

LIVE THE PROCESS

A Moment with GoMacro

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Amelia Kirchoff and Jola Sonkin want to make life sweeter.

When Kirchoff was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003, she researched alternative treatments and found her calling in a macrobiotic diet. The lifestyle shift not only nourished her physically, but it encouraged a kind of emotional and energetic balance, as well.

Always a lover of desserts and of cooking with homegrown ingredients, she began creating healthy treats in her kitchen. When her daughter, Sonkin, tasted her mother's creations, she knew they had something special: She brought a first batch of bars to a store and GoMacro was born.

Today, Kirchoff continues to bake new creations on her 120-acre Wisconsin farm, while Sonkin acts as CEO and raises four kids in Carlsbad, California. Here, the mother/daughter team discusses how they're driven by appreciation for each other and by a chance to make the world a better place:

Live The Process: Amelia, prior to your struggle with breast cancer, did you have an interest in health and wellness?

Amelia Kirchoff: Prior to my breast cancer diagnosis, I did have an interest in wellness. But—after my cancer diagnosis, as I researched alternative therapies and learned so much more about the effect that healthy, nutritious food can have on our health—this interest became a passion. Although I researched many alternative therapies, I turned to macrobiotics after meeting a relative who survived a diagnosis of terminal lymphoma through strict adherence to the macrobiotic diet. This personal experience gave me the confidence to turn down a five-year regimen of Tamoxifen (and its potentially harmful side effects) that was recommended by doctors at that time. Instead, I built up my immune system by following the principles of macrobiotics.

I was born in Wales and grew up on a farm in England. My parents, although not vegan, had a large orchard and vegetable garden. They had a small food-based business, and my mother cooked everything from scratch. We rarely bought prepackaged or canned food. This experience helped me make the transition to macrobiotics and its focus on grain and vegetable-based meals that are cooked at home. Of course, as I recovered from cancer, my interest in macrobiotics and its focus on building a healthy body, as well as creating balance in one's life, intrigued me.

LTP: How did you both come to start making bars? Jola, why did you decide to join your mother in her new macrobiotic diet?

AK: Although, initially I followed a strict macrobiotic diet that did not permit sweets, I found that I missed the desserts and cookies that I loved. The desserts that were available in macrobiotic cookbooks at the time did not appeal to me, so, after I recovered, I started to make my own. Initially, I made cookies, pies and bars for myself and my family. I had just purchased a farm with a small orchard in Wisconsin with my husband, and I expanded the orchard and grew all my own vegetables. My love for gardening came from my mother who had been a gardener all her life. My daughter, Jola, and her husband, Alex, often came to visit and enjoyed the desserts I made. Alex suggested to Jola that she try to sell them and that was the start of GoMacro. We soon found that there was a bigger demand for the bars and they were easier to make and ship, so our focus turned to the MacroBars.

Jola Sonkin: I joined my mother in converting to a macrobiotic diet because I wanted to support her through this challenging journey she was on. I also saw the effect the diet had on her strength and vitality and how it was changing her life for the better.



LTP: How did that lifestyle shift—and your respective backgrounds—ultimately impact the company’s creation?

AK: As I continued to study nutrition, I was amazed at the amount of unhealthy processed food that was in the marketplace and my passion to share healthy wholesome food with absolutely no additives or preservatives only grew. The cancer diagnosis had given us both the opportunity to realize the importance of good nutrition. Ultimately, good nutrition comes from the quality of farm fresh produce—produce that is vegan, organic, non-GMO and free of all pesticides. Understanding this, together with my love of gardening and animals, and a farm to experiment in, I knew it was inevitable that I would grow my own food. I was then inspired to utilize these ingredients to create healthy, organic bars. My prior experience running a small business, as well as coming from an entrepreneurial family, gave me the organizational and accounting experience that I needed. But I was not a salesperson.

JS: As my mother’s health improved, she started to experiment in the kitchen, producing delicious cookies, bars and pies. At the time, I was a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools and had no experience in sales or the health food industry, but my mom’s battle with cancer was my inspiration. After school one day, I decided to wrap a few of her cookies in saran wrap, printed up a label listing the ingredients on my computer at home and called them, “MacroTreats.” The first store I went to loved them and bought six dozen! My experience as a teacher implementing school programs and interacting with lots of people perhaps made it easier to sell the bars. Although I was initially nervous, it became more natural with time, and sometimes my mother and I would go together, since we found that as a mother/daughter team we were able to support each other.

LTP: What makes GoMacro unique? Do you each have a favorite bar respectively?

JS: We are a female-founded business that, after 13 years, is still 100% privately owned and funded. This has enabled us to maintain our passion for the highest quality organic ingredients and the ability to purchase from farmers who practice sustainability and pay fair wages. Our bars are unique because they are USDA organic, gluten free certified, vegan certified, kosher certified and non-GMO project verified, RAW and CLEAN certified.

My favorite MacroBar is the Everlasting Joy (Coconut + Almond Butter + Chocolate Chips). I love the flavor combination and that the bar is high in protein, which I crave after a great workout. I'm also particularly fond of this bar because it is one of our MacroBars with a "give back" component: a portion of the proceeds from sales of the Everlasting Joy bar goes to programs that assist with feeding the homeless. I grew up in an urban area, and taught school for many years in Chicago, and witnessed firsthand the many health and personal issues that impacted the local homeless community. Giving back to the community is part of GoMacro's brand mission and it is something very important to me personally. I'm proud to be able to do that with this bar.

AK: My favorite is the Morning Harvest Apples + Walnut Bar. I love it because the five grams of fiber is important to my diet. I love apples and have a huge apple orchard, so they are one of my favorite snacks. Since it is difficult to travel with apples, I always take several Apples + Walnut MacroBars with me.

LTP: Aside from eating your own bars, do you have wellness rituals or obsessions that keep you feeling balanced and relaxed?

AK: I have found that, as I turn 70, I need to be ever more careful of my diet. I feel healthier when I cook with fruit and vegetables from my garden, and I try to eat throughout the year with what is in season. Every day, I get up at 5.30am because I enjoy that early quiet time to exercise: treadmill and lifting weights for strength, as well as yoga for flexibility.

I have learned firsthand that diet and exercise go together and both are needed for me to stay in tune with my body. I love my life on the farm—the ability to meditate, go for a walk and enjoy nature, as well as enjoy the animals that live here. I also enjoy gardening and experimenting with new recipes. Making my own healthy desserts is still an obsession.

J: I love spending time with my family. After seeing what my mom went through, I have seen how fragile life can be. I have four kids and want to appreciate every moment I can with them. I also love work; everything that has to do with GoMacro is truly a joy for me. However, I realize the importance of balance, so I always find time to work out, practice yoga and spend time with friends.

LTP: What does happiness look like to you?

JS: To us, happiness means spending time with each other, being able to enjoy nature and our family farm and creating a responsible business that benefits the world rather than harms it.

LTP: What does it mean to you to “Live The Process” and how can we all do that more each day?

JS: To us, “living the process” means creating balance in our lives and, to do that, one must try to live in the moment. All too often, we are distracted by our hectic schedules, leaving no time to experience each moment fully. Having a purpose and a clear direction makes it easier to enjoy every moment. We are very grateful to own a company that we believe in, that allows us to live responsibly and that gives us total satisfaction.

We can all create balance in our lives by creating achievable goals for ourselves. As you make progress towards a goal, you will find satisfaction. Spend five to fifteen minutes every morning planning your day, turning it into an experience that will increase enjoyment and create direction. You will be on your way to “living the process.”

