

It's all in a nickname

Tantalisingly easy, Lizzy-B's convenient curry spice pouches are hot stuff

Words: Simon Knott

FROM HER maiden name Liz Curtis was nicknamed Lizzy-B while attending school in Barnet. More recently while searching for a company name of her own Lizzy-B seemed an obvious choice. The intervening years had been filled with a degree in food science at Reading University, followed by time at Coca-Cola as a marketing manager and subsequently a busy role with the spice company Schwartz in Thame, as an industrial business director. Although as Liz says the end of her time at Schwartz included a lot of soul-searching, reconciling the demands of the company and her two small children: 'It was no longer the balance I wanted. There comes point where the company share-price isn't more important than your family. I concluded I would prefer to be working for myself.'

By this time Liz had come full circle after the nomadic demands of husband, Peter's, job in the RAF. Returning once more to Hertfordshire they set up home in Harpenden. In 2002 with a resolve that so many people consider but far fewer act on she researched the practicality of putting her spice market experience in to practice. As Liz explains: 'I spent a lot of time at the Hatfield business library researching business reports for information. It became clear there was still strong growth in ethnic home cooking and that people wanted to cook meals from scratch, but didn't always have the time or ability.'

Enthused by her findings she created Dazzling Delhi, her first prototype ground spice sachet, which enables a quality Balti curry to be easily reproduced. An Indian friend of Liz's husband provided the inspiration for Terrific Tandoori, the second product. As Liz says: 'I decided to package the spices in different pouches for the different steps in a recipe. This ensured the meal replicated the correct way of cooking it, to ensure a better flavour.'

Recruiting almost 200 'guinea pig' friends and colleagues she waited for the feedback. The consensus was positive; people enjoyed cooking the dishes themselves but also liked the convenience. Another strong point was the freshness of the one-use spice sachets; in contrast to the rare outings the glass spice bottles we all have lurking at the back of our cupboards occasionally get.

As with any new business finance was a stumbling block from the start. So to minimise costs Liz outsourced the production and packaging to a small spice house in East Anglia. By May 2003 Liz was personally distributing her spice sachets to butchers and delis around Harpenden. She also attended Hertfordshire County Show employing the services of an interior design friend to help construct her stand. By November Liz had added Sizzling Satay to the product range and an introduction from a mentor led to Waitrose stocking her products. By Liz's own admission this was 'too much too soon' so she re-concentrated her efforts on the independent sector, developing sales via farmers' markets at St Albans, Hertford and Ware, as well as local trade shows and her website.

For 2006 Lizzy-B starts the year on an upbeat note after her recent win being voted *Slimmer Magazine's* best cookery product of the year. And with another new product, Spicy Rub Seasoning, aimed at livening up roasts and barbecues on the way, things are definitely looking up.



INFORMATION

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