

Cora Shaker, The Jellybean Maker

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Once upon a time, there were two very unusual jellybeans: one was polka-dotted (aquamarine spots with white encircling them on a peach colored background) and one was gray. You don't usually see those kinds of colors, even with all the jellybeans that are out there these days, so many more than when I was a little girl. They were made by an old woman who had a very special, very small jellybean shop. Her name was Cora. Cora Shaker. She always said that her name fit, because she liked to "shake things up." She made all the jellybeans herself, and made up their designs and flavors as well. The people in the little town she lived in just loved the jellybeans she made. She made enough money to keep going, and that was just fine with her, as she loved her work – she loved imagining the colors and flavors, and then figuring out the puzzle of how to make them. She also loved that her work made children and grownups happy. She did make sure to include a toothbrush and tiny toothpaste tube, too, so that the people would know she thought it was important that they take care of their teeth as well as enjoy the treats she made.

One year, a giant jellybean company decided to put their new, state-of-the-art jellybean factory in the very same town. Even though people loved Cora's jellybeans, they were curious about the new factory, and many of them got jobs in the factory, too. The company did a lot of advertising, and gave away a lot of free samples. They had very many flavors and colors, all bright and solid and sweet. Pretty soon, Cora's jellybeans weren't selling as fast as they had. She started to make less and less money, because she had fewer and fewer customers. Soon after that, she realized that she was not going to be able to stay in business much longer. She closed her shop.

She needed to get a job, so she went to the jellybean factory and filled out an application. She had never worked for a big factory, and didn't know how to find her way through the big building. She just went to the first office she found that took applications. The woman who was doing the hiring didn't pay much attention to the name on the application, and didn't look up and recognize Cora – she just saw that Cora had written down that she had experience with jellybeans, and stamped the words "New Hire" on the application. Soon Cora had a new uniform

and was working on the jellybean line adding jellybeans to a big conveyor belt. She like the people she worked with, even though the work was very different and a little boring. So she decided that on each of her breaks, she would make a new jellybean, just like she used to. Eventually, she had a whole box of them. She was just going back to work, and about to put her box down, when she sneezed. She turned her head so that the sneeze wouldn't go on the conveyor belt and spread her germs, but as she sneezed her box tipped up sideways over the conveyor belt and as she said the "choo" in "AHHHH-CHOOOO!!!" all the jellybeans fell out onto the belt. She watched them flow away, and felt a little sad, but not very sad. She had made so many jellybeans in her time that she knew she would make more. Besides, it would be nice to have her jellybeans going out where people would enjoy them again. She knew that they were made even better and as safely as the factory standards, so she didn't see any harm in a few new jellybeans getting into the packages.

The next week, there was a buzz in town. People were noticing that in every package of jellybeans, there were a few jellybeans that looked different from all the other jellybeans. Everyone was excited to find something new, and they shared and compared and sighed at the delicious flavors and colors, like Wild Beach Plum Jelly. They started to buy the jellybeans just to find the new ones. Pretty soon, word of this hubbub came to the head of the jellybean factory. She asked her assistant "What's going on? We don't have any new designs of jellybeans. We didn't approve any new campaign. Track this down and find out what is going on!"

So her assistant found some of the packaging from the people who had found new jellybeans, and looked up the codes that were printed on the package to find out the date and the line on which the jellybeans had been produced and packaged. Then she interviewed everyone on the line, one by one, to find out if they had anything to do with the new jellybeans. Everyone said no, they had no idea. But at last she got to Cora, who answered the assistant's questions honestly and told how she had been making jellybeans during her breaks, and how by accident they had fallen onto the line, but that they were safe.

The next day the head of the factory came down to the line to see Cora. "Cora," she said, "I hear you are the source of these unusual jellybeans that have been suddenly appearing in our

packages. Now, you're new to this whole working on a line thing, but surely you can understand that we can't just have new things suddenly appear. We very carefully research and plan our product introductions, and we do field tests and market research and very, very carefully make sure that our product is the SAME every time – that anyone who buys a bag of our jellybeans will know what they are going to get and get just that. You have broken our rules.” Cora started to pick up her things, thinking that she was going to be fired. But the head of the company smiled kindly and put her hand on Cora's shoulder.

“Please hear me out, Cora. Even though you broke our rules, it seems that you have something to teach us, despite all our research and tests. People just love your jellybeans, and they are excited to find a new and unique one in the middle of our bag of ones that are the same every time. I understand that in fact you used to be a jellybean maker all the time, but that our big factory put you out of business.”

“That's right,” said Cora simply.

“I have a proposal for you,” said the head of the factory. “We'd like you to keep making new flavors and colors of jellybeans, just one of every new kind that you make up. We'll give you your own space to work in, and you can work there more than just on your breaks, you can work there all the time.” Cora smiled, imagining the space. The head of the factory went on, “We'll just keep on putting one new kind of jellybean into each bag we sell, on purpose, from now on. This way, you can go back to doing the kind of work you are used to.

“A little store just couldn't afford to sell all specialty jellybeans anymore. Even a big factory like we have couldn't afford that. But if we combine your special jellybeans with our big factory ones, and just put one in each bag, I think we can make something very special together.”

And so, Cora did keep inventing jellybeans, and the townspeople went on enjoying them. She even got the company to add a tiny toothbrush with every bag, the way she used to. The company decided her skills were so important, that they decided to hire an apprentice to learn from her before she retired. So they put out an advertisement and took applications, and

reviewed hundreds of them very carefully to find the right apprentice. Eventually, they picked a little girl who was just the right person for the job, with a great imagination and good working skills. She learned from Cora about how to make up new flavors and colors, and work to make those imaginings into jellybeans, so the skills were passed on and that very same girl is still making jellybeans today.

After Cora retired from the company, she opened a Jellybean Museum and Art Gallery. More and more people flocked to it, and the new factory head came to look and see what Cora was up to now! For the new head of the factory was that very first apprentice whom Cora had taught. When the former apprentice saw all the inventive artwork made by visitors, and the new jelly beans which Cora kept making, she offered to contribute thousands of the company's jellybeans so children could make even more art in the gallery. She also offered to produce whole bags of some of Cora's new jellybeans for sale each month, and give with a portion of the proceeds going to Cora. Cora was happy, the townspeople were happy, and every year a new apprentice to comes to the Jellybean Museum to learn from Cora. Usually, the apprentices are children, but whether they are children or grownups, they go on to do imaginative things all over the world. And it all started with some jelly beans and a woman who liked to shake things up!