

Green QUEEN

Her first market stall of products didn't make a single sale, but Narelle Chenery went on to create the world's first certified organic skincare range.

I grew up eating whatever my mum cooked: meat and three veg with the goodness boiled out of it, Coco Pops for breakfast... which wasn't the best diet. But I started paying attention to my health when, at 21, I had an irregular pap smear. Facing the possibility of cervical cancer at that age put me on the path to natural healing.

"At 22, while I was at university studying applied science, I became pregnant. I started eating organic food and eliminating toxins, and I did what most women do – I looked for the natural claims when buying products. Later, I got involved in a direct sales company that offered 'natural cosmetics', but when I looked into the ingredients, I couldn't even pronounce what was on the label – it certainly didn't sound like something I'd want to drizzle on my salad.

"I was so angry about all the fake claims – women look for the right products but fall victim to all this 'greenwashing'. So I decided to experiment with my own products. My first creation was an after-shaving splash I made with my uncle in mind, as he's always suffered from bad shaving rash. I took a jar and filled it with vodka, orange, cinnamon sticks, basil from my garden and cloves and it turned into a gorgeous infusion. He said it worked amazingly.

"However, my first public experience was at a market and it was an absolute flop – I didn't make a single sale. That inspired me to do things from home – I got my message out by writing articles about what's really in the products we use on our body. I knew I had good products – Miessence came about because I wanted to make a change in the industry. I wanted to be a beacon of integrity and create a product nobody could pick any faults with. Our products were the first in the world to be certified organic according to food standards, by an independent body.

"What we need to realise is that our skin has no defence against poisons – when we eat, toxins are processed by our liver, but whatever we put into our skin goes into our system without a filter. We certainly don't absorb everything, but we apply at least 20 products on a daily basis – just think of your shampoo, conditioner, body creams, each bit of make-up... Imagine the things left on our body.

"Miessence is now available in more than 60 countries, and was the first company in Australia to become carbon-positive – we offset more than our carbon emissions by planting trees. It's such an easy thing to do; I don't

know why everyone doesn't do this. It's important we operate with integrity.

"This path has totally changed my life for the better. My husband, Colin, is a director of the company and he's my rock, and our kids are proud of what we do. I get messages from women around the world telling me how my products have worked for them and I'm honoured.

"I'm currently on a committee developing international standards for cosmetics – it's very cool to be playing on the world stage. There's been a plethora of cosmetic standards that are very lax, and I want to ensure no claims in the cosmetic industry are made that are unsubstantiated. In the meantime, my advice is that if a product says it's organic but has no label indicating it's certified, it's not the real deal.

"This has always been my vision – to help women see beyond hype. My advice – and this isn't limited to the products you use – is to question everything you're told and do your research. Go against the grain, believe in your own wisdom." +

