

# HOW I MADE IT

## Peter Myers founder of Myers of Keswick

WHEN Peter Myers's father first taught him how to make Cumberland sausages he had little idea he would end up in America and that those sausages would make him famous.

As a young man, Myers went to America for a two-week holiday in 1972. He liked it so much he decided to stay, getting a job as a barman in New York's Greenwich Village.

When his father came to visit him, Myers started giving away his father's Cumberland sausages to patrons during happy hour. Before long the bar began to get crowded with people "getting a meal on the house".

Then one day a friend who worked at the British consulate told him there were 250,000 Britons living in the New York metropolitan area.

Myers had a sudden inspiration. He quit his job in the bar, where he had become one of the landlords, to open a shop selling Cornish pasties and sausage rolls. Myers of Keswick, a traditional English shop with black and white tiles and an old drinks refrigerator, opened its doors in the village on July 4, 1985 — Independence Day.

Myers said: "I thought I might as well declare my independence for the first time." But on a sweltering hot day, he managed to sell only one pork pie.

The next day, working in the shop's small kitchen with no air conditioning, Myers and his wife baked another tray of pork pies. This time they sold two.

"My wife broke down in tears, wondering if we had done the right thing. I looked at her, and I said, 'Are you crazy? Not many businesses increase their sales by 100% in 24 hours'."

The couple persevered. Myers of Keswick's success was not overnight, but sales grew gradually week by week as word of the shop spread. Myers now sells his pasties and pies to British expatriates and Americans in New York, and ships them to customers across the United States.

He attributes much of the shop's success to the Cumberland sausage, a recipe that is more than 100 years old and was passed down from his grandfather, who bought the recipe, along with a butcher's shop, in 1907.

Myers said that the recipe had remained unchanged and that he used only the finest meats, rusks and spices. To be considered authentic, the sausages needed to be made in the traditional way. "They are a delicacy peculiar to the Lake District. It is very hard to find an authentic Cumberland sausage."

Myers said he believed his were the only ones of their kind in America, and he made them daily to meet demand. A note on the shop's website even cautions customers to ask for the products by name, Myers of Keswick, to avoid buying imitations of his sausages by mistake.

Myers said: "I like to think, without sounding boastful, that we make quality goods. We have reason to fear that some unprincipled persons may be induced to sell a spurious imitation of our world-famous sausages."

Myers of Keswick has now been in business for more than 20 years and has become much larger than Myers had ever anticipated with sales of more than \$1m (£530,000) a year. However, he has no real plans to open new shops as he has built up strong online sales through the company's website.

He has also established a strong line of business as a supplier of other British goods popular with expatriates. For example, he sells Birds instant custard and Roses lime cordial alongside his sausages and pies. These other products account for about half his sales.

Myers said the shop was especially busy at Christmas and Easter when British expatriates living in America wanted to buy mince pies and Easter eggs imported from the UK. Some Brits even do a lot of their shopping there — from McVities Hobnobs and Cadbury's chocolates to Scotts Porage Oats and household items such as Imperial Leather soap and Lemsip cold and flu tablets. The shop is also popular for its traditional and familiarly British freshly made goods, such as shepherd's pie, pork pie with port-and-Stilton topping, and curried lamb pies.

He believed the shop also attracted crowds because it retained the quaintness and traditions found only in rural parts of England. Myers said he took ideas and inspiration from his childhood memories. Even the tiles in the shop reminded him of home.

He would like the business he has built up to stay in the family and hopes that one day his daughter will take it over. He said: "She

always used to say she'd take over Myers of Keswick and I hope she does. She has the recipes."

For all the time Myers has spent in America, a part of him will always remain British. The company's website has useful links for expatriates to information about British events taking place in New York. It also posts messages from British customers thankful for his pies.

Myers, 60, now divides his time between Britain and America. In both places he can be found having a nice cup of tea with a sausage roll, talking about football.

Julie Earle-Levine