

Chocolate wars waged with kittens and brick dust

BY KATE ROBERTSON

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Author Deborah Cadbury had always planned on writing the history of chocolate; after all, she is a descendant of the family that founded the largest and most successful chocolate company in the world. But it was what she calls the “cuddly Quaker bits,” that made her realize it was a tale worth telling.

Two Quaker brothers, George and Richard Cadbury, took over their father John's failing chocolate company in the mid-19th century, when cocoa was only regarded as a cozy drink for chilly nights. Following their strict religious belief that “personal profiteering from business success was considered as shameful as debt,” they introduced the world's first chocolate bar and built the town of Bournville, now part of Birmingham, England around the Cadbury factory. Housing, swimming lessons and sickness benefits were all part of the enlightened social plan. For Cadbury, a historian based in England, the credit crunch of 2005, which saw banks in Britain and the U.S. collapse, brought home the fact that some of that progressive social idealism, albeit of a rather austere strain, was sadly lacking in the cutthroat world of capitalism and free markets. That's when she really decided to delve in.

She had just finished researching the life of George Cadbury when Chicago-based Kraft Foods announced its hostile takeover bid for Cadbury.

Suddenly, her project was very topical. The result is *Chocolate Wars, The 150-year Rivalry between the World's Greatest Chocolate Makers*, Douglas & McIntyre.

Cadbury recently shared some of the rich family history with the *Star*.

Where do you fit in to the Cadbury story?

If you go back five generations, there were two brothers. One made those lovely little mother-of-pearl buttons and ran a drapery shop. The other made chocolate buttons and ran a chocolate shop. I am descended from the draper's side.

From your descriptions of the first cocoa concoctions — which contained such additives as brick dust, animal fat and potato flour, it's hard to imagine chocolate was very tasty when it first arrived in Europe. What was the appeal?

In Victorian times, only the wealthy could afford chocolate. It was this drink that got a very mixed reception because lentils and pearl barley tended to be added to mop up the cocoa butter . . . Unscrupulous traders were adding brick dust and animal fat. The Cadburys weren't doing this. The Cadburys came up with pure cocoa in the late 1860s and business took off with the introduction of the Adulteration of Foods Acts, (which stated all ingredients had to be listed).

Whose chocolate arrived in Canada first?

Fry chocolate was the first British cocoa product to make it to Canada from the earliest years 1870s onward — Fry's yellow tins of breakfast cocoa.

Do you think it's ironic that Quakers found success with such an indulgent product?

I love the fact that my very austere Quaker forebears, who absolutely believed in Quaker values and that on no account were the senses to be indulged, stumbled across the ultimate in sensual extravagance and the wonderful idea of mass produced confectionary.

What was a “fancy box”?

The fancy box was effectively the first chocolate assortment. It was dark chocolate, because we didn't know how to make milk chocolate then, wrapped around truffle and almond marzipan and strawberry — the ultimate in pleasure in boxes made to last with beautiful brocades. The Puritanism was so strong you weren't meant to indulge in art or literature, but Richard Cadbury overturned this and came up with what became the chocolate-box lid. He would paint pictures of his own daughter with her white kitten and put them on the lid of his fancy boxes.

You call Cadbury's discovery that slaves were being used on the cocoa plantations in the Portuguese colony of Sao Tome a moral shock. How did the company that prided itself as the caring employer that built homes and recreation facilities for its worker's around its factory deal with that?

There are certain things that capitalism and free markets can't solve by themselves. What the Quakers did in response to the discovery that a lot of the beans they were using could have had slavery behind them was a very interesting example of what I wish we saw more of today. They got the first reports that there could be slavery in the cocoa and they said this isn't a problem that is going to be solved if we are in competition, so the three Quaker companies — Rowntree, Fry's and Cadbury — joined forces and they investigated. George even sent his nephew out because the slavery was underground. He had to prove it was happening. Armed with that evidence, they took it to the British foreign office and the Portuguese authorities and tried to use their purchasing power as their lever to change the practice. When it was completely clear that that wasn't going to work, they organized a boycott.

Your book isn't just about Cadbury. You describe other successful British and European chocolate companies, and explain Milton Hershey's growth as well as Forrest Mars' creations and their rivalries. Does Willy Wonka fit in here somewhere?

Some people have suggested that I am a descendant of Willy Wonka, which is very sweet but sadly not the case. This is a very personal story about people who do have the charm of Willy Wonka and, indeed, Roald Dahl (who wrote *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, on which the 1971 Willy Wonka film was based) worked at the Cadbury factory in Bournville in the 1930s. It is highly likely that George and Richard Cadbury were rolled together to be the inspiration for the Willy Wonka character, so there was the charm of that unfolding story.

At a time when everyone was trying to make cocoa tastier, Swiss chocolatier Rodolphe Lindt invented chocolate fondant by accident, helping secure Switzerland's place as a leader in the chocolate wars. Tell me about that.

The story goes that Rodolphe was a bit of a gentleman entrepreneur. He was leaving for one of his gentlemen weekends and forgot to switch off all his cocoa machinery. So when he came back, the cocoa had been very very very beaten. Instead of being a mess, it was liquid smooth

and gorgeous. He experimented and realized he could fold in more cocoa butter and make a really melty kind of chocolate he called chocolate fondant.

What is your favourite chocolate bar?

I really do like Dairy Milk. Actually I probably like Moro, the dark chocolate. The truth is, when I was writing this, I had all the Cadbury chocolates, including the historic ones, stacked under my desk as samples to make sure my research was good. Then I had to get the rivals, to make sure I really knew them, so there was a lot of sampling. I must have tried 100!