

## THE SWEET TASTE OF CHILDHOOD

by Kim Hanson

702 words

Chocolate. It's sweet, decadent and often addictive. . . once you've started eating it's hard to stop. But for one enterprising Alberta couple, Crystal and Bert Westergard, chocolate represents so much more. It serves as a tasty conduit to all things past.

Chances are, if you were born and raised in either Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba, and are 40 years or older, you will recall snacking on a Cuban Lunch chocolate bar. A rich, deep, delicious rectangle of chocolatey-goodness, with crinkled edges, a shiny, smooth bottom, embedded with a handful of salty Spanish peanuts. The unusual name for the delicious treat found its way into the vernacular during the Spanish-American war fought in Cuba in 1898. Intriguingly, a Cuban Lunch was “*a soldier's rectangular chocolate ration.*”

This slang term hung on. The Paulin Chambers company of Winnipeg began a bakery in the early 1900's, manufacturing not only their version of the Cuban Lunch, but also other confections, biscuits and treats. The prairie company ceased to exist more than thirty years ago.

When Crystal's elderly mom, Elfie, was struggling with memory loss, she says,

“My mom couldn't remember her favourite colour or what she ate for breakfast or even the date of her birth. But, she did remember being a young girl, eating her favourite chocolate bar; a Cuban Lunch.”

Crystal wondered,

“When everything else has been stripped away from an elderly senior, why can't they have just one simple pleasure? Eating a plain, historical, chocolate bar.”

Crystal wanted to bring back something familiar to her mom. She wanted to re-create the humble, simple Cuban Lunch. But, as the Westergards' soon discovered, that desire was much easier said than done!

Crystal and Bert, two non-chocolate-type people set out on a united quest to satisfy not only Elfie's craving, but many like her. First, they obtained the trademark for Cuban Lunch. Next, they met with chocolate factory owners in an effort to find a suitable partner. It wasn't long before they realized that chocolate people are artisans in their own right. Chocolatiers prefer to work on their own new creations and didn't necessarily want to go back in time and “copy” someone else's work.

Undaunted, Crystal and Bert bought and studied a book called “The Art of the Chocolatier.” They took a class on “How to Make Truffles” from a local expert and obtained their food handling permit, in order to establish credibility in the marketplace.

The two began experimenting with chocolate recipes at home after their day jobs were through. Once they felt close to having produced a replica of the Cuban Lunch recipe, they took the project to a chocolate factory in Delta, B.C., that agreed to work with them. Unfortunately, the factory ended up discarding this version of the Westergards' recipe entirely. . . they had used Hersey's chocolate chips in the mix which the factory did not have access to.

Experimentation of that elusive recipe continued. They worked together on perfecting the chocolate and peanut mixture yet again. For this batch, though, they rented a commercial kitchen. Crystal and Bert produced a few thousand bars which sold out immediately!

Today, their new Cuban Lunch has sold well over one million bars. They can be found for sale in many western Canadian supermarkets.

The company's website ([www.CubanLunch.ca](http://www.CubanLunch.ca)) is a great source of history, stories and testimonials. As Josephine, a retired nurse says,

“In March 2020, I was in Calgary Co-op and discovered they were selling Cuban Lunch chocolate bars. I purchased several and was in seventh heaven as I slowly ate them. I am 87 years old and cherish your Cuban Lunch bars and the memories they bring back to me.”

Rum & Butter is their latest chocolate re-creation. These bars also sold out quickly. Crystal and Bert are awaiting their turn at the chocolate factory for production of more stock. Despite the pitfalls, roadblocks and hurdles, the Westergard's have persevered. Their dream is to grow their little company. Their goal is to continue to produce more chocolate nostalgia, like Pep Chew, Wigwag and Liquid Four Flavours. Their reward is knowing that, just for a few minutes, their customers can again walk in the shoes of a seven-year old child.