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Cook uses her noodle

Big bucks for cheap eats

Fleur Bainger

IF a woman who didn't know how to boil an egg can sell a couple of million cookbooks and become a national success story, there's hope for any of us.

And that's a message Rachael Bermingham is keen to spread.

Wife, mother of three, and one half of the team behind publishing phenomenon *4 Ingredients*, the Queensland entrepreneur is making her way to Perth this week to inspire other women with her rags-to-riches tale, which ends with her becoming the highest-selling, self-published woman author in Australia, co-host of a TV cooking show and director of a book distribution company.

Bermingham and her friend Kim McCosker came up with *4 Ingredients*, the first in a series of cookbooks containing recipes that use four ingredients or less.

In keeping with the simple theme, the method can usually be detailed in four lines or less, and there's nothing you wouldn't normally find in a mainstream supermarket.

A world away from the kitchen, Bermingham's career started in hairdressing before switching to diver and shark feeder, then starting up a travel consultancy.

Her timing couldn't have been worse. She opened the consultancy three months before the World Trade Center attacks in New York, and her business slid into bankruptcy.

"We were beyond broke," she said. "I remember going through the house and trying to find 5c to make up a dollar for a loaf of bread at one point. It was dire."

But during that period Bermingham says she discovered a marketing talent that pulled her out of a deep hole. "Businesses started approaching me to market them," she said.

"That's when I turned businesses from zero turnover to \$2.5 million turnover. I really knew marketing, promotion and publicity, which I was shocked at because I had no training, no experience and no uni degree."

She also credits this time with seeding her passion for simple, inexpensive cooking that makes use of household basics.

"You would take one ingredient and use it three different ways," she said. "Meatloaf is one – mince is so cheap whenever you buy it.

"I also used quiches a lot, they're fantastic. All you need is puff pastry, eggs, sour cream and

whatever vegetable you have living in your fridge. I really love using bacon or even pineapple.

"It's really cheap to make and you can make two and freeze one for later. When you're a busy mum you don't want to have to cook every night."

Bermingham said she and McCosker were told the cookbook market was saturated when they first started.

"We were unknowns, we'd never written a cookbook before, and we weren't chefs," she said. So the women decided to self-publish and the rest, as they say, is history.

Detractors complain that the recipes are too simple, overuse pre-made goods in jars and lack nutritional value, but with sales of the four *4 Ingredients* titles and two other books by Bermingham reaching a combined 3.25 million, the market would appear to disagree.

Their show on Foxtel's Lifestyle Channel is beamed into 18 countries. The pair have just returned from a *4 Ingredients* book tour in Britain and the cookbooks are due to be launched in the US in April.

Bermingham is also the new owner of a distribution company, Bermingham Books, and is regularly used as a motivational speaker.

The businesswoman says her lack of cooking expertise has never been an issue.

"People relate to it – they think, 'If she can do it, I can do it,'" she said. "I remember making a call to Mum, saying, 'How long do I boil an egg for?'"

Bermingham will address the Women's Network Association on Thursday and cook pancakes for kids with cancer at CanTeen's Bandanna Day on Friday. Visit www.everydayhero.com.au/burswood—pancakes.

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Rachael Bermingham Author, 4 Ingredients

1,1,1,1, CAKE

A recipe from the poetic Belinda Gillam ... defines fast and fabulous.

- 1 cup coconut
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup caster sugar
- 1 cup self-raising flour

Preheat oven to 180C. Place all ingredients in a bowl and mix.

Line a loaf tin with baking paper and pour mixture in. Bake for 40 minutes.

Optional: Serve warm with butter or cold with cream cheese icing.

Deliciously simple.

Rachael Bermingham with her three sons, twins Casey and Bowie and Jaxson.

Picture: PAUL BROBAN

