



## There Really is a Mary Macleod

If you walk west from Leslieville along Queen Street toward the Don and keep your eyes open, you'll spot a quaint little shop on the south side. It's the home of Mary Macleod's Shortbread, and only when you step through the door into the aroma of warm sugar and butter, and steal a glance at the kitchen and warehouse at the back, does the scale of the enterprise hit you. Boxes are stacked floor to ceiling ready for shipping around the world, and a dedicated team of long-time employees works steadily and carefully, baking the kind of cookies that we wish our mothers had made. Every beautiful box or tin, each secret recipe for every melt-in-your-mouth confection, has come from the creative mind of Mary.

Her story is one of inspiration, imagination, and pure Scottish determination. Now in her 70s, Mary has finally accepted help from her daughter-in-law, Sharon, to run the 30-year-old business, but that hasn't diminished Mary's input at all.

Mary Macleod's Shortbread had its beginnings long ago in Scotland, when Mary, then a young girl, learned the art of baking. "Ever since I was little, I've loved food. I like simple food. I like it well prepared, well cooked. And I've always said to my customers that I could give the shortbread to a newborn baby, in terms of its basic purity; I mean, I can't help the sugar and the butter, but everyone in the world needs a little treat."

Right now, everyone in Mary's world is busily preparing for Christmas. Everything is made by hand, from the shortbread to the packaging, each outgoing container hand-tied with bows and sprigs of evergreen. In the thick of filling a large order from Toronto's Holt Renfrew, both Mary and Sharon note with respect the near 30-year relationship Mary Macleod has with the top department store, "Who," as Mary says, "have always been so good to me."

Adding to the action, a delivery van of butter arrives. It's the same local supplier Mary has used for the past 30 years. In these cookies, only the Belgian chocolate is imported. Still, amidst all the comings and goings for Christmas preparation, a honed rhythm is maintained.

Four bakers, secure in the knowledge that Mary will still sweep floors and do whatever else is necessary, never miss a beat. And somehow this infectious energy—the genuine delight in the constant creation of new products—is contagious. The staff smile and laugh as the Christmas orders go out and plans for weddings and corporate work take shape. With Sharon now handling the business end of things, Mary is free to create, and even with more than 12 flavors on the shelves, there are still cookies to be dreamt up.

It took Mary 18 months of working until 3 am to develop her signature Chocolate Crunch cookie. She had to figure out how to keep the chocolate solid within the dough while it baked. But she did it; in fact, Mary was the first Canadian to crack the code. "All the messes I had, you wouldn't believe it! It was amazing!" Tasty messes that were shared with the local police who dropped by night after night to check on her as she worked alone. And still today that desire to innovate and dream, has not waned. New products, like tiny butterscotch shortbread, were introduced in 2010, and more are sure to follow.

Underlying this relentless drive is an enormous sense of gratitude. There were times when money was hard to come by and family responsibilities were demanding, but somehow the right people showed up at the right time. There was her friend, Winsome Lee, who helped her in the early days, two women at CIBC who, believing in her, lent her money to buy the building—"I'd never seen those women in my life!"—and of course, her family.

"I'm grateful to be able to give something back," Mary says with a smile, "We contribute to almost any organization that asks. When I came here, my husband and I were students. We came up the St. Lawrence by boat and it was like glass. When I looked out I saw red roofs, green roofs, blue roofs. I turned to him and said, 'Canada is going to be a marvelous country for me!' And I've loved it. I've been very blessed."

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