

smile chocolatiers

THE SMILE STORY: A TALE OF TWO PHONE CALLS

(First person with Smile Chocolatiers Founder Joanie Freeman)

CALL ONE

One day my sister phoned from Chicago saying, "watch Oprah today. It's about following your dreams." It showed a young man who left a career in law to make cupcakes. It was so inspiring, and it got me thinking. I had always loved cooking and baking, and my family and friends had always said it could be a business for me.

A week later, I still couldn't shake the idea. Two weeks later, I visited the California School of Culinary Arts in Pasadena, California. Within a month, I was enrolled in their Cordon Bleu program in Patisserie and Baking. Taking out student loans at 50-something made me wonder, "Was I crazy?"

The program was rigorous, (up at three thirty *AM*, cooking by six). The camaraderie was great, and immediately after graduating I landed my first job as a Pastry Chef at Granita, Wolfgang Puck's eclectic Malibu outpost. I loved what I was doing.

But...I couldn't stop thinking about *chocolate*. Or, one particular Cordon Bleu instructor. A French chef, he taught us about chocolate and started every morning by yelling, "*Good morning, chocolate RULES!*" Part was his supreme passion for chocolate; the other part was a clear reminder of how "touchy" chocolate can be... It melts, it separates, it hardens too quickly or it won't harden at all. The science behind chocolate scared me, and at the same time, fascinated me.

CALL TWO

When one door closed, another opened...quite literally (and serendipitously). At the same that Granita closed, my cousin called asking if I wanted to "play in chocolate." Out of the blue, he had bought a little chocolate factory in Denver. Looking back, I think my curiosity with blending the flavors of tea with chocolate began on the flight there.

It was pretty simple and instinctual. I wanted to create something that tasted delicious. I started by asking myself lots of questions: "*How could I enhance the flavor of the chocolate and not its sweetness?*" "*Would the taste of the tea come through the taste of chocolate?*" Experiments in my kitchen led to impromptu tastings by all-too-willing friends and neighbors. And so continued my "adventure in flavor pairings."

Today, my company, Smile Chocolatiers, produces *Choclatea*, a line of 12 different (and equally flavorful) chocolate bars, all hand-blended with finely crushed organic tea. I'm still fascinated by chocolate. I still feel lucky that I answered the phone when I did. And what I love most of all is that in making my dream come true, I make people smile. That's why I named my company Smile Chocolatiers.