



PEN-International Interview with Jimmy Libman

(music)

Narrator:

JIMMY LIBMAN ALWAYS KNEW THOSE HOURS SPENT PERFECTING COOKIE RECIPES WOULD PAY OFF. AFTER GRADUATING FROM R.I.T.'S NATIONAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF, HE DECIDED TO PUT HIS FAMILY'S POPULAR RECIPE TO THE TEST BY OPENING HIS OWN BUSINESS, "GIMMEE JIMMY'S COOKIES," IN WEST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY.

Libman (through interpreter):

I HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO HAVE MY OWN BUSINESS, AND THAT WAS A GOAL I HAD FOR MANY YEARS.

MY MOTHER SAID TO ME AT THE TIME, "WHY DON'T YOU THINK ABOUT STARTING A COOKIE BUSINESS?" AND I DIDN'T LISTEN TO HER, AND I DIDN'T PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT SHE SAID. AND SHE SAID, "WHY NOT TRY IT?" SO, FOR AN EXPERIMENT, WE WENT TO DIFFERENT COOKIE STORES, AND I TASTED AND TESTED DIFFERENT COOKIES, AND TOOK SAMPLES, JUST TO SEE WHAT THEY WERE LIKE. AND I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, "THIS IS INTERESTING-- MY MOTHER'S COOKIES ARE THE BEST COOKIES, ESPECIALLY COMPARED TO THESE."

SO I SAID TO MY MOTHER, "WELL, I THINK MAYBE I WILL TRY THE COOKIE BUSINESS, OR AT LEAST GIVE IT A TRY IN AN EXPERIMENTAL WAY." SO MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME HOW TO MAKE THEM, AND WE DECIDED TO DO IT HERE IN MY HOME TOWN. WE OFFERED FREE SAMPLES OF COOKIES TO PEOPLE, AND EVERYBODY SAID, "I LOVE THE COOKIES." EVERYBODY THAT HAD THEM SAID THE SAME THING: "I LOVE THEM, I LOVE THEM." BUT THE OVEN WE HAD AT HOME WAS SO SMALL THAT IT WAS REALLY TIME-CONSUMING. SO MY DAD DECIDED THAT WE SHOULD GET A COMMERCIAL OVEN. WE GOT THE NEW EQUIPMENT, AND MY FATHER WAS WANTING TO PUT THE OVEN IN THE BACK OF THE HOUSE, NEAR THE BASEMENT, BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THE OVEN WAS TOO BIG TO FIT THROUGH THE DOOR. SO WE PUT EVERYTHING IN THE FRONT DOOR, PUT IT IN THE LIVING ROOM, AND THAT'S WHERE I DID MY EXPERIMENTING AND MY PRACTICING, AND IT WAS STARTING TO WORK; MANY PEOPLE CAME TO US ASKING FOR COOKIES. SO WE SOLD MORE AND MORE, AND IT WAS A REALLY GOOD START.

WE MOVED THE STORE FROM THE LIVING ROOM INTO THE BUILDING. THE BUSINESS KEPT GROWING AND, AT THAT POINT, I DECIDED TO HIRE SOME EMPLOYEES TO WORK WITH ME. THROUGH VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION, I WAS ABLE TO HIRE TWO DEAF EMPLOYEES. THEN WE HIRED A HEARING SECRETARY WHO KNEW SIGN LANGUAGE, AND SHE COULD COMMUNICATE VERY READILY WITH EVERYONE, AND WE HAD A REALLY GOOD RELATIONSHIP. SO WE'VE REALLY GOTTEN ALONG VERY WELL.

(jazzy music)

EVERY DAY, WE GET TO WORK, AND WE MAKE COOKIES ALL THE TIME. WE HAVE 19 DIFFERENT FLAVORS OF COOKIES. GOOD MORNING, THIS IS GIMMEE JIMMY'S.

Libman:



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BUT IN THE MORNING IS WHEN WE DO OUR PHONE CALLS. WE CONTACT THE SUPERMARKETS; WE GET FAXES; WE HAVE CORPORATE PROGRAMS THAT WE PROVIDE FOR, AND SO WE COLLECT ALL THE ORDERS FROM THESE DIFFERENT PLACES. THEN THE TINS ARE FILLED AND THEY'RE SHIPPED, EITHER BY UPS OR FEDERAL EXPRESS. SOMETIMES THERE'S 50 TO 200, SOMETIMES 300 A DAY THAT NEED TO GO OUT. DURING DECEMBER, CHRISTMAS SEASON, WE HAVE 1,000, 2,000, SOMETIMES EVEN 3,000 A DAY THAT GO OUT, AND THAT'S NORMAL FOR US DURING THAT TIME. AND MY EMPLOYEES ARE WONDERFUL! THEY HAVE REALLY FAST HANDS AND THEY WORK VERY QUICKLY, AND THEY SAVE ME A LOT OF LABOR BECAUSE OF THEIR QUICKNESS. BECAUSE I'M DEAF, I HAVE A SPECIAL LIGHT SYSTEM IN THE STORE. IT HELPS ME TO HAVE THE LIGHTS, TO KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING, AND IT WORKED VERY WELL-- IT WAS A GREAT IDEA. HELLO, I NEED SOME COOKIES. AND AS IT TURNED OUT, I DID HIRE THREE DEAF EMPLOYEES, AND THEY DEPENDED ON THE LIGHT SYSTEM AS WELL, AND IT'S WORKED GREAT.

Interviewer:

WHAT'S THE SECRET TO THE SUCCESS OF THESE COOKIES? THE COOKIES. HONESTLY, YEAH, THEY SELL THEMSELVES.

Libman:

I HAVE SEVERAL PICTURES FROM VARIOUS FAMOUS PEOPLE, AND EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, I GET A LETTER FROM SOMEBODY-- FOR EXAMPLE, PRESIDENT REAGAN TASTED MY COOKIES AND HE SENT ME A LETTER SAYING "THANK YOU," AND SAID HOW WONDERFUL THEY WERE. MY MOTHER ALWAYS SAID TO ME THAT WORD OF MOUTH IS A GREAT WAY TO GET BUSINESS GOING; IT'S THE BEST KIND OF ADVERTISING, AND WHEN PEOPLE START TALKING ABOUT IT, THAT'S HOW YOUR BUSINESS WILL GROW. I'M VERY COMFORTABLE, AND I TRUST THE PEOPLE THAT I WORK WITH, THAT HELP ME RUN MY BUSINESS, SO I HAVE NO WORRIES. THEY DO A GREAT JOB FOR ME, AND THEY HAVE FOR A VERY LONG TIME. I THINK ONE OF THE REASONS IS BECAUSE WE WORK WELL TOGETHER AS A TEAM.