

TOUGH COOKIE: FITNESS TRAINER WHIPS SWEET TREATS INTO SHAPE

WORDS BY RACHEL TRAVERS / PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATIE NOBLE



This is Bonnie Clancy's story, as related on her website:

"I have been encouraging people to stay fit and be healthy most of my life. Being a former personal trainer and owner of a fitness studio, I could see first hand the benefits of a balanced diet and active lifestyle. I also taught vegetarian cooking classes to espouse health and wellness. From this experience, I came up with Bonnievilles Power Cookie—a simple way to bring nutrition to the shelves for people on the go."

But Bonnie Clancy used to be a sugarholic. And she knew she had to change. In 2000 she took a macrobiotic cooking class in Brighton. Her epiphany came when the class made a relatively healthful chocolate chip cookie. "You can eat this cookie," Clancy said to herself and realized if she could have this in her life, she could probably change her lifestyle.

The path to the power cookie began with her teaching cooking classes, and then a vegan cooking class. She continued baking cookies but dropped the chocolate chips and created a plain peanut butter cookie. "People really liked it," she says.

Bonnie knew she had a good product. Understanding that people tend to indulge in sweets, her plan was to give them something that was nutritious, had no refined sugar or dairy and satisfied the sugar craving.

In 2002, she began selling at the Hingham Farmers Market, convinced that people would love her cookies as soon as they tasted them. She was right. Customers stood in line, and she always sold out.

The original cookies morphed into a plant-protein-based and gluten-free chocolate cookie she called Cocoa Cocoa (she got rid of the chocolate chips). And, using her original peanut butter cookie as the building block, she created

Coconut Almond and Cinnamon Ginger Cookies to round out the line.

Bonnie has lofty goals when it comes to cookies. She had set out to create “a cookie experience, something that’s really healthy for people, and share what I love.... I want people to enjoy the flavors without the guilt.” She considers the Bonnievilles “a sustainable energy cookie” to be used as a healthy snack or light lunch when paired with a piece of fruit. But in reality, she wants the cookies to contribute to other changes in people’s eating. She believes her cookies can help people stay on track.

Serendipity played as important a role in the story of Bonnievilles as did Bonnie Clancy’s personal journey. A trip into her local Whole Foods to find out where she could get bulk peanut butter led her to a “team leader” who happened to also be a “forager” (someone who is on the lookout for new local products). He asked Bonnie why she wanted to know this information. Bonnie told him about making her power cookies and was asked to bring him a sample, which she did.

She got a phone call the very next day to set up a meeting with all of the Newton Whole Foods team leaders as well as the bakery manager. “You won our hearts, we love the ingredients, we’d like to carry you in our store,” was the unilateral response from Whole Foods.

Things moved quickly at this point. Her initial packaging was fairly homemade and bore a sepia-toned photo of a 7-year-old Bonnie playing on a 1959 Pontiac Bonneville—ergo “Bonnievilles.” She expanded from her upstairs licensed home kitchen to a downstairs licensed commissary and made the decision to become gluten-free since all the equipment would be brand new.

In the small space she calls the commissary and thinks of as “Bonnieville,” there are three large windows with fresh herbs growing on their sills, looking out onto gardens and trees. In a well-choreographed dance, Bonnie works with Elissa Dunlap and Alison Canfield, hand-rolling cookies which are then laid out on baking sheets, 18 at a time. She can bake off five sheets in 16 minutes, and then the cookies are removed and re-racked to cool. Right now she bakes only for one long 10-hour day a week. But there is more to come.

New packaging and her new gluten-free certification have prompted more expansion. And though Clancy chose to sell to the Massachusetts Whole Foods first, she was actually given what is called “an allocation” for the whole region of Whole Foods in New England, and “Bonnievilles” will be going regional soon. She is also currently selling in 16 smaller outlets throughout the state.

Life keeps moving along in Bonnieville. In addition to expanding regionally

Bonnie has been working on two new cookies to add to the selection.

She found a jam she liked without refined sugar and has created a “sandwich” cookie with peanut butter and jelly and a salted peanut cookie dipped in peanuts

for extra crunch.

Bonnie clearly likes her life. “What’s better than baking cookies?” she asks rhetorically. “It’s always fun and one of the most homey warm things that you can do for yourself and to share with other people.”

Bonnie Clancy is one smart cookie.

To find Bonnievilles in your area go to bonnievilles.com.

Rachel Travers is a freelance food and lifestyle writer who has been contributing to the Boston Globe for 15 years—and to Edible Boston for its proud five! She can be reached at racheltravers.food@gmail.com.