

Mint to Be

For Heide Hooper, the world is simply delicious, painted pastel, and sweet as candy—butter mint candy, that is.

It all started five years ago, when Heide Hooper realized it was time to make a change in her life. After exploring several career paths, she still felt that something was missing. Heide's thoughts turned to a time in her life that was filled with happiness and joy, when as a child she joined her family for their yearly tradition in the small town of Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina.

"During the holidays, my mom and I would go to my grandmother's house to make butter mints. I remember sitting and watching my mother and grandmother pour batches of butter mints on a marble slab. It was a big deal," says Heide, explaining that they would give the special candy to friends around town.

Precious memories of this tradition gave Heide the inspiration for a new business venture. A bit unsure about such a career change, she turned to her father, Joe, for advice and guidance. "He gave me so much encouragement to get out there and do what I wanted," says Heide.

With high aspirations and the old family recipe, Heide got to work. In her own kitchen, she began mixing sugar, butter, and water, trying to replicate the delicious mints that she remembered so well. Her mother, Nell, and friends pitched in, and in the end, they were able to recreate her grandmother's recipe.

Heide approached a local market, Robert's Grocery, to ask if they would sell the mints. "The owners at that time let me sell my butter mints in their store. I am still so appreciative of their support so early on," she says. Her mints were placed on the market's counter, and before long customers just couldn't resist the mouth-watering sweets.

The encouraging sales Heide received at Robert's Grocery made her ponder the idea of other mint flavors, and she began experimenting. "Besides the original butter mint flavor, other flavors aren't very common," she says. She soon added strawberry, lemon, and cheesecake-butter mints to her line, along with Dr. Joe's Key Lime, which was named after her father. "Because of my dad's help and support I wanted to name one of the flavors after him as a tribute. Key lime was his favorite flavor, and that's probably one of our best sellers," Heide says.



Heide's packaging is just as unique and colorful as the flavorful butter mints inside. For creative tins, boxes, and tubs, she turned to friend and artist Deborah Cavanaugh. Deborah learned to paint after her children gave her watercolors as a Mother's Day gift. She created bright waterfront homes and boats for the Jake's Cheese Cake tins, while a home and garden decorate the tins for Dr. Joe's Key Lime. The original Homemade Butter Mints tin is adorned with pretty flowers in all shades of pink.

Gaining confidence at each stage of her success, Heide decided the time was right to launch her company nationally. She began attending the Atlanta Gourmet and Gift Market, a wholesale buyer's show. In a rented ten-by-ten foot booth, Heide took orders from buyers across the southeast for her homemade mints. In just two short years she had established Heide's Homemade Butter Mints—something "mint to bee" as the slogan states. "It was hard to get started but it's amazing because the people in the business are so willing to help you," she says.

Today, Heide and her staff have tripled production, making butter mints in thirty-pound batches at a time. Her mints are popular at weddings, fundraisers, and even dinner parties. But despite all the growth of Heide's Homemade Butter Mints, she has kept the small roots of her company. The butter mints are still sitting on the counter at Robert's Grocery, tempting customers to have a taste, and just as she did in the first years of her business, Heide still stops by the market every week to make sure they have plenty of butter mints to go around. Every batch still carries her personal touch, whether it's shipped just down the road or to countries around the globe. 🍯