

Upfront

“Alchemy” refers to the transformation of matter. In medieval times, alchemists aspired to convert base metals to gold or develop a universal elixir from readily available elements. Alchemy evolved as more art than science, accruing an affiliation with magic, serving as a metaphor for “the undoable.”

An entrepreneur possesses the alchemist’s spirit. She is sufficiently bold to believe that she can create something from nothing. Her imagination has ample force to outwrestle her skepticism. She is an optimist and a striver, and the fiercest enemy of her own fear.

If it were easy, everyone would do it. This applies to lots of things and particularly well to starting, building and maintaining a business. Just as we can imagine ourselves holding the oversized check that Powerball winners pose for pictures with, we fantasize: If Elon Musk can, why not I? Reality rules, however, and the failure rate for entrepreneurs in the U.S. (arguably the Promised Land for enterprising dreamers) is dauntingly high. As documented in a comprehensive 2019 research study, roughly 90 percent of startups collapse and disappear. Disappointment comes fast: Nearly 22 percent of new businesses fail in the first year, with more than half gone before what-would-have-been their fifth birthdays. It’s intuitive to believe that a global pandemic has made these morbid statistics even more dire today.

It’s a long way from “I have an idea” to getting someone to pay you for it. And longer, still, to collect enough such payments to meet the obligations you’ve accumulated since Idea-day. Even more distant – the moment that you find there is finally something leftover for you, once everyone else (who hasn’t assumed the same levels of personal risk as you) gets paid. IPOs and billionaire rankings – such rewards are far more statistically improbable than pop-culture suggests.

I’m like you: I root for the little guy. Or gal. And one for whom I root especially hard bought an ad in this issue of my magazine. She didn’t ask for it for free, despite my affection for her (and her husband), which approximates the feelings I have for my own family. Rather, fully respectful of the odds-defying artifice of proprietorship, she and her partner (also a friend of mine) are paying me for space farther back in this book.

But I want to share a sliver of Cindy Edwards’s story, and the story of Sapelo Skin Care, as it relates to my own. Cindy, a longtime Skidaway Island resident, and her business partner, Stephanie Dutton, also a neighbor of yours, had an idea. As I alluded to above, that can be a dangerous thing. Dangerous when it’s a bad idea – as converting such a thing

to success is nearly impossible – but, perhaps, even more dangerous when the idea is sound enough to (possibly) work...because, suddenly you’re sucked into a relentless vortex that consumes much, maybe all, of your energy, money and time.

As Cindy and Stephanie say, through their company’s website, “The wash of tides is essential...the founders of Sapelo Skin Care have been paying attention to rivers and creeks that swell with high tides twice each day. Stephanie and Cindy heed lessons of generations of Southern women to be gentle and careful with their skin; a heritage often overlooked in today’s hyper-popular trends of repeatedly inflaming the skin with quick-fix dermabrasion procedures and chemical peels. Following cues from tides and tradition, they’ve crafted a contemporary, twice-daily ritual that soothes and replenishes – delivering surges of nourishment and hydration for healthy cell development...The brand launched in 2015, its name a nod to the still-wild barrier island near the Savannah coast. All of this, born of the Georgia tides.”

Where do the stories of skin care and my own intersect? Through my wife, actually, which is cruelly ironic, as skin disease took her life.

Cindy and Louise, at first blush as different as the Country Mouse and City Mouse monikers they jokingly used to describe their much-more-complex-than-thatselves, were the best of friends. They loved, cherished, and respected each other, both their disparate characteristics and their common cores. When Cindy contemplated entrepreneurship, she sought Louise’s counsel, as Louise was a clever and accomplished businessperson, herself. Louise, a “grinder,” versed in financial theory and process discipline, was happy to help. Until she couldn’t anymore, as she was forced to fight for her life rather than commercial success. One thing is certain: If Louise were still around six years out from Cindy and Sapelo’s first official day, the pride and joy she would feel for her friend wouldn’t be limited by my inadequately descriptive prose.

Cindy asked my opinion, too. My response: “There is probably nothing harder in free-market capitalism than building a consumer brand.” Fortunately, for the men and women who swear by Sapelo’s age-defying mysticism, Cindy both heard and ignored me each time she inquired.

I skied with Cindy’s husband last week (Am I allowed to admit that in “COVID times?”). I love Joe; I love Cindy; we all loved Louise. Joe tried to explain Louise to some of the other guys on the trip who hadn’t met her. I remember one word he said above all others: “Special.” That she was. “Cindy has Louise’s picture right next to her computer at her desk,” Joe said. “She looks at her every day.”

Cindy, Stephanie, ladies of Sapelo Skin Care, I’m sure she’s looking back and smiling, knowing you’ve made it this far.

Scott A. Lawrence



To contact The Skinnie with your ideas, responses, letters and more, email us at mail@theskinnie.com

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Before



After

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