

# BEN & JERRY'S: THE INSIDE SCOOP

How Two Real Guys Built a Business with a  
Social Conscience and a Sense of Humor

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1.

Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield first met in a 7th grade gym class at Merrick Avenue Junior High School when they both found themselves lagging behind all the other students who were running a mile for gym class.

The coach yelled at them, "*Cohen, Greenfield, if you can't do the mile in under seven minutes, you're gonna have to do it again!*" Ben replied, "*But coach, if we can't do it in less than seven minutes the first time, how are we gonna do it in under seven minutes the second time?*"

With that, Jerry realized Ben was the sort of guy he wanted to hang out with, and the two quickly struck up a friendship.

Ben's father was a successful accountant who worked for the State of New York, and he later boasted his greatest contribution to Ben's career was in passing on genes that predisposed his son to eat a lot. Ben was okay at schoolwork when he applied himself, but he really excelled at eating and his physical shape (even as a kid) reflected a healthy appetite.

Like Ben, Jerry also was overweight as a kid. He got good grades at school, played as much sport as possible and hung out with a small group of close friends.

At High School, Jerry continued to get excellent grades while Ben excelled mainly at extracurricular activities. Jerry won an academic scholarship and went to Oberlin College in Ohio while Ben decided to attend Colgate University in New York because the dorms there had open fireplaces.

To support himself, Ben got a job in the student cafeteria which went okay until he grew a beard - which happened to be against food hygiene rules. When this was drawn to his attention, he shaved a thin strip down the middle of his chin, so instead of a beard, he now claimed to simply have two rather bushy sideburns. The food services manager was not amused and fired him anyway.

Ben eventually "sort of left" Colgate University, having failed to get around to returning to school after a one-month independent study period. After working for an ice cream company in their freezer for a few months, he tried to enroll in Skidmore College in New York as an exchange student - which went fine for one semester until they found out he had actually dropped out of Colgate. Ben suggested they let him sit in on some courses without actually registering (and without paying any student fees), but for some reason Skidmore College was not keen on that idea. Eventually, a compromise was reached, and Ben was enrolled in a program which allowed him to take some classes without being a registered student, although he did have to pay the course fees. After a year at Skidmore taking pottery classes, however, Jerry decided his new pottery career needed new influences and he moved to New York City at the end of 1972.

Jerry, meanwhile, continued to excel academically, and maintained a near-perfect 3.8 grade-point average at university in his first year as a pre-med student. His grades did, however, slip a little the longer he stayed at university, as he became involved in basketball and lacrosse. When Jerry was unable to get accepted into any medical school after graduating from Oberlin College, he decided to go stay with Ben in New York, and arrived there in May 1973.

To pay the bills, Jerry got a job as a lab technician while Ben drove a cab. Ben also developed an interesting theory on nutrition at about this time, and he tried to live on a diet of nothing but French bread and butter. Quite often, he would burn the

bread while toasting it, and then happily eat charred French bread. It was a hint that Ben really had no sense of taste or smell whatsoever - which would later turn out to be a bit of a handicap in an ice cream business.

By mid-1974, Ben tired of New York and was successful in getting a job teaching crafts at Highland Community's school in Paradox, New York. When he got there, he found most of the 25 students were there by court order, but that didn't perturb him and he plunged enthusiastically into teaching crafts, photography and organizing the yearbook. Unfortunately, however, his dog Malcolm was accused of being the source of a surprising decrease in the number of chickens on the school property in circumstances that Ben later described as "strictly circumstantial". In addition, Ben didn't like the numerous staff meetings, and when the school closed in early 1977, Ben decided he would like to go into business for himself.

Jerry, meanwhile, had met his future wife, Elizabeth Skarie, and had moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina to stay with her. While she worked and paid the bills, Jerry spent nine months hanging around the campus of the University of North Carolina until he got another job as a lab technician. When he was temporarily ditched by Elizabeth in early 1977, he decided to take up Ben's invitation to go into business with him and he loaded all his possessions into his car and drove north to catch up with Ben.

2.

Having decided to go into business together, Jerry and Ben now had to decide what type of business they wanted to start. One idea was to become cross-country truck drivers. However, since they both loved to eat, they also thought some business involving food might be fun.

Their first idea was to form a company called UBS (standing for United Bagel Service) which would home deliver fresh bagels and cream cheese with the Sunday edition of *The New York Times*. The only problem was they couldn't figure out what the company would do the other six days of the week. They also discovered bagel making equipment would cost them \$40,000.

Their second choice for a business was making ice cream, which they never actually got around to researching the cost of equipment but they simply assumed must be cheaper than making bagels. Jerry and Ben invested in a \$5 correspondence course on ice cream making offered by Penn State University, and started researching where they should locate their new enterprise.

Obviously, a warm climate is desirable for an ice cream business. The only problem was most warm cities already had home made ice cream shops. Therefore, they ended up moving to Saratoga Springs, the home of one of Ben's old university's - Skidmore College.

Jerry had accumulated about \$4,000 since college, and Ben decided he would contribute the same amount of capital to the new venture. To raise his share, he took a job as a baker's assistant - but he was fired six weeks later for prepping a batch of roll batter with too much salt and other indiscretions. He also worked at a Diner for a while until he had a slight disagreement with the owner over the adequacy of the kitchen lighting and was fired again.

Jerry, meanwhile, was scouting out a location for a store and attending auctions for used restaurant equipment. Whenever he was free, Ben would help by attending the auctions with Jerry,

