Life is sweet after a rocky road

On the job: Natalie Marshall and her mother, Virginia, at the Port Fairy markets which is one of the many markets they visit as Natalie's Handmade Chocolates.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] I [/dropcap]n that funny way of life, a painful and unexpected event can often lead to a fresh start and a new way of doing things, which is exactly what happened to Warrnambool chocolate maker **Natalie Marshall**.

It is almost 10 years since Natalie suffered a work accident at the former Nestle's factory, in Dennington, and was eventually unable to return to her job because of chronic back pain. It was while undergoing rehabilitation, however, that she thought about taking a new path in life.

“I used to make chocolates at home when I was a kid and I started to think about possibly doing this as a proper business,” Natalie explained.

“After all, people love chocolates!”

[dropcap style=”font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;”] N [/dropcap]atalie spent 12 months investigating how to start a small business and drew up a detailed business plan for **Natalie’s Hand Made Chocolates** that included a start-up menu of 12 different chocolate varieties all made from a Cadbury chocolate base.

Finally, about three years ago, she went public with her sweet treats at her first market and proved her theory right: people really do love chocolate!

Actually, it was not her *very* first market, as Natalie once sold some chocolates at a Port Fairy market as a 16 year old, after being invited along by a friend.

“I turned up with a plate of chocolates that I had made in my Mum’s kitchen and I had them spread out on a plate with some Glad Wrap over the top: that was it,” she laughed.

“And you know what? I sold out!”

[dropcap style=”font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;”] M [/dropcap]arkets have certainly evolved since the days of Glad Wrap covered plates, with savvy customers now looking for hand-made products that are beautifully presented and packaged and that keep up to speed with changing tastes.

Natalie still makes her chocolates from home, which she shares with her mother and co-worker, **Virginia Marshall**, but it is now a registered commercial kitchen that produces not 12, but 35 different menu items including two of her best sellers; a white raspberry chocolate and a rocky road.

“I have been really, really pleased with how it has gone and how we have grown,” she said.

Natalie, Virginia and two friends are familiar faces on the south-west Victorian market circuit and will often attend up to four markets a weekend between them, stretching from Willaura, to Geelong, to Port Fairy. It can be exhausting work, but Natalie is determined to keep growing.

“One day, I hope to be able to open my own chocolate shop here in Warrnambool: that’s the five-year plan,” she said with a smile.

[box type=”bio”] Natalie’s Hand Made Chocolates can also be found in florists and select stores around south-west Victoria, including Cheeseworld, Allansford. Visit the Facebook page here.[/box]

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