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SHARI FITZPATRICK

She's 'Berried in Chocolate'



By TAYLOR GRIGGS: H&N Staff Reporter

Shari Fitzpatrick has loved strawberries since she was a child.

"My love affair with strawberries started when I was 4 years old, right here in Klamath Falls," Fitzpatrick, a Klamath Falls native who now lives outside Sacramento, said. "My dad had a garden every year which included a strawberry patch."

Fitzpatrick said that when it came time to harvest the strawberries, she always knew she was in for a treat.

"I had this great system. Two for the bucket and three for me," she said.

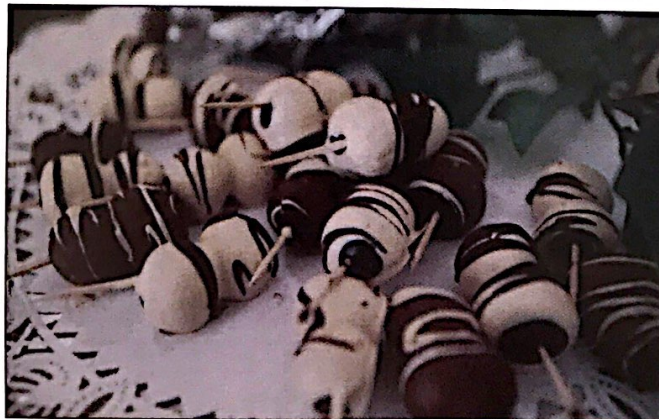
Fitzpatrick's childhood love for strawberries grew into something much bigger when, during a stint in Los Angeles working as a mortgage broker, she realized that other people were fans of her chocolate-dipped strawberries, too.

PERSONAL DELIVERY

"I would deliver chocolate strawberry baskets to real estate agents to market myself," Fitzpatrick said.

From there, she started her own company, "Shari's Berries," which she said she started in 1989, when she was 25, with a \$1,500 credit card cash advance. The company was a hit, with Fitzpatrick's strawberries the star of a multimillion-dollar company that got the attention of the likes of television personalities Oprah and Guy Fieri.

Fitzpatrick said that in the ninth year of business, she "agreed to a bad business deal" that put the business in trouble. After 22 years, Fitzpatrick fell below 51% ownership of Shari's Berries. She lost the company which still had her name.



Passionate pursuit:

Shari Fitzpatrick, gourmet food entrepreneur, motivational speaker and author, holds a copy of her book, "Berried in Chocolate," at a chocolate and wine tasting at Rosterolla Wine Company of Klamath Falls on July 12.

H&N photo by Taylor Griggs

"It broke my heart, I didn't think anything like that was possible," Fitzpatrick said. "I grieved losing my company like I lost one of my sons."

Fitzpatrick, however, found a way to make this a mere road-block on her business journey. She had been doing motivational speaking throughout her time with Shari's Berries as a way to market her strawberries, and after she lost her company, she decided to use her passion for inspiring others, to write and publish a book.

SHARED EXPERIENCE

"I got a book deal right away," Fitzpatrick said. "Berried in Chocolate," Fitzpatrick's book about her experience as a businesswoman, and all the ups and downs that she experienced with Shari's Berries, was published by Pelican Publishing in 2010. She has a version of the hardcover book for sale that is – you guessed it – dipped in chocolate.

More recently, after a hiatus from making and delivering chocolate-covered treats, Fitzpatrick has started up again with a company named after her book.

"When I started Berried in Chocolate, it was back to being fun again," Fitzpatrick said. Shari's Berries still exists as a company, but she is no longer affiliated with the brand, which is something she wants people to know.



H&N photo by Taylor Griggs

Private label: Shari Fitzpatrick, gourmet food entrepreneur, motivational speaker and author, holds a bottle of her private label wine at a chocolate and wine tasting at Rosterolla Wine Company of Klamath Falls on July 12.

She said that the Shari's Berries company's strawberries are too "machine-friendly," and when customers started to notice, she knew that she had to start her hand-dipped strawberry business again.

Fitzpatrick also said that Berried in Chocolate, her new company, has expanded to beyond strawberries, to gifts both chocolate-covered and not.

"We have clusters of grapes on the vine dipped in chocolate," she said. "So you can tell people how 'grapeful' you are for them."



H&N photo by Taylor Griggs

Fresh pick: Shari Fitzpatrick talks about her chocolate-dipped gourmet treats during a chocolate and wine tasting at Rosterolla Wine Company of Klamath Falls on July 12.

Fitzpatrick has also ventured into the wine world with her wine label, "Shari's Grand Reserve." This wine, she said, is of course also available for purchase dipped in chocolate. But Fitzpatrick wants to make it clear that this chocolate-covered wine, made from grapes grown in Northern California's Fair Play region, is "not just a fun novelty."

"It's very impressive wine," she said. "And you can wake up with a cavity and a hangover at the same time."

Fitzpatrick said that a lot of her joy comes from helping others, which is why she gets a lot out of being in the gift-giving business.

"I love being in the gift business. Ever since I was a little girl, I loved giving gifts," she said. "I have the spiritual gift of hospitality."

Shari's strawberries, grapes, wine and book are all available for purchase at berriedinchocolate.com.