

Making a crust

Story by Angela Wellington

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Thanks to a young bloke from WA, Americans are tucking into the humble Aussie pie.

A few years ago a young bloke left Perth for America.

His father, an American who had lived in Australia for a long time, moved to Toledo, Ohio, for work and the young marketing student thought he'd go along, continue his studies and "just see something a bit different."

If it was difference he was after, it was difference he found.

There were, he discovered, no meat pies to be had in Toledo. At least none that he saw and none that an Australian would recognize or appreciate. The closest approximation was a little pastry concoction called a "pot pie" which, the Aussie noted with distain, couldn't even really be picked up and eaten by hand.

As a university student in Perth, the meat pie had been a staple of Purri Gould's diet.

"You kind of miss it when it's not around," the 25-year-old former Rockingham boy says.

While the bloke in him was registering dismay, the marketing student in him registered "opportunity".

"I thought, I bet you someone's going to come along here, they're gonna start selling meat pies, and America's such a big market they're going to make a bundle."

In the beginning he thought he might wait until he'd graduated to give the pie magnate idea a go. But, youth being youth, he didn't wait. He put the idea to his mum.

Lynne Gould, who had joined her husband in Toledo, had a background in project management. After 10 years of study and serious career positions she wasn't immediately impressed when one of her sons suggested they move into pie-making. Once the initial shock had worn off, however, she considered the potential of the American market (more than 290 million people to Australia's 20 million).

They set up a bakery in a quiet mall for research. Over seven months, they discovered Americans like a bolder flavour than the traditional Australian meat pie, but love its typical flaky pastry.

The Goulds and their pies were embraced. Today they operate a State-inspected kitchen in an old church, making frozen pies to sell in the area.

Originally simply called “Aussie Pies”, the name has changed to “Crikey’s: Genuine Australian Pies”. The product’s logo is a cartoon crocodile. (Purri’s artistically talented brother Isaac helped develop the product’s packaging.)

“At the time the Crocodile Hunter was really big over here,” explains Purri. “Everyone was really infatuated with this guy. So we wanted to play on the theme.”

The enterprise employs 10 people and is producing about 2400 pies a week. To go beyond State boundaries they’ll need to set up a Federal plant – so that’s the goal for the coming months.

“We want to make it big now,” says Purri. “If it works here in Toledo it will work anywhere in the States.”

The potential, he believes, is quite spectacular.

It’s a mesmerizing image; millions of Americans clutching pies at the football. Just like Australians. Or maybe not quite. Perhaps the Americans need to develop their own deep cultural relationship with the meat pie.

“They mess it up a bit sometimes,” says Purri. “They want to sit down and eat it with knives and forks. You have to let them do that. You have to let them discover it and make it their own as well.”

The practice of plastering tomato sauce on the lid of the pies has, sadly, been lost in translation.

“I get into trouble for doing that,” says Lynne. “My sauce maker says, ‘I make this beautiful sauce and you go kill the flavour with tomato sauce. What are you doing?’”

With two other sons still living in Rockingham, Lynne says they want to visit back “home” very regularly.

Back in Australia, as it happens, there is a branch of her family that has already produced a long line of bakers. Indeed it was a cousin New South Wales who pioneered an efficient method of making pies in bulk for small bakeries.

Lynne plans to talk to him again soon. It’s time to discuss his sausage roll machine.