



Recipe for Faith, Bud's Best Cookies



Bud Cason's life took a pivotal turn at the age of 12. He committed his life to Jesus Christ, and he discovered what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. "My Aunt and Uncle had a little cookie company in Birmingham called Greg's Cookies. I started working there in the summer time- sweeping floors and stacking boxes. I was so fascinated about seeing the raw materials come in- the flour, the sugar, the shortening, and seeing cookies produced. At 12 I had a passion for being in the cookie business."

The same woman who introduced Cason to the cookie business also nurtured his faith. Margaret Sharp took a real interest in the future of her brother's son. "Growing up, my Aunt really pushed me. She kept me in church. I guess you can say she kept me on the right path," remembers Cason who attended the Seventh Day Adventist Church with his family and was baptized at 12. "I think that the commitment that I made when I was baptized is the thing that really kept me in the church."

When Cason finished college and a tour of duty in the Army, he began to work full time for his Aunt and Uncle. In 1968, Cason's Aunt confided in him that she could no longer continue with the company and offered to sell it to him. "I was really planning to do something totally different. The company had a lot of debt, and I knew I

Bud Cason with his wife Gail, their three children, spouses and grandchildren. Cason met his wife when they were both counselors at a church camp. The couple will celebrate their 44th wedding anniversary in April.



could start a new company for about the same amount of money I was paying her. However, my philosophy has always been it is never wrong to do the right thing. And I knew it was the right thing to buy the company from her."

In 1970, Cason bought 100 percent of Greg's Cookies and made a commitment to give back to God. "I started to pay a ten percent tithe on profits and the business started growing and growing," says Cason. In 1983, Cason bought another cookie company in Cleveland, Tennessee. By 1986, Cason had drawn the attention of a company conglomerate interested in buying Cason's Birmingham and Cleveland operations. "I said I had no interest what so ever in selling, but they kept on and on, to a point that it seemed like it was a bad business decision not to sell," remembers Cason who finally conceded when the buyers offered to give him an additional \$10,000 a

month for three years

to continue his charitable giving at the same level he had in the past. Cason used the money to support his church, First Seventh Day Adventist of Hoover, and the church's school, Hoover Christian School. He also assisted a church school in Mississippi and paid for several children to go to college. "I was able to use the money to help other people."



Bud Cason with some of his grandchildren. The oldest grandchild, Cason (2nd from left), was named after her grandfather. The children attend Bud Cason's alma mater, Hoover Christian School (formerly Brakeworth Junior Academy). Cason's three children also attended the school, of which he serves as school board chairman.

Cason committed to helping the new owners of Greg's for one year and staying out of the cookie business for another four years. "When I sold, I told them I was going back into the business after my five years...I started investing my own money, biding my time until time was up." While Cason waited to pursue his passion, he prepared. He enrolled in a nutrition class at the University of Alabama. "When I started back I wanted to produce the best quality product, at the lowest possible price for the consumer. I was trying to find out as much as I could about ingredients. One of the things

Bud Cason's daughter Jan leads tours through Bud's Best Cookies every Tuesday and Wednesday during the school year.

the dietician told the class was that when people are hungry for something sweet, the first bite kind of takes care of the sensation and the second bite really does. After that, you are just filling your stomach." Cason began to toy with the idea of a bite size cookie. Not only did it make sense nutritionally, it made sense operationally. "I could run bite size cookies in an automated plant where no one would touch them from start to finish. When the consumer opens the package, they are the first one to touch that product," explains Cason.

In 1992 Cason purchased an office and small warehouse in Hoover. He invested 12 million dollars in upgrading the facilities and buying the best equipment. In April of 1993 the first, bite sized Bud's Best cookies were produced. His future success was questioned.

"When I started putting equipment in, I had several friends call and say, 'Bud, people are not going to buy a little bitty cookie. They want a big cookie to eat. I hate to see you loose all that money on what you are doing.'" Cason did not give up. "I prayed about it and I said, 'Lord, this business really belongs to you. I am just here, as your servant. If you don't, it won't. If you want me to do something else, I'll do it.'" Not long after Cason's bite-size cookies hit the market, bite-size became big. "All you heard was mini this and

mini that. It was not really something we created here, but something we started in this area that people really jumped on." Today Cason's plant produces more than a million bite size cookies per hour and "Bud's Best" are in high demand in stores throughout the southeast and northeast.

Such demand has not tempted Cason to operate his plant seven days a week. As a Seventh Day Adventist, Cason observes the Sabbath from sundown Friday through sundown Saturday. In observation of this and in respect to Christian employees who worship on Sunday morning, Cason closes the plant at sundown Friday and reopens Sunday evening or Monday morning. Cason says he also seeks to incorporate his faith in his everyday business practices. "My philosophy is trying to do the right thing with every employee, with every customer, and with the people that supply us products. I try to do the right thing with everybody. If you do, God can bless your business."

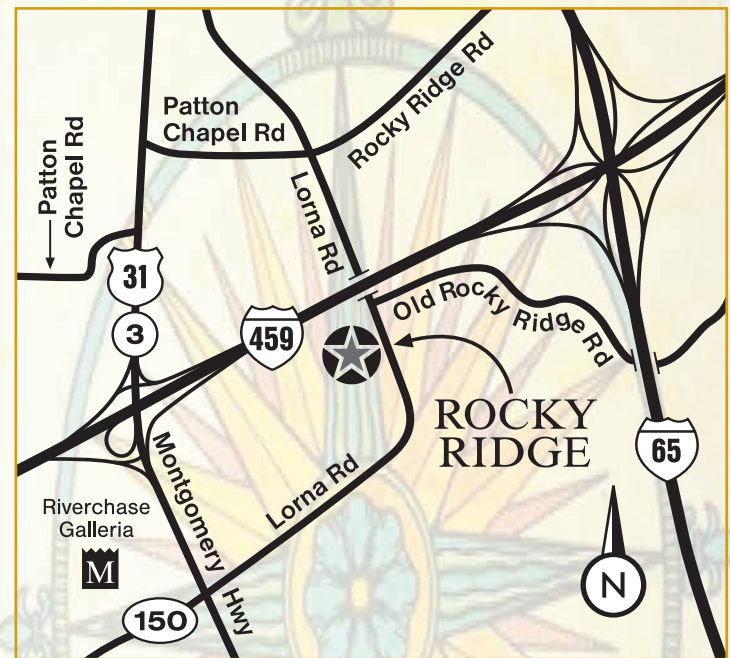
To keep his priorities, Cason says he sets aside thirty minutes every day to read the Bible. "The principles of the Bible tell you how to treat employees, how to invest, what to do... It seems like exactly what you need is right there and it will speak to you," explains Cason.

67-year-old Bud Cason says he has no plans to end his cookie career. He loves it too much. "It is very rewarding to start from scratch, and see the business grow. It is also very rewarding to be able to help with the Lord's work. I will stay in the business as long as the Lord wants me to. It is something I enjoy everyday."

— Laurie Stroud



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