never get rid of the brown moccasins my son wore as a baby ... so cute!”

the boys’ booties were embellished with “basketballs and bears,” Susan says. “All I wanted was something simple and colorful.” So she decided to make her own.

With a design she’d drawn at her kitchen table, she enlisted Gus and daughter Hattie, then 2, as fit models and sewed a prototype. Susan loved the brown leather booties so much, she put her next finished pair up for sale, pricing them at \$20, on the e-marketplace Etsy. It took a while, but after a few weeks, she had her first buyer, in California: “I screamed when it happened,” she says.

Five years later, thanks to tireless dedication, a bevy of celebrity admirers (see sidebar at right) and an appearance on the ABC reality show for entrepreneurs, *Shark Tank*, her online kidswear boutique, Freshly Picked, is booming. The Utah-based designer told *GH* about what it takes to build a brand from scratch and what she’s learned from being the boss. —Rachel Bowie



Five Things Susan Can’t Live Without

Vince Wedge booties

“When you work on shoes, you notice quality. I love these.”

Wit & Wisdom Stretch Skinny Jeans in Indigo

“You can dress them up or down.”

Ruffles

potato chips “I work out so I can eat these chips!”

Halogen Leather Moto Jacket

“People take me more seriously when I’m wearing a good blazer.”

Diptyque Feu de Bois scented candle

“I have one on my desk. The woodsy scent is comforting.”



HUMBLE BEGINNINGS “The first time I went to buy leather, I asked for a yard. The lady said, ‘No, hon, you have to buy the whole cow.’ A hide costs \$200 and makes about 40 pairs of mocs. We were pretty poor at the time, so we didn’t have money to spare. My brother owns a window-installation company. That first summer, I convinced him to give me his old windows so I could take the frames to the scrap yard for cash.”

LEARNING TO DELEGATE “I hired my first seamstress in 2011, after I started having panic attacks. I had been working until 2 A.M., taking care of the kids, running our social media, making and shipping 100 pairs of moccasins a month, and it was just getting too big. Now we have 11 full-time staffers.”

MARKETING GENIUS “I used to send mocs to influential bloggers. Then in 2012, a magazine editor e-mailed and said, *We want to feature your shoes with Kourtney Kardashian and her son, Mason. Can you send mocs?* Mason ended up being photographed in them. We didn’t see an immediate sales bump, but it raised our street cred. Recently we sent a pair to Beyoncé!”

SHARK TALE “After the *Shark Tank* episode aired, [investor Daymond John] and I decided the deal he’d offered [\$150,000 in exchange for a 25% share of the company] wasn’t a good fit. He thought I could make it on my own. It worked out. Plus, the exposure was massive: We got 38,000 new social-media followers!”

TINY TESTERS “I always say, ‘I’m not in the shoe business, I’m in the memory business.’ The moccasins are soft leather, so your child’s footprint embeds in them. I’ll never get rid of the brown ones Gus wore as a baby. They have his little footprint in them — so cute!”



SUSAN PETERSEN

Age: 35

Current home: Provo, UT

Family: Husband Christian, 36; kids Hattie, 8, and Gus, 5

Celebrity fans: Kim and Kourtney Kardashian; Busy Philipps; Tori Spelling

Role model: “My grandma. I come from a long line of women who’ve hustled.”

Guilty-pleasure TV: *House of Cards*, *The Good Wife*

Stress relievers: Working out — and sex!