

History in the Mixing

BY COURTNEY KASPER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIMBERLY COOK



Lune Chocolat is cooking up a sweet taste of Central New York history, while blazing their own chocolatey trail to bite-sized success.

When life handed Mary Elizabeth Evans lemons in the form of an unexpected fall from affluence to poverty, she simply stuck to what she knew to make her proverbial lemonade—selling her mother's homemade molasses candies. And if desperate times truly call for desperate measures, then Mary Elizabeth's case was certainly one where necessity became the mother of invention. For being forced into such dire straits made Mary Elizabeth determined to never see such days again. By age 30, she went from poor little Syracuse candy girl to self-made millionairess and Fifth Avenue proprietress of an internationally renowned tearoom bearing her name.

While Evans' romantic rags-to-riches tale might have been forever lost in the pages of history books, two local chocolatiers are baking her story back to life by recreating a sampling of her original recipes, which haven't been tasted in more than 70 years.

Emily and Michael Woloszyn, owners of Lune Chocolat in Manlius, were immediately smitten with Mary Elizabeth's story

after the Onondaga Historical Association approached them about confecting her candies for its 150th anniversary. The husband and wife team quickly began studying historical files, old photographs and her vintage recipe collection before handpicking the four chocolate flavors that they would carefully recreate to taste. The chosen sweets: maple love, mocha, whipped vanilla and batter caramel.

"It really felt like there were so many unique ties to the community; for instance, when Mary Elizabeth first started she worked out of a case made by Wustof Stickley, which is now in Manlius, and it really gave us an opportunity to replicate things that haven't been tasted in years," said Michael, adding that even her still living relatives in Rhode Island had forgotten how good her candy was until trying Lune's recreations. "It was fun and challenging to find ingredients... Some of the recipes we were able to get the ingredients local, like the maple or the vanilla fondant, other things we had to look for such as hickory nut. At the time those recipes were created, the Erie Canal was booming and things would just come up through it. Since then tastes have changed and palates have changed."

Even though OHA's celebration took place earlier this year,

Emily said that Lune will continue offering Mary Elizabeth's

candy. "We really like the story and the process of it, and the people that come in asking about it, they really like the story and then they want to hear our story, so it's fun sharing the history..." she said, while stirring a Maytag washer-sized vat of velvety chocolate. And her next move of smoothly ladling the rich, dark liquid into molding trays without spilling a drop makes it hard for any onlooker to believe that she's only been practicing this technique for less than two years, much less that the only training she's ever received was from a German bread chef.

In fact, how the former surgical technician and her husband, who live in Camillus, even got into the craft chocolate making business is quite serendipitous. "When I was doing my [MBA] thesis at SU, I was assigned the topic of chocolate, and I had no intention of ever doing anything with chocolate," Michael said. "But the very first time that I watched somebody make it—and the only reason why I went and watched this woman was because I didn't have time to go to Hershey to watch a big facility produce chocolate—and the very first time I watched this woman make it in the artform and smelled the aroma... I kept asking her what she was doing; all she would reply is, 'It doesn't matter. As long as you make it with love, it's going to taste good.'"

Emily admits that deciding to open Lune with no prior chocolate making experience was a scary decision to make. "We always wanted to own our own business. We looked into some different ventures, even something that now seems as farfetched from chocolate as a mountain bike company... I remember sitting in the car in the parking lot of Monro Muffler and I



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said, "OK, this is it, this is the time right now that we're going to decide if we're going to open our own chocolate shop or if we're going a different route," said Emily, adding that a "different route" would've likely meant her husband working a corporate America job and the family of four (they have an 8-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter) moving out of Syracuse.

All it took was a little thinking inside the box, literally, to turn their dream of owning their own business into a successful independent chocolate shop, just as Mary Elizabeth had proven more than a century ago that the key to success isn't always going above and beyond the confines of what is already known — it sometimes just takes a little courageousness, imagination and resourcefulness to mold your own niche. And since officially opening its doors on Sept. 21, 2011, a day after Emily and Michael

celebrated their 14th wedding anniversary, Lune has been gaining substantial attention for its artisanal take on the classic culinary treat. Think: delectable bites of handmade, small batch savory and sweet chocolate truffles, bars and barks with crazy creative pairings like mango, rosemary, alcohol infusions, habanero pepper, elderberry, pink peppercorns, edamame, barbecued beef brisket and even Pastabilities Hot Tomato Oil and bread.

"We agreed in the beginning that it was always going to be ever changing," Emily said. "We have a set amount of chocolates that will be always in the [display] case — AbbiY Hot Lips, P.R. Hedge, Chai Buddha — and there will always be stuff changing on the top shelf." The latest additions: Cake, Fruity Pebbles with Pearl Vodka, and soon, Pink Grapefruit Poodle.

The inspiration for such unconventional flavor profiles comes from sampling and smelling produce at area farmers markets (where they select most of their fresh ingredients) coupled with a lot of trial and error, which still gives Michael a rush when pairings click. The last ah-ha moment came one Saturday afternoon a few weeks ago

after a customer rambled about craving a cinnamon roll they used to find at the mall. "I made a cream cheese ganache and a cinnamon bun ganache put the two of them in milk chocolate and it's one of my better combinations," said Michael, who designs most of the fillings, while the more arty Emily paints the chocolates.

"We love chocolate and we think chocolate has a connection to people and emotions. Whether you're sad or angry or happy, there's chocolate and people go to chocolate," said Emily, noting the reason- ing for their tag-





line, "Fill your soul with chocolate."

Both claim that one bite into a piece of fine quality artisan chocolate and you'll never go back to the 'other stuff' you once craved. "Real chocolate [like wine] has different perfumes and flavors of where it's grown," Emily said. "You can sit down with a whole row of the chocolate we get and ... you can taste where it's grown and what it's grown near."

With business on the rise and a current staff of five, Emily shyly mentioned that expansion and a few other surprise ventures outside the world of chocolate are in the near future. Though they have no aspirations to ever become a mass produced chain, Luno's owners hope to eventually create exclusive chocolates for more local restaurants and to further educate CNY patrons on fine chocolate tasting.

"We are only guaranteed now," Emily said. "I feel it is important to leave something positive behind me in this world. My desire is to leave a piece of history; everyone should try to leave their mark in this world, because in the end, we are all very important."

Just as a strong-willed young career woman from Syracuse named Mary Elizabeth took risks to build her future, never knowing how important of a mark she would actually leave. ■

Lune Chocolat

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MUST TRY:

Lavender & Honey,
Chai Buddha,
Guinness & Pretzels,
P.B. Hedge



The Story of: *Mary Elizabeth (Evans) Sharpe*

Nearly 40 years after our foremothers down the road in Seneca Falls paved the way for the women's rights movement, a young girl in Syracuse by the name of Mary Elizabeth Evans (Oct. 23, 1885–April 6, 1985) was exercising her female right to become a self-made career woman at the young age of 14.

After her father, William E. G. Evans, died en route to the Klondike region in search of gold, the duty fell on Mary Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, to support her mother, Fanny Riegel Evans, her three sisters and a brother. She began making and peddling batches of her mother's fine molasses candies door-to-door.

The next step was a "pay-and-help-yourself" cabinet filled with boxes of her sweets and a tray for money in the lobby of the University Building, so that Mary Elizabeth and her family could keep manufacturing the treats. Before long her candy company (simply called Mary Elizabeth's) was a household name, and she later pioneered a chain of dainty tearooms and candy shops that offered tea and light fare in New York City (Fifth Avenue flagship, 1909), Boston and Newport. Her always hand-crafted, pure candies, including elegant chocolates, were sold in Europe and throughout the United States.

"... I certainly believe that other women can accomplish what my sisters and I have done. If they are willing to stick to it, and don't let things break in. They must build for the future ... For what has been done once can be done again, if women will believe that the gateway to success is opened by patience and a



Photo courtesy of Brown University

capacity for work," Mary Elizabeth said in *The Chicago Herald* article reprinted in the Aug. 9, 1916 *The Post-Standard*.

During World War I, she joined up with the U.S. Food Administration and traveled to Paris with the Red Cross to oversee the U.S. Central Diet kitchen. She also published two cookbooks during this time titled *Mary Elizabeth's War Time Recipes* (1918), featuring recipes to accommodate rationing shortages, and *My Candy Secrets* in 1919.

Mary Elizabeth lived to age 100 and died a multi-millionaire in Providence, R.I., where she lived with her husband, Henry Dexter Sharpe, longtime chancellor of Brown University and head of his family's manufacturing company Brown & Sharpe, which is now operated by their son, Henry Jr. After the closing of her shops in the mid 1930s, Mary Elizabeth, a self-taught landscape architect, was an avid philanthropist best known for her efforts to beautify Brown University and the city of Providence.