

How a Childhood Toy Inspired This Entrepreneur to Launch Her Business



Reminded of her passion, Laurie Gray ditched the corporate world and launched the Pie Bar bakery.

July 23, 2019 3 min read

This story appears in the July 2019 issue of *Entrepreneur*. [Subscribe »](#)

There's something about working with dough that's calming and therapeutic. I learned that from my mother, Beverley. As a child, I'd be by her side as she'd make cookies, brownies, breads, lemon bars, and pies – all from scratch. I'd then spend hours in my bedroom in a make-believe kitchen, replicating what I saw with my Little Chef toy oven.

Years passed. I grew up. After two decades and a career in

banking, I decided, *Heck, I'm going to give baking a shot instead.* In 2003, my friend and I put in \$500 each, stocked a space in a commercial kitchen with supplies, and started baking pies. We wholesaled to about a dozen local food stores and sold directly to customers at nearby farmers' markets.

Thing is, though, starting and running a business isn't easy. I was a single mother raising two kids. I had no health insurance or retirement savings. Steady paycheck? Yeah, right. I got nervous. After about two years, I sold my stake and returned to the corporate world.

Related: This Man Just Raised \$120 Million for a Fancy Home Juicer

Fast-forward to October 2014, and I lost my job. My reliable corporate cash flow was gone. While I tried to figure out my next move, I started baking pies to help calm my nerves. Then I got a call from my mother and she said, "Laurie, you won't believe it. I found your Little Chef oven in the attic."

Seeing it after all those years was emotional. I took it as a sign at exactly the right time. I was inspired to become a business owner again. To generate buzz, I started doing pop-up shops near my home in Long Beach, Calif. The response to my pies – many old family recipes – was overwhelmingly positive. When the doors to my new business, The Pie Bar, opened in June 2016, we had people lined up down the sidewalk. It hasn't slowed since.

Related: Online Grocery Recommendations Are Lacking. 3 Young Entrepreneurs Have Created an AI-Powered Solution.

Today that Little Chef toy oven sits on display in the front of the store. When kids come in with their parents, I get to share my story about playing with it and how it created a passion that led to owning my pie shop. It reminds me of how far I've come. If you quit, and that's it, then you'll never know what you can accomplish.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/335402>