

People

Cooking up a new culinary concept

By Roxanne Hawn

Two weeks before turning 30, Elizabeth Yarnell (MLS '98) awoke blind in one eye. The news wasn't good: multiple sclerosis. Although her sight returned, the medical reality loomed.

Instead of melting down, however, she cooked up a solution that improved her health and changed her career. Today, the former instructional designer feels better and lists inventor and cookbook author among her credits.

Yarnell, whose cupboards at the time featured gummy bears and little else, believed she could fight the disease by eating better. She took cooking lessons, but fatigue won out. "Everything I wanted to cook took forever, especially since my focus was on whole foods," she says.

Stumped by the Dutch oven she received as a wedding present, this self-proclaimed "last-minute cook" threw meat and vegetables in the pot and cranked her oven as high as it would go (450 degrees). "Forty-five minutes later," she says, "it just smelled so heavenly. I took it out, and we had a great dinner."

Yarnell began experimenting with carbs and other ingredients. Ultimately, she landed upon a solution for whole-food, complete meals spanning culinary traditions that require little prep and only 30–45 minutes to cook.

When a houseguest asked for her secret, Yarnell drafted a 12-page manuscript. "It explained the concept and the method and included a couple recipes," she says. "I started handing that out with Dutch ovens as wedding gifts. People loved it."

In 2001, she expanded the booklet, pitched publishers, launched a Web site and began the patent process to protect her "infusion" cooking method.

Some 50 rejections later, Yarnell needed a new plan. Publishers were not interested. She didn't own a restaurant. She wasn't a famous chef or chef to someone famous. She hadn't even gone to culinary school. After promising negotiations, corporate sponsorship from a major Dutch oven brand also fizzled out.

"This thing I'd been working on for five years fell through completely," recalls Yarnell, who by then had two small children. "Even my agent expressed a lack of faith in me, so I fired him. I said, 'OK. I'm going to cry for a month, then what am I going to do?'"

Despite her fears about the expense and stress of independent publishing, Yarnell rallied family resources, including an advance on her inheritance, to publish 2,000 cookbooks. She sold all of them the first month. Over the next few years, Yarnell sold another 10,000.

She set out for the 2007 Book Expo America to snag a new agent and a mainstream publisher. "As it turned out, the editor from Broadway Books (a Random House imprint) already owned my cookbook," Yarnell marvels.

The new edition of *Glorious One-Pot Meals* came out in January 2008. After years with little financial ease or sleep, Yarnell says, "My biggest definition of success is having people 'get it.' This is a totally different concept, not just another cookbook."

>> www.elizabethyarnell.com

>> www.efforlesseating.com



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