

# The Native Society

Positive Perspective Platform: Inspiring Thought Leadership

## RISA BARASH: FOUNDER & CEO, FAIRY TALES HAIRCARE



### **Bio:**

Risa Barash is the CEO and Founder of the first line of all natural lice-prevention hair care for kids – **Fairy Tales**, which is only second to Suave Kids' in terms of sales. In 1999, Risa and her husband owned a hair salon where hundreds of kids were coming in with head lice each month. They realized that prevention would be key – and from there, were able to develop Fairy Tales' Rosemary Repel® to prevent lice before the onset. To get the product off the ground, Risa walked the streets of Manhattan, placing Fairy Tales shampoos in salons for free – with a promise that if it did not sell, they would come back and pick it up - all sold out. The company is coming up on a twenty year anniversary, and Fairy Tales is a multimillion dollar business, with more than just lice care (i.e. everyday shampoos, sun protective hair products, detanglers and more).

### **How did you get into the beauty/haircare industry?**

My husband got me involved in the beauty business. His family owned a children's salon in NY. The number of cases of head lice kept growing so they developed a shampoo using organic herbs. I came along with my PR, marketing background and after much research and debate, I joined the team.

### **Any emerging beauty/haircare industry trends?**

Beauty/hair care is in a huge growth period. I attribute this to the rise of indie brands, the ability to sell online only and use social media as a catalyst for growth. As a society, we are all more aware of what we put on and in our bodies today. This has led to an insurgence of products both in hair and beauty.

### **Any industry opportunities or challenges?**

Selling online has been a huge disruptor for retail. As we all know, the behemoth known as Amazon has changed the game for everyone. Retailers need to work hard to stay relevant. Brands in turn need to provide for each outlet they sell in. We create programs, promotions and exclusives for mass, salon and specialty stores in order to keep everyone happy.

### **Inspiration for launching Fairy Tales, and your vision for it?**

My inspiration for launching Fairy Tales was really that I just love a challenge! My husband told me that no professional brand of hair care created exclusively for kids had succeeded in salons. My hubris wanted to see what I could do! My vision has always been clear: to create salon quality products that parents need not just want at an affordable price. We will continue to create products branching out into skin and body with the same core values and mission.

### **What's next for Fairy Tales in the near future?**

We are always working on our existing formulas to ensure they are up to date with ingredients. We are creating a baby line as well. This spring/summer we will be launching a line of hair, skin and body products for the next generation of the Fairy Tales customer.

#### **Your key initiatives for the success of Fairy Tales?**

One of the keys to our success has always been the fact that we listen to our customers. Word of mouth marketing created and built our brand since its inception and we never lose sight of that fact. We have created fans, they are verbal and we love that.

#### **Your most difficult moment with Fairy Tales? (and what did you learn?)**

Because we got our start in salons, we turned down retailers for a long time. Since the inception of Amazon and as online shopping boomed, we needed to pivot our thought process. We realized that our growth depended on being where parents shop. We created a tiered program to provide each channel of distribution with incentives to ensure everyone was serviced accordingly.

#### **Ideal experience for a customer using Fairy Tales?**

That's easy! Our Rosemary Repel lice prevention line of hair care has been proven over 96% effective in protecting kids from head lice. You don't get a better experience than that! Our testimonials are amazing to read!

#### **How do you motivate others?**

Everyone loves the story of the underdog and we are certainly that! I love to tell our story about how I walked the streets of NYC putting products in salons and saying to the owners that I guaranteed a sale and if it didn't sell, I would pick up the products! I think it shows that as the founder of the business, I truly believe in my products and am willing to get in there and do whatever is necessary to succeed.

#### **Career advice to those in your industry?**

My best advice for anyone getting into the beauty business is to be passionate about your products, stay true to your mission, read everything you can about the industry and remember to always listen.

#### **What do I do best?**

I am an avid reader and a good talker. As an entrepreneur, I know it's important to stay on top of trends, competitors and my company's long term interests. As a good talker, I am able to articulate my message and engage my listener with a mix of personal, business and humor. Being a former stand-up comic always has its advantages as I believe adding humor to anything always disarms, engages and draws in my audience.

#### **What makes me the best version of myself?**

Tenaciousness comes to mind first. When I stop and think that we created a niche industry – lice prevention hair care, I am always so proud. My belief in our brand, its mission and purpose is something I never wavered from. I worked hard to convince salon owners, parents, and now the top retailers around the country that my brand is needed, wanted and here to stay.

#### **What are my aspirations?**

My personal aspirations are to continue to parent Jack (16) and Ava (14) and help guide them into adulthood. I want to ensure my children are kind, considerate and understand that their happiness and inner peace is the greatest lesson they can learn from me.

My business aspirations are to continue to grow our brand and create products for the growing Fairy Tales Hair Care customer. I believe our brand will be on shelf next to Burt's Bee's, Yes To -type brands as we continue to build and service our loyal customers.

#### **My Biggest Success?**

My biggest success – working with my husband every day for nearly 20 years! Kidding! My greatest success is my children. I know they are mine, but they are really great people. As a working Mom, I don't get to be a helicopter parent much and I think it has been a blessing. My kids are self-sufficient – they understand what needs to be done and they make it happen. My parenting style is a little

unconventional. My kids know that I don't need them to get straight As (however, it's cool if they do). I need them to be well rounded, happy kids.

#### **My Most Challenging Moment?**

I had to let go an employee who really helped shape the business in its early growth years. This person has a brilliant mind but due to some personal issues, it became clear I needed to let her go. We had a great symbiotic working relationship and I truly valued her input so it was incredibly hard to part ways.

#### **My Motto?**

My Dad taught me a long time ago to just keep my head down, focus on my business and don't worry about what anyone else is doing. It has served me well.

#### **My Favorite People/Role Models?**

My favorite personal role model is my Dad. He is an entrepreneur as well. In fact, I am a 4th generation entrepreneur! He has taught me to think big, think smart and think quick. I learned from him to make a decision and move on.

#### **My Favorite Places/Destinations?**

I have 2 favorites. I love the town we live in. Montclair, NJ is an eclectic mix of people, great indie shops, top notch restaurants and we even have a film festival! It's like a mini NYC. And my other happy place is Turks & Caicos. There is something about that island that is magical. Every time we go, I get off the plane and my blood pressure immediately drops!

#### **My Favorite Products/Objects?**

Obviously my favorite product is Fairy Tales Hair Care! I challenge anyone to read our ingredient decks, try our formulas and not be convinced that we make high quality hair care for all! Our Curly line has avocado, murumuru butter and quinoa in it – I am obsessed!

#### **My Current Passions?**

As I said above, our town is really special. I was asked to host the monthly StorySlam at Montclair Film. Each month I host 10 or so storytellers as they present their stories based on a pre-selected theme. I get to tell a little story of my own and work the crowd in between guests. It's been amazing to exercise that comedy muscle again. I absolutely love the challenge!

I have also been obsessed with our new brand launching this spring. We saw a void in the tween market and have created products based on their specific challenges. It has been so much fun as my kids have been involved as well.