

# Some careers take twists and turns

## From cooking class to entrepreneur

CARMEN CHEUNG  
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Susy Pardo calls herself the CBO of her company. Chief Baking Officer, that is.

Having attended Sheridan College for journalism, and worked as a project manager at an advertising agency, owning flourgirls, a specialty cupcake and cookie shop in Milton, Ont., is far from where Pardo, 35, imagined her life would be.

Born and raised in Canada, Pardo married an American and moved to New York for several years where she worked remotely for an advertising agency in Toronto.

While food, specifically desserts, had always been a passion of Pardo, it was the "circus of food" in New York combined with the desire to meet people in a new city that brought her to enrol in cooking school at the French Culinary Institute in New York City.

And once she walked through the door on her first day in the kitchen, she knew she was where she belonged.

"I just loved it. I just loved the feeling I got from being in the kitchen," she recalled. "If someone had told me 15 years ago that I would've ended up at cooking school in New York, I wouldn't have believed it for a minute."

Eventually moving back to Canada, Pardo and her husband decided to settle in Milton, west of Toronto.

Pardo started flourgirls online as a virtual store in February 2005 while still working full-time as a project manager at an advertising agency in Toronto. Ten months later, after having distributed dozens of cookies to a lot of people, "the right people started eating my product," she remembers.

In November of the same year, she had her first big break – Sweetspot.ca, a cooking website, ran an email about flourgirls cookies. Pardo received 300 emails about her products in the first 24 hours. Then Maclean's magazine called, wanting to add flourgirls to the "Recommended List" in their Newsmakers 2005 issue.

Pardo decided to resign from her full-time job and make flourgirls her career.

"The workload started to increase to the point where I just



Susy Pardo owns flourgirls, a specialty cupcake and cookie shop, that started as an online company.

PHOTO COURTESY FLOURGIRLS

felt that I needed to focus on one or the other," she said.

And choosing to pursue her opportunities with flourgirls wasn't a difficult decision for her to make.

The virtual store allowed Pardo the flexibility of not having to deal with the overhead costs of opening up a shop or keeping regular business hours. She was

available to meet clients in the evenings or weekends for wedding consultations from her dining room table. She did everything from client consultation, to delivery, to baking.

Eventually, though, she needed to hire someone to help with the baking. And by December 2007, flourgirls had its first retail location and three new staff members.

Pardo says things worked out well for her, thanks to a very supportive environment and family.

She cites the move from a home business to the storefront as the biggest challenge she's faced with flourgirls because of the lack of personal time.

Though Pardo's career started out completely different from where she is now, she says she believes that her past career paths have given her the foundation to succeed where she is now.

"They always say that people end up with six or seven careers in their lifetime, so I don't regret it at all," she said.

## WORKOLOGY

### Deciding to do something different is inspiring and scary



DONNA NEBENZAHL

A trip to India was the final piece of a puzzle that was to become Jennifer Loneragan's new life. A historian by training, she had spent years in the stifling bureaucracy of Canada's museums system, constantly bumping up against bureaucracy that dashed months of work or relegated bright ideas to dusty shelves.

Visiting India with a friend, they were in a village in Uttar Pradesh at a school started by one individual.

"The children were there, sitting at desks," recalled Loneragan, 42. "It was the first time I had a sense that one person can actually do something. With a little bit of money and a little bit of effort, one person can make a difference."

Wanting to make a difference had been building up in Loneragan for years, ever since she began work at the Museum of Civilization where she eventually became assistant curator.

"One of the jobs I had to do was focus on collections," said Loneragan, who received her PhD in women's intellectual history from Bristol University. "I began to realize we don't have very much that will help us tell women's stories."

As a historian, she was dealing with lots of written material, but in this environment she saw that there were very few objects that enabled the museum to tell women's stories.

"It was really then that I developed this consciousness of the dearth of women's things and how we don't value them," she said.

She discovered that women don't even value their own material culture; they would donate their husband's uniforms or other material, but either throw away their own stuff or not want to part with it for sentimental reasons.

"I began to nurse this idea in my head, looking for the way to encourage women to value their own art."

Women's creations are often crafts, Loneragan realized, and we really don't value craft the way we do art. So she came up with an idea of opening a place that would sell women's art; and

she added to that after the India trip a way to promote women's work in developing countries.

"The stuff from India, that beautiful embroidery that evolved from their long artistic tradition, fit into my plan," she said.

Frustrated after two years at another job in Ottawa, working for the National Historic Sites, she decided the time had come to turn her idea into reality. She volunteered for about a year in her spare time for Ten Thousand Villages, the fair-trade store, and this February, she moved to Montreal, where she took a business course for entrepreneurs and wrote up her business plan. All the while, she had been scouting potential artisans whose work she liked and began in earnest to search for a location for her store.

She financed the venture with "a little bit of love money" from her parents and cash from a portion of her own savings, and opened up in September on Park Ave. in Mile End.

"I represent the artisans in my shop," said Loneragan, whose takes all the pieces on consignment. "For me, it seems like the most concrete way that I could imagine of really encouraging women's creativity and women's art."

She carries works of about 30 artists, items like ceramic tableware in desert colours made by Anne-Marie Garceau, woven scarves and embroidered shawls in silk and wool from India, silver jewelry from a Calgary silversmith and mosaic-topped sidetables from Quebec.

The shop is named Artistri. She is giving herself a year of losing money, she says, and hopes to be making a good enough profit after three years that she can live off the business.

It's hard work and she doesn't sleep much these days. But life is exciting, Loneragan says, partly because handling bureaucracy has been reduced to dealing with the likes of Hydro-Québec.

"Now, if I have an idea, I can move on it," she said. "That's the most liberating thing. I don't have to wait; if it doesn't work, I try something else."

This business, she believes, realizes her dreams and gives women artists access to a market.

Artistri will hold a holiday event on Thursday, Dec. 11, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. at 5319 Park Ave., between Fairmount and St. Viateur. Artisans will be on hand to answer questions.

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