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Tell us your story - how did it all start and what inspired you to start making your own chocolate?

We started the business from our tiny kitchen in our flat in Bayswater, London. Meg had been making chocolate treats for herself, friends and family for some time. After giving up refined sugar from her diet, and being vegan, she quickly discovered the options in local stores for good quality, healthier chocolate were rather limited.

From experimental homemade recipes using raw cacao and coconut sugar we felt we had a product which was ready to launch to the public. The first few months of the business were incredibly tough, as any startup would agree, the transition from day jobs (Meg in corporate HR, and Jonathan in E-Commerce) to full time chocolatiers was far from easy. Launching into our first retailers in London enabled us to quit our day jobs, Meg in the Summer of 2015 and Jonathan later in the Winter, and eventually relocate the business to Derbyshire.

Tell us a bit about how you make your chocolate and choose your flavours?

All of our chocolate is crafted from three main ingredients; cacao butter, cacao powder and coconut sugar. We carefully refine the mixture using state of the art equipment – which holds the mixture at a steady 40 degrees Celsius until it's incredibly smooth. Making good quality chocolate takes time, so this part can't be rushed. We add ground cashew nuts, lucuma and inulin powder to our 'Mylk' recipe, which delivers a dairy free creaminess.

Once the chocolate is silky and smooth, we temper to ensure each bar has shine and snap. The mixture is

delicately dispensed into our moulds, and inclusions such as goji berries, cacao nibs, and pink Himalayan salt, are carefully sprinkled onto each bar. Once the bars are chilled and firmly set, they're wrapped, packaged and delivered to our warehouse, ready to be delivered to one of our many customers around the world.

Developing our recipes is possibly our favourite part of the job. We aim for flavours that create interesting combinations, or textures that add an extra dimension to our chocolate. Sometimes demand for classic flavours such as mint or orange is so strong, we felt they deserved to be part of our range.

Why is Raw Halo chocolate healthier than regular chocolate?

We like to think our chocolate is glowing with goodness. Why? Well because we only source the finest organic ingredients, avoiding any GMO or crops that have been subject to pesticides. Our cacao is raw, which means we don't roast our beans – instead we rely on gentle sun drying and use a cold pressed extraction method – this ensures more nutrients are retained in the cacao. We don't use any refined cane sugar in our recipes – instead we opt for a healthier coconut sugar, which is known to have a lower GI, avoiding nasty sugar spikes.

What are the nutritional benefits of eating raw chocolate?

If we had our way, all chocolate would be raw. Raw cacao has so many health benefits over traditional roasted chocolate, and we think it tastes even better too. Cacao is known as a good source of iron, magnesium, and >

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antioxidants, and unfortunately most of that is lost when the cacao is roasted. Raw cacao simply retains more of the nutritional benefits, a more natural way to enjoy chocolate.

Why is fair trade and organic important to Raw Halo and how do you source your ingredients?

Utilising ingredients which are both fairly traded and organic are at the heart of Raw Halo. We work with a small supplier based in the UK, who we've built a trusting relationship with. They are very open and transparent in the way they work, and we really appreciate that. Over the last few years, they have built a network of organic certified suppliers, mainly cacao farmers in Peru, and coconut sugar suppliers in Indonesia. We work alongside the Soil Association where our ingredients and final products are certified along every step of the way. It's hugely important that the farmers producing our ingredients earn their fair share, and we'll always champion that.

What would be your desert island chocolate bar and why?

If we could only take a single bar, that would be our award winning Pure Dark. We love how fruity it tastes, and because it's a relatively high cacao percentage at 76%, a single piece is most satisfying – so a 70g bar will last a good week or so.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

Two moments which really stand out for us over the last few years, were receiving our first Great Taste Award, and launching into Harrods. When we began making chocolate

we felt like small fish in a big pond, with so many other established brands around, and chocolate experts making their names known. Winning an award for our Pure Dark bar in 2015, and further awards for Pure Mylk, and Mylk + Salted Caramel in 2017 gave us validation of the quality we had always strived for. Our launch into Harrods was rather unexpected, and it certainly put our brand on the map. Being stocked in the most famous department store in the world certainly helps open doors into other stockists – we're incredibly grateful to their team for giving us that opportunity.

What's coming up for Raw Halo in the future?

As we head into our third year, we do so with a huge amount of optimism and excitement. As we launch into our first supermarket, Booths, we're working to hard scale up our production and ensure we meet our ever growing forecasts for 2018. With more supermarket listings hopefully on the horizon, we're returning to Crowdcube for our second round of fund raising. Working with larger retailers certainly requires more working capital to cover ingredients and stock, so raising additional finance becomes a necessity.

Chocolate aside, what foods do you love and how do you keep yourself healthy?

We try to balance our work and life as much as we can. Keeping fit often revolves around yoga for Meg, and out running through the hills of Derbyshire for Jonathan. Meg loves avocados and will find a way to include them into

