



Born in Brooklyn, Pure Genius Makes Seriously Sweet Bean Brownies



When thinking of a satisfying sweet treat, "bean brownies" aren't the first thing that come to mind. They're often chalky or overly gooey replications of their full-fat and -gluten counterparts, totally lacking in decadence.

But when you bite into a **Pure Genius** Deep Chocolate Brownie or Chocolate Chunk Blondie, all that hits your tongue is a soothing flood of chocolate, a crisp crumb, and a meltingly soft texture. Which is exactly what owner Nancy Kalish is going for.

Kalish was a writer for health-focused food publications like *Prevention*, *O*, and *Real Simple*, where she found herself asking each health expert she interviewed, "What do you eat?" Sadly, their answers often conflicted directly with her "god-awful sweet tooth."

"I'm talking the kind where I want to eat dessert for breakfast — that kind of sweet tooth," Kalish tells the *Voice*. "My health aspirations kept on coming up against my desire for Oreos."

She started reading about black-bean brownies and then playing with the recipes she found, but ran into problems from the get-go. For a start, most of the recipes tasted like black beans.

The recipes that used chickpea flour smelled horrendous — so much so that she thought the bags of flour she was buying had gone bad, that's how potently they hit her nose. Then she realized that's just the way the flour smells naturally. But the chickpeas in particular gave the brownies a texture that was "really luscious."

"It was very reminiscent of the slightly underbaked, fudgy brownies that I like," Kalish explains. "I thought that maybe if I could get the beany taste and, more importantly, the beany *smell*, out of there, I would have something I could enjoy."



Several times a week, for months on end, Kalish played with her recipe, working on brownies and blondies until they got better and better. She found using whole beans — not pre-processed flour — was a crucial first step. Then she came up with a specific order of adding ingredients that achieved a rich, indulgent flavor and smooth texture. One year later, Kalish had a base recipe she could be proud of.

After encouragement from friends and loved ones who'd tried countless bean brownies, Kalish decided to go to market. In early spring of 2015, she jumped in the deep end and signed up for a booth at a massive natural-product trade show. From there, Whole Foods started her on the process of applying to their stores — each of the chain's twelve regional hubs require separate application and approval. Eventually, Kalish found herself

scaling up and supplying 34 stores in the Northeast, which meant she had to overcome one major hurdle: shelf life.

"The way I eat is very clean," she says. "I don't like anything that I don't recognize on the label. But our shelf life was a week! No stores were going to take that! So we started researching natural preservatives, and I worked with a food scientist. It turns out that a tiny bit of oregano oil has antioxidants that are antimicrobial and took our shelf life from one week to five weeks! That was amazing! Without that discovery, there was no way we'd be a viable product!"

The result of all that work is a sweet treat that's packed with protein and fiber (thanks to the beans), along with oats, flax, gluten-free chocolate, maple syrup, sunflower oil, and sea salt. Plus, they're in a super-zippy package that screams anything *but* "health food!"



Founder Nancy Kalish

Designer Yael Miller (of Miller Creative) steered Kalish away from the artisanal, paper-wrapped kind of craft design that already floods health food store shelves. Instead, they embraced a design that speaks to the "fun and lively" part of Kalish's friendly, exuberant personality. The bright pink and blue packages streamline the important info: They're gluten-free and vegan, they contain "only the good stuff,"

they're full of protein, and each package is only 194 calories. "Beans" is printed small inside a cute, tiny bean shape. "I wanted kids to enjoy it, and for parents to be able to give it to their kids without it screaming 'BEANS' and them going 'YUCK!' " Kalish says.

Kalish made sure to bring Pure Genius goods into focus groups with children, too. "Kids are the most brutal critics," Kalish explains. "If they don't like something, they make a horrible face and they spit it out at you. I'm happy to report that we had no horrible faces, and no one spit them out!"

Now, Kalish is working on expanding her line, and product placement. While the Whole Foods application process took time, she landed local markets like Westerly and West Side, as well as small health food stores in the West Village and throughout Brooklyn (where both she and Pure Genius are based). Coffee bars have also put displays on their counters and online ordering (with free shipping) is available, too.

"I couldn't ask for a better place to launch than New York," Kalish avers. "I was born in New York, and I'm a tried-and-true New Yorker — for ever and ever. Consumers here are adventurous, they're informed, and they're educated eaters. They're interested in trying new stuff, but they will not sacrifice taste. They're not willing to sacrifice anything."

With Pure Genius, we don't have to.