

USC

Trojan Family Magazine

Class of '94

ALUMNI PROFILE

Squeeze Play

A chance meeting with an Italian man who would later become her husband as well as memories of her mother's vivid dreams about oranges led **Adriana Kahane '94, MBA '98** to undertake an unusual study while at the USC Marshall School of Business.

That feasibility study inspired Kahane, following graduation, to found Dream Foods International, a business that imported blood oranges from Sicily. It evolved into a successful organic juice company.

"Being from California, I figured, 'We have oranges - why would we import?'" Kahane says, recalling the project from professor Bill Crookston's feasibility analysis class. "But then I remembered my family's trips to Italy and my mother telling me about how she liked blood oranges so much that she used to have intense dreams about the juice."

Dream Foods' juice line, found in specialty retailers such as Trader Joe's and Whole Foods, includes shelf-stable bottled tangerine and blood orange juices along with squeeze-bottle lemon and lime juices. Kahane continues to import the fruit from Sicily, where it is grown in the rich earth near Mount Etna, an active volcano that has taken its place on the company's labels and logo. The volcano also had a hand in shaping the company's destiny in 2003, after repeated eruptions damaged the skin of the region's blood orange crop.

"There was no choice but to squeeze them into juice, but it was a perfect choice because I had long wanted to expand the business into something that could be sustained year-round," Kahane says. Such practicality and determination were hallmarks of Kahane's tenure at USC, Crookston recalls.

"Adriana was a driven student who opened locked doors," Crookston says. "She did very well, so well, in fact, that we use her feasibility study for volcano oranges in our classes as a case example of a well-done study. All faculty call on her to tell her story about her journey as an exemplar for their journeys."

Kahane cites Crookston's positive energy and USC Marshall professor Gene Miller's devil's-advocate nudges as key elements toward sustaining her postgraduate success. She remains in touch with many of her instructors as well as with fellow graduates of USC Marshall's entrepreneurial studies program, including Marco Giannini '97, MBA '03 (founder of premium pet food company Dogswell) and Alton Johnson MBA '04 of Bossa Nova Beverage Group.

"That program is so focused on experiential learning, so it's not just theory, but how things can be applied," Kahane says. "If you go through that program, you should be ready to run a business. You're given the tools. After that, it's really up to you to make it happen." To make it happen, Kahane moved to Italy after graduation and soon married Pino Modica, the Sicilian who had helped convince Kahane to do that initial feasibility study on importing blood oranges. Modica's family owned blood orange farms, and their fruit was among the first shipment of oranges Kahane imported to Los Angeles 10 years ago.

These days, Kahane, Modica and their 8-year-old daughter spend their summers in Italy, still running the business, but also enjoying the slower pace and time with extended family. "Being an entrepreneur allows you to control your schedule, but most people end up working like crazy and not taking advantage of the fact that you do have control of your time," Kahane says. "Being in Italy is a constant reminder of how I want to have not just success in my business, but success in my life."

Kahane is developing single-serve bottles of her blood orange and tangerine juices that will put the products in the refrigerated aisles of grocery stores, the place where most people look for juices. But don't look for the varieties to change.

"I don't think it was pure coincidence that when we launched our juice line, the two juices were cardinal and gold in color," Kahane says. "I consider it my subliminal tip of the hat to USC."

- Glenn Whipp



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