

Sweet Dreams!

One Woman's Inspiring Story of Success

By Candace T. Botha

In the O'Brien household, it had become a familiar nightly ritual. At around 8:00 p.m. every evening, Donna-Marie O'Brien would sit down on the couch with a dish of ice cream, sharing a lick or two from the bottom of the bowl with her constant companion, Molly Magee, a Soft Coated Wheaten terrier.

Molly and O'Brien had been nearly inseparable since the pup was just eight weeks old. O'Brien was grieving the recent loss of another dog when her parents told her they wanted to give her a new puppy for her birthday.

"I didn't think I was ready for another dog," O'Brien recalls, "but I agreed to go see the puppies, who were only five weeks old at the time. The breeder came to the door with the two remaining females, one tucked under each arm.

"Molly, who was the runt of the litter, literally jumped out of the breeder's arms; she just seemed so spunky.

"Throughout my life, I have always rooted the loudest for the 'underdog,' who always seems to have more hurdles to cross.

"I instantly knew that, as the runt of the litter, Molly was the pup for me."

And so, as Molly grew, the nightly ritual became one of the pup's favorite times of the day. If 8:00 rolled around and O'Brien was not ready with ice cream in hand, the pup would remind her by sitting in front of her and whimpering.

It was around the time Molly celebrated her first birthday, however, that she developed digestive problems, and she began vomiting each time she ate. After O'Brien took her to numerous veterinarians to determine what was wrong with her puppy, the diagnosis was in: Molly suffered food allergies and had to be

placed on a special diet. She was also developing crystals in her urine, which caused additional health problems.

The Rx was clear cut: All treats and chewies—as well as her beloved evening treat—had to be eliminated from Molly's diet immediately.

Suddenly, O'Brien's nightly routine became plagued with guilt. How could she eat ice cream as Molly sat watching her, wondering why she was no longer allowed to lick the bowl?

Although she searched in supermarkets for a frozen product that her pup could enjoy, there was nothing available that met Molly's strict dietary requirements.

And so, an idea to create a frozen treat for her adored companion was born.

Although O'Brien has always enjoyed cooking, it was never her chosen career path; it was always more of a hobby.

"I love to cook; I enjoy the creative process," O'Brien comments. "Chopping, dicing...they are such stress relievers for me."

Originally from Boston, O'Brien earned a degree in mass communications at Emerson College. She then moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in film and television.

After experiencing health issues, O'Brien returned to her birthplace and her close-knit, Irish-Catholic family, which included three older brothers and one younger brother. She taught television production under the auspices of a federal grant program at an inner city school for a year.

When her father was diagnosed with lung cancer, O'Brien worked for a social service agency in Massachusetts, where she was hired to help develop a smoking-cessation program. It was in this field that she developed a true passion for her work.

After nearly forty-five years of marriage, O'Brien's parents had planned to relocate to Florida. They had purchased a mobile home and were looking forward to retirement. Her father, however, passed away before they made the move.

O'Brien once again changed hats by entering the dot-com industry. She worked there for several years before deciding that both she and her mother needed a change. So, together, they packed their bags and



Pictured above, Donna-Marie O'Brien, creator of Mageeze Freeze, gives Molly Magee an oh-so-sweet-taste of her all-natural "ice creamless treat."

Photo by Betty Lupacchino

headed south to Florida.

Following the move, O'Brien found work, but admits that she lost the passion that had motivated her to succeed in her previous positions.

"My prayer was to find my passion again," O'Brien says, reflectively. "After going through so many struggles, I felt like something was missing."

And then there was Molly, her loyal companion, who was suddenly deprived of one of the things in life she loved most. O'Brien decided to utilize her culinary skills to try to develop a healthy frozen treat that Molly could enjoy, despite her dietary restrictions.

"In the beginning, it was hit-and-miss," O'Brien recalls. "Actually, it was lots and lots of misses," she says with a laugh.

Through trial-and-error experimentation, O'Brien developed Mageeze Freeze, "an organic, healthy, yummy ice creamless treat" that is lactose-, soy-, dairy- and gluten-free. Available in peanut butter, carrot-apple, banana, and mint flavors, Mageeze Freeze is

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Mageeze Freeze is available in a variety of mouth-watering flavors that dogs adore. As O'Brien says, "If you're lucky, maybe they'll let YOU lick the bowl!" Photo by Betty Lupacchino

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made of 100 percent organic ingredients that are supplied exclusively from green-friendly farmers in the United States. With no additives or preservatives, the treat is actually human grade and human edible, made with all-natural flavoring. In fact, at a recent holiday gathering, two of O'Brien's brothers and their families were discovered sitting around the kitchen table, enthusiastically sampling the frozen dog treats!

Using American-grown, organic ingredients was especially important to O'Brien.

"I easily could buy less-expensive ingredients from China," O'Brien claims, "but with the health scare and product recalls last year, I would rather pay more to ensure the quality and safety of my product."

O'Brien admits that she didn't initially develop Mageeze Freeze with any intention of marketing the product. "I made it for Molly, so she could eat something healthy," she says.



Molly Magee is the inspiration behind Mageeze Freeze, as well as an upcoming series of children's books.

Photo by Betty Lupacchino

"But when more of my friends started asking for it for their dogs, and Molly's supply was dwindling, 'light dawned on Marblehead,' as they say in Boston!"

Development of Mageeze Freeze and its promotional materials has definitely been a family affair, O'Brien says. Her mom made the new company's colorful aprons, while decisions about business cards and posters were based on family input. And O'Brien's new stepfather, who has "taught me so much and is behind me all the way," is a frequent taste-tester.

With no prior experience in food production or marketing, O'Brien admits that she has faced some unexpected challenges. "It has been such a learning curve," O'Brien reveals. "But all the things that I have experienced in life—all the hats I have worn—have certainly prepared me.

"It is so energizing," she continues. "I have such a passion for what I am doing; it is so easy to work with animals."

O'Brien debuted Mageeze Freeze in Sarasota at "Dog's Night Out," a fund-raiser hosted by the Animal Rescue Coalition on January 18. The frozen treat created quite the buzz among pet owners and their dogs at the Saks Fifth Avenue event.

Although O'Brien is still making all of the frozen treats at home in her kitchen, she knows that a major expansion is right around the corner.

And she is ready.

As for the future, O'Brien foresees international distribution, as well as sales in a variety of different domestic venues that cater to dogs. She dreams big, and with good reason. She has filled an innovative, yet critical need in the pet marketplace.

O'Brien also has plans to write and publish a series of illustrated children's books that will feature



Molly as the main character.

Of course, she credits her newfound success to her favorite canine companion.

"If you had asked me a year ago what I would be doing now," O'Brien says, "I never would have guessed that I would be doing this; I couldn't even have dreamed it. But when Mageeze Freeze began to take shape, I knew that I had rediscovered my passion.

"One of the greatest lessons Molly has taught me is how to enjoy the simple things in life again," O'Brien continues. "She just absolutely loves riding in the convertible with the top down. And when I take her for a walk, she stops to smell the flowers—and then eats them!

"She gives me so much joy," O'Brien says with heartfelt emotion. "This was one small thing I could do to give her an opportunity to enjoy a treat she loves."

At around 8:00 p.m. every evening, Donna-Marie O'Brien sits down on the couch with a bowl of ice cream, while Molly Magee happily enjoys a sweet, healthy helping of Mageeze Freeze.

It is, after all, a familiar nightly ritual.

For more information about Mageeze Freeze, visit www.mageezefreeze.com, or call 941-525-6278. ❀