

Life and Cupcakes

As A CHILD, Jessi Walter '03 enjoyed spending time in the kitchen surrounded by baking pans, bowls, and mixers. "I was always making chocolate cookies or cakes," she says. "It was something fun that I could do with friends or by myself, and I loved the precision of the measuring—and of course tasting—along the way."

In 2007 she started Cupcake Kids! (www.cupcakekids.com), a hands-on cooking company that offers parties, classes, field trips, and other events for children of all ages. "I'm one of 23 first cousins, so being around kids is natural for me," she says. "When I moved to New York City, I didn't know any kids, and I was really missing this part of my life." After meeting her boyfriend, she was inspired by his young nieces. "I started cooking with them, and the idea developed from there," she remembers. "I did one of their birthday parties, and we made pizza and cupcakes."

After losing her job as a vice president at Bear Sterns, Walter used her experience as a credit strategist (and her training as an economics concentrator) to shift to her new enterprise. "Being on Wall Street gave me a great background in finance and the business world as a whole," she says. "I've been able to draw and build on these experiences as I launched my own company."

Though based at the Kurve Restaurant in Greenwich Village (with a spot on the Upper East Side in the offing), Cupcake Kids! regularly travels to private homes, schools, camps, and museums for special occasions. The new "Urban Foodies" series



Edibles entrepreneur Jessi Walter on the job

provides an opportunity for children to go behind the scenes and interact with staff members at various city restaurants. Since its opening, Walter has expanded the company to offer events for adults, such as cooking classes, baby and bridal showers, and team-building sessions. Party themes for kids include "make your own pizza, lasagna roll-ups, or soft pretzels" and, of course, "cupcake (or cake) make, bake, and decorate." The recipe testing, she says, is an ongoing challenge. "It's a slow process—I like my recipes to be delicious, nutritious, and kid-friendly, so it takes a while to get them just right...I'm always looking for recipe ideas, whether I'm out to eat, walking around, watching television, or reading a magazine."

How does she keep kids engaged? "We make something new each time, and the kids learn about food, nutrition, and cooking techniques," she explains. "We mix, measure, stir, and taste—it's impossible to be bored." She also uses songs and rhymes to get chefs-in-training involved in the fun. "Our pizza song is the most popular: 'Roll, Roll, Roll Your Dough.' The younger kids love it." (Meanwhile, they're exercising and improving their math, science, and reading skills as they make treats from scratch.)

"The smiles on the kids' faces when they taste what they made are priceless," Walter says. "I've always loved kids, food, and business, and Cupcake Kids! has allowed me to combine my passions into one job. I have tons of ideas for expansion, and I'm looking forward to making it happen."

—KRYSTEN A. KECHES