



A son's needs, a mother's refusal to give up lead to bakery empire

By Nancy McAllister

If you've ever popped a Goldfish cracker into your mouth, you've tasted the handiwork of Margaret Rudkin. You may not know her name, but chances are you've eaten at least one of her products.

When Rudkin was a 40-year-old housewife in rural Connecticut, she discovered that one of her three sons had serious allergies and asthma. He had to avoid most commercially processed foods and was ordered by a specialist to eat a natural diet of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

One day, Rudkin decided to try her hand at baking a loaf of stoneground whole wheat bread for her ailing son. The results were less than successful. "My first loaf should have been sent to the Smithsonian Institution as a sample of Stone Age bread, for it was hard as a rock and about one-inch high," Rudkin later joked.

But she didn't give up, and finally after numerous attempts, she came up with a loaf of bread she thought was good. Her son loved it. Her friends loved it. In fact, everyone who tasted it seemed to enjoy it. And best of all? Her son's health improved so much that his doctor began prescribing the bread for his other patients.

Eventually, Rudkin approached a local grocer about selling her bread. However, he was put off by the bread's price—25 cents a loaf, compared to the commercially processed white breads at 10 cents a loaf. Rudkin didn't try to negotiate with him, though. Instead, she let the bread speak for itself: She gave the grocer a taste. He took all she had, and so began her company, Pepperidge Farm.

When her husband took her bread to work with him in New York, word began to spread. In 1939, Rudkin baked her 500,000th loaf of Pepperidge Farm bread—still in the comfort of her own kitchen. Later she added the Distinctive Cookies European line, and eventually the iconic Goldfish crackers.

Rudkin's company achieved an average annual growth rate of 43 percent. And eventually Pepperidge Farm would exceed \$1 billion in annual sales. A bottom line built on a mother's love.