

It's never too late to make 100K

Sian Merrylees talks to three women who prove that a second career can net a decent salary despite very amateur beginnings



"I get a thrill out of seeing my cereal on supermarket shelves"

Lucy O'Donnell, 42, is married to Carletto, 49, a fund manager. They live in East Sussex with their children Columbus, nine, Angelica, seven, and Archie, five.

OLD JOB: Selling pashminas.
NEW JOB: Launched LoveDean cereal in 2005.
START-UP COSTS: £12,000.
FIRST YEAR'S TURNOVER: £70,000.
CURRENT TURNOVER: £200,000
 – getting my cereal distributed in really great shops made all the difference.

"Since I've had children I've become horrified at the amount of additives in what we eat. Breakfast was problematic in our house as the food they liked wasn't healthy, and healthy food didn't appeal to them. When we went on a skiing trip to Austria I was delighted to find a delicious, healthy cereal on offer at breakfast. It was a nutty, oat, honey mixture – and the kids loved it. I hoped to return home with packets stuffed in my suitcase, but it turned out the hotel owners made it themselves. After we'd returned home I bought oats, nuts, seeds and honey at my local health food shop and made up my own version. When my husband – not a natural cereal man – ate it every day, I knew that I was on to something. I'd stopped selling pashminas and was looking for a business that worked around the kids. This seemed perfect. I'd kept my mixture in a sealable, recyclable pot so I decided to stick with it. But when I



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BEST MOVE "Moving production from home to off-site so I could concentrate on building the brand and selling."
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approached a wholesaler to buy pots, the minimum order was 1,000. I was shaking when I made the order, but this also helped me think of my cereal as a real business. I used about £6,000 from savings I'd put by when I was selling pashminas. And my husband matched my investment from savings. I joined the local food networking association – Hampshire Fare – and their advice was invaluable. They suggested I contact Trading Standards to check over my labels and explain about manufacturing and distributing. They also advised me to apply to the Great Taste Awards. I'd made my first batch of cereal in April 2005, and in July that year I won the Gold award. I was stunned. At first I sold the cereal through word of mouth. Whenever my husband grabbed

a sandwich somewhere he thought it might sell, he gave a pot to the owner to taste. I drove to local delis and cafes and booked appointments with buyers at larger stores. Gradually, sales increased and I took on my brother as a salesman. It was hard work. The first year, it took over our lives. We had boxes all over the house. As sales grew, I realised that I couldn't continue working from home. So I found a manufacturer to take over the making of the product and took the business to a new level. LoveDean cereals are now also sold in Partridges, Whole Foods and Fresh & Wild stores. I get a thrill out of seeing it on shelves. But I also love the fact that although I'm busy, I can still take the children to and from school. See www.lovedeanlarder.com.

Gabrielle Shaw Communications
 Burlington House, 184 New Kings Road, London, SW6 4NF
 Tel: 020 7731 8811 Fax: 020 7731 8300
www.gabrielleshawcommunications.com



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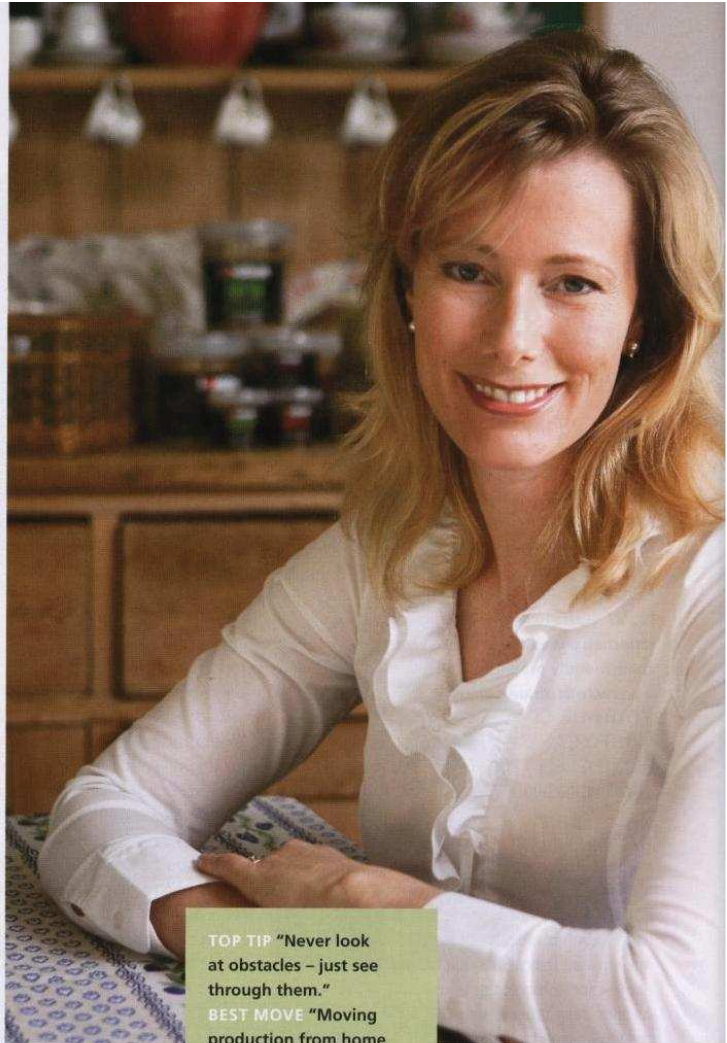
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