

Bringing Artisan European Bread To America with Yuliya Childers

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food businesses about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with Yuliya Childers.

Yuliya lives in Prattville, Alabama, and sells European style breads and baked goods with her cottage food business, Wild Yeast Kitchen.

Yuliya is a classically-trained pianist from Ukraine, but started making bread in the United States when she couldn't find any that reminded her of her hometown. She started selling her items in 2016 and her old fashioned products are now very popular with locals.

So I'm looking forward to hearing her unique story today. And with that, welcome to the show Yuliya. Nice to have you here.

Yuliya Childers: [00:00:45] Thanks for having me. It's an honor.

David Crabill: [00:00:48] Yuliya, can you go back to when you got this business started and, I think actually, even before you started the business, you started making bread. Can you just share kind of how you got going with this?

Yuliya Childers: [00:01:01] Sure. I was born and raised in Ukraine, in the Soviet Union actually. And, uh, there are many very good cooks in my family and bakers, but we never actually had to bake bread, because bread was readily available to us. We had, excellent quality bread available every day and, you know, food trucks would bring it to the local bakeries twice a day.

We would get it hot and it was, it was such an essential and basic thing that was. Always cheap and always available to us so nobody in my country really baked bread. When we immigrated in the late nineties, bread became one of the sore points with us because we could never find anything that remotely reminded us of good bread.

American bread was a mockery, in our opinion, you know, it was all the, um, abundance of food around us, in the supermarkets and other stores, we could never find a loaf of bread that was decent in texture and flavor. And, uh, it was, uh, it was a very, um, painful thing for new immigrants. And with time we kind of, uh, settled down and decided that this is one thing that we're going to forever miss, and we're just going to live without, you know, there were several stores in the area where I lived in Maryland and then some European food stores in Atlanta, where I moved a few years later that sold European style brands. And even those were of poor quality.

They were loaded with preservatives and wrapped in plastic for a longer shelf life. And they just were not what I was looking for.

David Crabill: [00:02:49] So, what does the, what, what makes the European style of bread so much different?

Yuliya Childers: [00:02:55] I just think that the European breads in general have a great respect for, Artisan bread making. They have respect for flour. They have no additives the grain is generally grown in a more respectable way. There's no chemicals. There's no, flavor enhancers, definitely no preservatives.

And, the bread is such a longstanding tradition in Europe. That nobody ever thought of, you know, streamlining and I'm putting it in big fat air-quotes streamlining the production to the point that bread loses its nature. It has the original flavor. It has a robust crust. It's has moist, stretchy crumb.

It has longer shelf life. Not because it has preservatives, but because it was, it was produced in the old fashioned way with slow fermentation process. it was baked at the right temperature. You know, I've heard some horror stories about American bread that from mix to plastic bag, it's like two hours, you know, it's, it's, it's not bread.

It's, it's a technological wonder. And definitely is worth looking at as a technological miracle and, you know, you can make a video of it and it will be a wonderful thing to watch, but that's not bread. It's a product.

David Crabill: [00:04:22] There's sugar too, right?

Yuliya Childers: [00:04:24] Oh yeah, of course, because, when you, when you, when you try to produce the bread in such a speedy, speedy way, your flavor suffers and that's the first thing that goes, so in order for it to rise faster, they load it with a lot of yeast. Um, so it puffs up like a balloon. And of course, when you puff up so quickly, there's no way for it to develop any kind of flavor. So they enhance it with sugars and, other flavor enhancers, they add, you know, for those whole grain breads.

And I'm again, I'm putting big fat. Air quotes around it, you know, whole grain breads. They put some, you know, flavors so that it resembles a whole grain bread, but more. And, you know, those breads just don't taste like anything. They taste like yeast.

David Crabill: [00:05:12] So when your customers, you know, many of whom live in Alabama, many of them are American, probably have never tried European bread before, when they try your product for the first time, what is the reaction typically?

Yuliya Childers: [00:05:26] There's two kinds of reactions. There's one group of people that taste the bread and say, Oh my God, this is how my grandma used to make bread. Okay. And then there's a second time reaction is, Oh, you know what? I traveled to Germany 10 years ago and that's the kind of bread they had there. So I have customers that remember the good bread because their grandparents made them in an oven at home. And some people who traveled around and they just have tasted the right kind of bread.

David Crabill: [00:06:03] So it always stands out to them.

Yuliya Childers: [00:06:05] It always stands out to them. And this is my favorite kind of customer, because I know that this is not something new to them. This is something they know and forgotten, and it came back to them because I certainly can relate to that feeling that lost something that you had in your childhood. And now it's back. It's a very powerful emotion and you can't beat that.

David Crabill: [00:06:30] So let's talk about your childhood a little bit. I mean, are you, are you able to recreate and make all the breads or items that you had when you were a child and what, what are you currently making and selling?

Yuliya Childers: [00:06:43] I'm very spontaneous in what I like to bake, In the beginning when I just started baking bread myself, I was trying to recreate something I used to eat in Ukraine, like, you know, white, crusty, breads, or rye breads. That reminded me of something I bought in my bakery, you know, 25 years ago.

But, with time I started exploring other techniques and other culture breads. And without having a concept for my bakery, I think that it eventually sort of by itself, crystallized as, uh, you know, breads from around the world. I didn't intend it to be this way, but I think that with time, sort of the theme emerged and now I have a Scandinavian inspired bread, a German inspired bread, Italian inspired bread. So I have different types of loaves that may remind people of the country that they came from. You know what I mean?

David Crabill: [00:07:46] I assume you don't have any American style breads.

Yuliya Childers: [00:07:50] actually, some people approached me about, making this, what is it called? The salt, rise bread, but this is a very, uh, Tricky product that I probably wouldn't venture into it.

It's kind of dangerous to produce. It's fully bacteria based, no yeast, and it can be dangerous for your health literally, but people who grew up eating that bread, they're swearing by it. And I hear wonderful things about it. I'm just a little scared of it,

David Crabill: [00:08:19] I've never heard of that style of bread, but it does sound a little, a little daunting. Well, so what did it take for you to learn how to create this bread? I mean, you said you didn't there weren't people baking bread. Cause it was just readily available in Ukraine. So was it difficult to learn how to actually recreate the bread?

Yuliya Childers: [00:08:38] it was not difficult as a physical process, but it took some time to figure out. What to expect from the, how the dough behaves, what it needs to look like when it's ready to go, because there were no teachers around me and everything that I've learned. I learned from online videos or articles and, you know, internet is a wonderful resource, but it's not a hundred percent true.

So somebody else's technique that they invented may not be the one for you. Bread is a very finicky thing. And it's highly dependent on your particular environment, on your ambient temperature, on the humidity, in your kitchen, what kind of flour you use? What kind of water? and you know, all these things come with experience. Nobody can teach you that. Even if you go to bread school and I've been to bread school. So,

David Crabill: [00:09:35] Is it also an ingredient thing? I mean, I know there's many different kinds of grains. We've lost a lot of the diversity in grains in the United States, but are there just grains that are in Ukraine that you can't get here? And is that part of it too?

Yuliya Childers: [00:09:52] You know, I haven't really gotten that deep in the grain varieties. One simple reason for that is they're not really readily available to me locally. I imagine that there's gotta be a difference between the wheat here and the wheat in Ukraine, you know, Ukraine, is a unique country in a way that, it's been for years called the bread basket of Europe. It's got like the most top soil of any other country in the world and their grains are wonderful. But I don't know much about the Ukrainian wheat, believe it or not.

I just know that for me to produce decent bread. I need to use a flour that was not bleached and not treated in any way. And it doesn't have any bromates in it because bromates are not good for your health. And you know, they're banned in Europe and we still are eating them here.

David Crabill: [00:10:46] so do you need any special equipment to make this bread? Like, are you using a pizza oven or a brick oven?

Yuliya Childers: [00:10:52] No I use my regular kitchen oven, but I put, two baking stones in it. And so I bake on two shelves in my oven and I put two thick baking stones and that's the only, hack that I'm using to make my own a little bit more ready for bread. It's still not ideal, and I'm hoping eventually to get the oven that is full brick, uh, you know, kind of like your factory brick oven type.

Eventually I will get that, but right now I bake in the regular kitchen oven with two baking stones and I created a sort of a steaming mechanism by putting a tray on the bottom with the lava rocks on it. And when I put the bread in the oven, I splash water on those rocks and it creates a big steam burst, which is sufficient for making bread crusty and beautiful.

David Crabill: [00:11:41] Yeah I've seen some of your bread and it looks amazing. So let's talk about selling a little bit. When did you start selling products for the first time?

Yuliya Childers: [00:11:52] I started doing that in 2016. I was thinking about that for a while, but I am a chicken and I'm over analyzing everything. So I almost talked myself out of it, because I was just afraid that I was going to fail. And what if this, and what if that's going to happen? You know, so, but I had a dream.

I had a dream of going to San Francisco baking Institute and taking their professional course and I couldn't afford it at the time. So, I started baking for a market because I wanted to save some money to go to that school. So my necessity pushed me beyond my fears and the lack of confidence. And I started baking for a local farmer's market and the setup was very easy and quick, and I decided not to overthink and just start small. And it just kind of took off very quickly.

David Crabill: [00:12:47] So, this is cool. You actually sold bread in order to afford the class to train yourself and how to make better bread. So what, what w how much did that class cost in San Francisco?

Yuliya Childers: [00:12:59] I think that the total cost of the program was like \$14,000 or something like that

David Crabill: [00:13:03] Oh, wow.

Yuliya Childers: [00:13:04] Plus you had to be there for three months to take that class. I had to live there. I had to rent a room. I had to drive around. Cause I wasn't gonna, you know, spend time, you know, riding a bus everywhere. So, you know, I had to rent a car.

And I had to take myself away from my family for three months. So it was, an adventure.

David Crabill: [00:13:25] Wow. That is a commitment both in time and money. Now was it worth it?

Yuliya Childers: [00:13:31] Absolutely. Absolutely. It was the best thing that ever happened to me on my own volition. I had a dream to go to that school for like six or eight years and, uh, I kept checking their website every year to see, Oh, they're doing the professional course now. Look at that. And then I made inquiries and they gave me the price and I was like, no, there's no way.

And I had a very demanding full-time job. At that time. And I just kept looking at those brochures and catalogs and kept drooling over them for years and years and years. And then the year I finally decided I want to go there. They raised the price. So I was like, Oh no, what's going to happen to me now.

So one year my husband just said, you know, you need to do it now. You, you need to stop looking at those catalogs and you just need to go and do it. So I started baking. I wanted to save money and we finally agreed that I'm going to go and I did it over summer and my husband took care of everything at home.

It was a fantastic experience. Fantastic.

David Crabill: [00:14:42] Now, I assume that you made a lot of bread before you went to that school and you probably learned a ton just from experience. So did they actually teach you a lot more, about how to make bread?

Yuliya Childers: [00:14:55] Yes. one of the reasons I wanted to go there is because they teach you on commercial equipment. And I have a goal of eventually opening a commercial bakery. so I wanted to sort of overcome that fear of large equipment and to see how to scale my small scale production, how to, how to grow it exponentially and not be afraid of it because I know nothing about commercial equipment.

They have a very large baking kitchen. Where they actually produce their bread for the bakery that they run in San Francisco. So it's a fully operational commercial bakery, which during the day they use as a school. So they have several large, deck opens. They have, you know, gigantic mixers. They have all the, you know, the dividers and all the, all the equipment that you need in the, in the commercial bakery.

And so we got exposed to most of it in a very short period of time and they do everything hands-on day and night. You know, you, you come there at seven o'clock in the morning and you'll leave at 4:00 PM and you work all day. so it was a full immersion course. Really really good.

David Crabill: [00:16:13] So what kinds of things did you take away from that program? And I, and it was on commercial equipment and you'd like to. To get there at some point, but were you able to take ideas from that and apply it to your current business in your home kitchen?

Yuliya Childers: [00:16:26] yes, absolutely. There were several things that were extremely helpful to me. They teach you how to think as a. A master of production, not a person who does individual loafs one at the time, there were several things that I'm using right now. And they helped me tremendously to streamline my process.

Here's a good example. Let's say you're doing a cinnamon swirl bread. You roll out the dough, then you have to cover it with the sugar and cinnamon, roll it up and put it in a pan. They are not thinking like that. They want you to roll out a big sheet of dough. Cover with sugar and cinnamon, roll it up and then cut it into individual loafs and put it in the pan.

It's a slight tweak, but it saves you a tremendous amount of time because you're not working one loaf at a time. So they think like producers of the, you know, mass quantity of bread rather than doing one loaf at a time. And they also teach you how to think ahead and plan your production in such a way so that your time is used most efficiently.

So you can do several things at once without sacrificing quality, and kind of think like a mass producer, but still be an artisan because you put your hands on everything. It's not a machine that does that.

David Crabill: [00:17:47] So let's talk about your production a little bit. What's the process like for getting your breads produced on a weekly basis?

Yuliya Childers: [00:17:56] Well I have two bakes a week. One of them is for deliveries, which I do most of the work during the day. And then I deliver in the evening, right at dinner time. And then the second bake I have is for the market and that's a big bake. The big bake I start on Friday morning, late morning. I do a lot of prep and mixes and roll my croissant dough and laminate my croissants.

And I start baking probably at 6:00 PM on Friday, and I don't stop until 6:00 AM Saturday morning. Because my oven is my bottleneck. I have to use my time in the oven very efficiently. So when one bread is baked and goes out of the oven, I give it 10 minutes to reheat. And then I put the next bread in which means that my entire production is organized around my oven time.

Which means I have to mix the breads according to time my bread mixing. Dividing and proofing accordingly. So that by the time it's ready to go oven is available, it's an art and it took me a while to get it right. I use spreadsheets a lot and I created basically color coded timelines of each bread because each bread has its own timeline.

And I kind of slide those timelines against each other to create the oven schedule.

David Crabill: [00:19:24] Wow. So you're, you're doing literally a full days of work just to prep the bread, and then you're baking for 12 hours straight, overnight ending at 6:00 AM. And then when does the market start?

Yuliya Childers: [00:19:37] Market starts at six, but I don't go that early because I'm still baking at that time. So I usually, before COVID started, I was at the market at 7:45 and I stayed there until everything sold out and sometimes it sells out in two hours and sometimes you stay until noon. So I can never predict that.

But as the COVID, you know, put pressure on us to be exposed less to masses of people, I schedule a pickup time now. So instead of coming and selling actively large quantities of bread, I take pre-orders. I pack everything in plastic bags and then I come to the market with all those bags ready to go.

And I tell people to come and pick them up within a two hour window from 9 to 11. So they come and grab their bag and we never touch each other. And that's how I do things now.

David Crabill: [00:20:36] Well, that is some serious dedication. That's over 24 hours of work every week.

Yuliya Childers: [00:20:40] Yes, it is. Yes,

David Crabill: [00:20:41] Are you used to that now? Or is it really hard?

Yuliya Childers: [00:20:45] I am used to it. And it is lucky for me as a Baker that I'm a night owl. I have always been a night owl. I don't like rising in the morning, early in the mornings. I do most of my work at night, so I love that. It's quiet. No, one's bugging me. I'm listening to my music or I, you know, play some movie or TV show in the background and I just work. It's great. I I'm very good with concentrating alone on things. So,

David Crabill: [00:21:15] Would it not be possible to just, you know, get all your bread baked, by like 9:00 PM or something, and then get a full night's rest and then go to market, or is it just a freshness issue?

Yuliya Childers: [00:21:27] it's both a freshness issue, especially with pastry because croissants don't have a long shelf life and they're best when they're still crunchy. You know, so, and after they sit for several hours, they become not crunchy, but chewy and that's, you know, I don't like them that way. And I'm sure my customers wouldn't either.

And you know, my family still needs to exist in that space. So during the day they, you know, they have their dinner, they, they. Go through the kitchen as they need. And I think that baking at night is a given when you're a Baker, whether you're cottage food, or, full production, commercial bakery, some baking needs to be done at night before the market.

David Crabill: [00:22:13] So you'd say that's a very common thing for cottage food bakers

Yuliya Childers: [00:22:16] Oh, it is. It's very, it's very common. In commercial bakeries, there's a night shift that starts at 3:00 AM. They start baking at 3:00 AM because they have larger ovens, they can afford to, you know, baking it off a lot faster than I do. So they don't need 12 hours to bake all of their stuff. But their night shift starts usually at 3:00 AM.

David Crabill: [00:22:37] Wow. So you do that for the Saturday market. And about how much bread are you making for this market?

Yuliya Childers: [00:22:44] If I have a very, very full day. I can probably bake about a hundred loaves. And then on top of that, I will make, about a hundred pieces of pastry. And sometimes I add bagels if somebody requested bagels, So that's, that's probably my maximum in this oven, in this kitchen.

David Crabill: [00:23:04] And you always sell out. So.

Yuliya Childers: [00:23:07] Almost always.

David Crabill: [00:23:08] Okay. I was going to say, did you ever consider adding a second oven? That seems like a natural step.

Yuliya Childers: [00:23:15] I want to, I want to add a primary oven. That would be much larger than this one. There's several things that are happening in my life right now that keep me from doing that. But that's in the, that's in the plans for sure.

David Crabill: [00:23:28] I'd imagine it's a pretty expensive oven, too.

Yuliya Childers: [00:23:30] It is expensive, but it's worth it. It's, it's a proper oven that does properly bake bread without having to sacrifice quality or working around its insulation deficiencies or the temperature, deficiencies, you know, anything that your kitchen oven cannot do. You have to work around to produce the bread on a level? You know?

David Crabill: [00:23:56] Now at the market, most of your customers are probably regulars, but when you deal with somebody new, do you have to educate them about your product?

Yuliya Childers: [00:24:07] Yes, I do. Again, before COVID, I used to offer some bread samples and people could grab them from the bag and taste different things. And then of course I will talk to them about what the, the difference between my process and the process that they use to make a commercial bread in the grocery store and why it's different, why it's potentially healthier and more wholesome.

And, I, I find that I have to educate my new customers on what sourdough is because when you buy sourdough at the grocery store, it's usually just sour bread. That they literally put like, acid in it to make it taste acidic and, uh, maybe a little bit of rye to give it a slightly different flavor.

And people are used to the idea that sourdough is just a sour bread. And they are very surprised when they find that sourdough is merely a technique and there are many, many, many different varieties of sourdough. So they asked me, do you have any sour dough? And I said, most of my bread is sourdough. Here's 10 varieties. And none of them are sour. I really

don't like sour bread. A lot of people who tasted San Francisco sourdough, that's a sour bread and they like it very much. They just like that tangy, you know, that tartness and I'm not a big fan of very sour bread in general. And all of my sourdoughs are very mild.

They taste more like yogurt than they taste like vinegar. And like San Francisco sourdough is more vinegary in flavor. So I have to educate my customers, about nuances of that And why my bread is so hard because it's crusty and why my bread is. So, you know, it has flour on top of it. And because one customer asked me, "Oh my God, that bread is really starting to go, right? It's all covered in mold." And I'm like, What? Mold? Why would I sell moldy bread? So people, people, yeah. People ask some ridiculous things sometimes. I am very lucky that in my area we have a training military base for officers. And these people are not just in the military, but they're experienced.

And they have been around including Europe, they stationed in Europe and a lot of them know what the good bread needs to be. And so they, when they hear about me, they come specifically to the market to get my bread because they know what the good bread should be like. And I'm very lucky in that respect because we have these guys in the area.

David Crabill: [00:26:53] So let's say somebody isn't fortunate enough to live in Prattville, Alabama. How would they know? Like if they were trying to find this kind of bread, how would they know? It's the real deal?

Yuliya Childers: [00:27:04] I would say that if they are looking for something like that, they need to make a search on artisan bakery or artisan bread. there's a lot of those bakeries around now. Maybe not in Alabama, maybe not in my region. Lucky for me, right? I'm the only one here, but, those artisan bakeries are popping up like mushrooms everywhere. So you just need to look for artisan bread

David Crabill: [00:27:28] Well sourdough. Yeah. The whole sourdough movement has been taking off and I've seen a ton of sourdough bakers coming out of the woodwork. but I just don't know if your bread is different than the typical sourdough that a lot of bakers are making, or maybe it's the exact same thing.

Yuliya Childers: [00:27:47] I think that it's similar to many of them. However, I offer a lot more varieties and some people in my bread, in the micro bakery community. Think that I'm crazy. I literally had this conversation a couple of weeks ago. I'm in, uh, one of the Facebook groups that is dedicated specifically to micro bakeries like mine.

And we have a lot of discussion about how we, how we produce, how we're organized, what kind of flour, et cetera, et cetera. And when people hear that, I make like 13 varieties of bread, every market, they think that I'm insane because it's a lot of work, you know, think about it. 13 varieties of bread means you have to mix 13 different kinds of dough.

And then each of them have to be treated Separately on its own timescale on its own timeline, sort of. And they think that I'm crazy, but I think it's a way to introduce many different faces of sourdough because there's more than one, you know?

David Crabill: [00:28:48] Well, is the choice to offer 13 different kinds of bread? Is that a choice that's just based on your passion for this and your bread, or is that an actual business decision where you can make more money or do better with your business by offering that kind of diversity?

Yuliya Childers: [00:29:05] It's both. First of all, for me, what's in it for me, for me personally, it, I'm getting bored. If I, if I do the same stuff over and over, I will get bored and I don't want to be making a hundred pounds of dough and dividing it into a hundred pieces and making a hundred loaves of the same stuff. It's boring to me. Now for my customers.

There are people that don't like that particular kind of bread, let's say I would make only three varieties of bread and they don't like them, you know? So I offer more varieties. So that there's a little bit for everyone. So this is for the customer and it's a business decision because if I have more varieties to offer to the customer, they have more choices.

They are more likely to come next time. Because they're not seeing same old, same old every week I rotate some varieties from week to week and so they're interested and they would come next time to see what's new. So as a business, this, this is healthy for me because I get more sales that way.

David Crabill: [00:30:09] Yeah, that makes sense. Now we were talking a little bit about all of the sourdough. Like this is kind of a sourdough Renaissance and I see a ton of bakers popping up that are selling sourdough now, like way more than even a few years ago. And one of the kind of interesting things I get to see working heavily with cottage food operations.

That is that. There seems to be quite, I don't know, it they're kind of gender roles that people fall into that I've noticed where you have, like your decorated cookies and decorated cakes. Almost always there'll be women that take on those businesses. And I have noticed that the vast majority of bread bakers are men.

And I, and so I just wanted to ask you about this because I don't know if you've noticed that or felt that I don't know if it's like a boys club. Do you have any thoughts about that? Cause you're, you're one of the only women I've seen running a, a bread business like this. And do you know why there would be that kind of gender difference?

Yuliya Childers: [00:31:16] I don't think that I've noticed the same tendency. I think that, um, maybe we'd know more about men, because a lot of the people who revolutionized or brought back this whole sourdough movement are men. And most of them wrote books and we have a lot of really good books written by men, but that's not always the case, you know?

I went to bread conference bread expo last year in Las Vegas. And, I took some classes there and most of these classes were led by women and they're pillars of the community. They're really big businesses like Amy's Bread in New York. And there's this company that's called Hewn. I forgot they're in Missouri I think. Both of these ladies wrote books on bread and they they're doing great. So I don't know if it's. I don't know if it's accurate anymore. Maybe it used to be that way.

David Crabill: [00:32:12] Hmm. I just don't know that many, sourdough bread bakers that are women. And I guess one of the things I was wondering is, is it a physically intensive process where it takes some extra strength?

Yuliya Childers: [00:32:25] Yes. That is absolutely true. That, now that part is true. It's physically demanding. It requires strong backs. And so a lot of the bakers, especially the night bakers and big production bakers are young men and that is accurate. But a lot of those businesses are managed by women. So, yeah, it is physically demanding because you have to lift 50 pound bags of flour constantly and carry big bins of dough back and forth. And you know, and you have to work with your shoulders a lot because you make a lot of movements shaping the loafs and, shoveling for the lack of a better description, you know, shoving the bread in the oven and out of the oven. It's a lot of shoulder, shoulder work and back work. Yeah.

David Crabill: [00:33:12] There are probably a lot more women bakers out there. I'm just probably am not familiar with them.

So going back to the production and selling process, you talked a lot about your market on Saturday and that big bake on Friday, but then you also do this subscription service that happens earlier in the week. Can you talk a little bit about the subscription service model?

Yuliya Childers: [00:33:33] Sure. Subscription is great. You know, a lot of you probably are familiar with the community supported agriculture, but same thing is now happening with the Artisan bakeries. It's literally called community supported bakery. It works the same way. You offer sort of shares of your bakery and people buy a share.

And they, for that money, they get a weekly or biweekly delivery. I offer several different kinds of shares based on like basic flavor preferences. You know, some people cannot have seeded breads. And so I created a separate subscription that is called seeded breads, and. Some people like adventure, and so they pick the Baker's choice and some people like rye breads, so they pick rye breads, stuff like that.

And so I rotate several varieties of bread within each of those subscriptions. And some of them are overlapping, of course,

David Crabill: [00:34:31] Now what is the Baker's choice and is that your most popular subscription?

Yuliya Childers: [00:34:35] Baker's choice. Yes, it is the most popular because, I can put literally whatever I want in their bag on any given week and I rotate them, of course also, but there's a broader variety of breads that are available to people through that subscription because it covers everything. And sometimes I make experimental breads and I will choose to put that in the bag this week because I want to try and see how people do with it.

So, that's the most popular one by far. And then, uh, some people. Prefer to get the same bread every week. And they let me know about it. You know, just bring me that I have a customer that has been buying the same bread every week for four years. And she's, she's happy, you know,

David Crabill: [00:35:22] Now do the customers have to do it every week or could they do it every two weeks or every month?

Yuliya Childers: [00:35:29] they can do it on whatever terms they want. They can do weekly, biweekly once a month or. They can even say, give it to me on every third month of every third, Thursday, I it's up to them. I use a, local harvest, website. Local harvest is a accompany that. Serves people like me and small farms and supports the CSA type model.

And they do everything for you. You pay a small subscription fee to them and they, they handle all the orders, subscriptions, cancellations, and you know, farm goes on vacation, customer goes on vacation. They handle all of that for you. So it's a wonderful service in I'm very pleased.

David Crabill: [00:36:16] Yeah, I saw, I saw that it localharvest.org. I'll put a link to that in the show notes. So, uh, that's kind of how the technology happens.

Yuliya Childers: [00:36:25] Right. There are several, I think there are several companies that are like that now, but of all the companies that I have, I have seen local harvest is the most, they charge the least money and offer the most options. I don't know how they do that, but they do it.

David Crabill: [00:36:41] Now I think it's on Wednesdays, maybe it's Thursdays that you do this bake and delivery. Why did you choose the, the timing?

Yuliya Childers: [00:36:51] why it chose Thursday? I used to do it on a different day of the week. I don't even remember. I think it was a Tuesday or something. And then, because I'm a small local Baker and I still have family to take care of my kid. Had more activities on other days. So Thursday was better for me.

David Crabill: [00:37:10] Makes sense. And do you try to take the people? I mean, if you have regulars at the market. Do you try to move them onto the subscription service?

Yuliya Childers: [00:37:22] I let them know that this is available to them. However, my market is in Montgomery. It's not in Prattville. So it's a different, basically it's different customers. My subscriptions are, deliveries are done in Prattville and the neighboring town of Millbrook. These are like twin cities, they're together.

And then Montgomery is twenty-five minutes drive from me. So it's completely different group of customers and they're rarely overlap. I would say.

David Crabill: [00:37:52] And how many customers do you have on the subscription service typically?

Yuliya Childers: [00:37:57] It varies. I have at least at least a dozen at any given time. And they come and go all the time because most of them are military and they move in and out of area. So, I lose. And gain about equal, equal amount of subscriptions every year. So this is not my primary business right now. Montgomery farmer's market is the primary one and that's where I do most of my sales.

David Crabill: [00:38:22] I wanted to talk a little bit about your background because you're actually trained as a pianist, and I think quite a quite good one too. You have a lot of background in that. So why like, did you ever envision yourself going into being a bread Baker instead of a pianist?

Yuliya Childers: [00:38:43] No. Uh, it's a funny thing, but I actually often talk about the difference, why such a dramatic twist. I quit my musical career. And by career, I mean making money. I mean, making money from music, I quit music because I never know if I did well with music. It's such a subjective thing that even if you feel you're doing well, people may not think you've done well.

And there's no good criterion in music to tell you that you have succeeded. And I'm not even talking about like international competition awards and all that kind of stuff. I don't really subscribe to those, but music is so subjective and so individual that you can never get fully satisfied from your accomplishments in music, you know, uh, with bread making it's so immediate, you see the result, you taste, the result, you smell the result and you always get feedback.

People come back and tell you, Oh, I love this. And I want more, I know it's not the same at all. And I think part of the reason I quit the musical career is because I could never have a measurable, measurable way of telling if I did well or not. And that was bothering me a lot.

David Crabill: [00:40:16] Do you notice any commonalities? I mean you talked a lot about the differences, but is there anything from your background and training that's transitioned over into bread.

Yuliya Childers: [00:40:27] Yes, lots of shoulder work. That's the only, the only commonality that I find is a lot of physical work and dedication. You have to put in hours to get results. You know, it's not going to happen to you magically,

David Crabill: [00:40:46] Yeah, that's pretty funny.

Yuliya Childers: [00:40:48] You need to have a, you need to have a stellar work ethic.

David Crabill: [00:40:52] Um, talking a little bit about marketing. I know you're very active on social media. What do you do to try to market your breads aside from obviously selling at the market every week? Is there anything that you could recommend to somebody who's starting a bread business?

Yuliya Childers: [00:41:08] Oh, yes, absolutely. Facebook is awesome. You can bash it all you want and call it fake news spreader or whatever. For marketing. It's an indispensable tool and very, very inexpensive, but. Advertising on Facebook is not the only thing you can do what I did and it happened sort of by accident. But now I can absolutely recommend that as a technique, no matter where you are in the country or in the world, find a local foodie group in your area.

There's Facebook groups that are dedicated to local restaurants, local, small businesses, and they are big groups usually. And they have a really large diverse group of subscribers to that

group. So you need to get in that group and start posting there. A lot of those groups actually would not let you post regularly if you're a business because they don't like people advertising, but some of these groups would say, if you're a business, we will allow you to post once a week.

And if you do more than that, we will kick you out. And so that's what I did. I asked, one of my customers. You know, if she could recommend a group where the military is hanging out the local military, and she said, the military is not going to let you in their group, but I can give you another group where we're all hanging out and finding out about local restaurants and businesses.

And she recommended that group. And that group had like, I forgot 25,000 members. So I posted there. And it literally happened overnight. I posted there and just introduced myself and say, Hey, I'm a local Baker. And here's what I do. Literally the next morning I came to the market, there was a line waiting for me. So I definitely recommend that technique. And I have been posting in that group for three years now and nothing but good things came out of that.

David Crabill: [00:43:17] Now I, I did want to ask, I don't know if this will be that correlated with the rest of our conversation, but I do like to kind of, I just am interested in hearing people who have immigrated. I feel like I read that you immigrated as an adult. And I just was wondering if you could share a little bit about that story and maybe why you moved or what you remember about the process or what it was like for you to land in the United States. yeah, just, just, if you have anything to share about that, I think those stories are always fascinating.

Yuliya Childers: [00:43:49] Oh sure. Um, my family is, Ashkenazi Jews. And so at the time when we were immigrating there, I don't know if it's still. On or not, but the Jewish refugees were going through this rigorous process of inter being interviewed and let in the country here, based on, uh, you know, anti-Semitism in their own country.

When I was growing up, the anti-Semitism was part of the daily life and we were just so used to it. We were not even paying attention much to it. You know, my parents went through this, uh, in the seventies through this process where they couldn't attend the colleges that they wanted to attend.

Because they were Jewish and they had to go to some, you know, deep into the country. Some were in Siberia or Ural Mountains to go to colleges and, get the education that they wanted. And that was basically the path that a lot of Jews, had to take, you know? so it was kind of a, a very customary thing.

by the time I was a teenager, it was not quite as prominent anymore, but it was still part of the daily culture. Like a person could call you names anywhere, anytime, and it was not frowned upon. You know, I think the last drop for us was, the economic collapse in the beginning of the nineties where, you know, I was a musician, my sister was an artist and my mom was a, a dressmaker and a designer and we basically had no future there anymore. People had no money. The economy collapsed, the country fell apart. Things got really bad

and, um, when people get miserable and they have no money and no prospects, they start getting angry and they look for someone to blame.

And so things started getting heated up again. And you know, my sister, I think the last drop for us was my sister was attacked on the street with a knife. Someone was calling her names based on her Jewish ethnicity and whatever, and it was just the last drop for us. And we left. We had to go through a pretty unpleasant process of being interviewed at the American embassy in Moscow.

We had to wait for five years to get to that interview. And then, you know, the interview process is grueling one. They ask you for personal stories and you have to prove that you're really running away for the reasons that you outlined and they interrogate you in the pretty, uh, uh, unelegant way should I say, um,

David Crabill: [00:46:34] Intimidating?

Yuliya Childers: [00:46:36] It's kind of, yeah. They treat you with suspicion, you know, that's what it is. And. I understand why that's, this may be the case, but, I've heard some pretty unpleasant stories from other people who experienced the interviews, you know, and by the time we got there, we were sort of ready for this kind of, attitude, but we had pretty strong stories to back our claim that we're a refugee.

So we two, it took us another year and a half or so to get all of our documents in order and sell our possessions. And then in 1997, we finally jumped the pond and the transition for us was for the most part, very smooth one. I must say. We found a job pretty quickly. We landed in Maryland and Maryland, Maryland the community we ended up in, was very friendly and their Jewish community was extremely strong and they assisted us with the job search and they taught us basics on how to pass the interview, how to get employed, how to do basic things in the American daily culture. Like. From basic things like how to write a check or how to get a medical insurance and, you know, how to apply for things.

So they assisted us and we've got tremendous support from them. And then we kind of, each of us found their own path eventually and started living normal lives.

David Crabill: [00:48:11] Wow. That is, that is an amazing story. And I, you know, I just can't help, but hear stories like that and just be so blessed about. You know how much opportunity I've been given and how easy it's been for me. And, uh, it's amazing to just also hear, not only the story, but you just have a very calm perspective about it all and, um, you, you just seem to be at peace with it and it just is very telling about the kind of person that you are.

Yuliya Childers: [00:48:43] Well, thank you. I definitely take nothing for granted, but you know, it's funny. I often talk to my sister about this. When we came to this country, we had an interview with, a social, we were assigned a social worker through Jewish community and she asked us, what language do you speak at home?

And my eyes popped. And I said, well, Russian, of course, you know, that's our native language and Russian of course. And she's like, don't say of course, because you know, give

it time and you'll see what's going to happen. and now my sister and I talk on the phone in English and I am amazed because I never thought that that would happen, but she's married to an immigrant from Iran and I'm married to a born and raised American boy, you know, so we speak English at home to all of our family members. So we basically don't use our native language anymore. Almost none.

David Crabill: [00:49:41] Well, you're clearly very, very fluent in English now. Were you pretty fluent in English when you came over?

Yuliya Childers: [00:49:48] I spoke English okay. I would say, okay. Because I was lucky when I attended the musical conservatory in Ukraine, I happened to have a very good English professor. I was lucky. My sister came to this country with no English at all, but she'd picked it up very quickly. So, Oh, cause she's an extroverted, she, she likes to talk and she's very communicable.

I am an introvert and it was really hard to, for me to break out of my shell and start talking to people. The hardest part was the phone conversations, because you don't see people's faces and their mannerisms, and you don't know really how they react to you. And so half the time you don't understand them.

So that was the hardest part. But you watch enough TV and listen enough to NPR, good English, you know? And then you pick stuff up.

David Crabill: [00:50:44] Yeah, well, that's very fascinating and I'm going to bring it back to the baking bread business side of things. And, do you have any stories that come out of the past few years of running this business that stand out to you?

Yuliya Childers: [00:51:00] Yes. Um, one of my favorite moments that I keep talking about, last year or two years ago, I started offering a Christmas dessert that's called Stollen. It's a sort of an Advent / Christmas cake from Germany. That you bake. And it has a very long shelf life, and it's supposed to sit on the table for the duration of the advent, which is, you know, weeks leading up to Christmas.

And you eat a small piece of it every day to make that season special. It's it has a lot of spices in it and a candied fruit, and it's really, really highly aromatic. And so I started making those for sale. And this lady came to me, she ordered several of them and she said she had German roots and she wanted to try it and see if she likes it.

And so I was waiting for her feedback and she wrote to me couple of weeks later and said that when she ate that cake, she started crying because. This is how she remembered her childhood. And that makes it so special to me. This is absolutely priceless. I don't care how much people pay for my bread.

This is the priceless moment because I can completely relate to this. This is the moment when you experience your childhood again, simply because you tasted or smelled something.

David Crabill: [00:52:30] Yeah, that's very cool. And you just reminded me that I didn't actually ask you about what people pay for your bread. I know you're making over a hundred loaves for a market, but what are you charging? And has it changed over time?

Yuliya Childers: [00:52:47] I haven't changed my price since I started, I raised the price a little bit on some things that are specialty things like my Stollen, for example, went from \$12 to \$13. Cause some of the ingredients went up in price. But for the most part, I charge \$6 for my loaf of bread of any kind, whether it has seeds or doesn't have seeds.

I just keep things very simple. So it's easy to remember. And the person has an expectation when they come in, they know that the loaf of bread is going to be \$6. I charge \$3 for all of my pastries. Which is croissants, scones, and, uh, I now make bostocks. I don't know if you've heard of bostocks, it's a dessert type breakfast pastry.

And then there's some specialty items like those Stollens or like this year for Thanksgiving, I was making pumpkin bread that looked like pumpkin and tastes like pumpkin. Those are special. So I charge a little bit more. I charge \$7 for those, but that's, that's about it. I don't fiddle with prices too much because it complicates things and it's hard to accept cash.

If you go \$7.50 or \$6.50 it makes it more difficult to make a transaction. So I keep them even.

David Crabill: [00:54:07] I just wanted to wrap up this conversation by asking where you'd like for this business to go, we already touched on it quite a bit, and I have a pretty good idea for where you'd like it to go. But, uh, what's your vision for the future?

Yuliya Childers: [00:54:24] What I want to do ideally, is to stay within the cottage food, but scale up. I would like to get a bigger oven and bake more and get into several markets and being able to sell to maybe businesses or do pop up sales. But I would like to stay in a cottage food because it keeps things a little bit more simple and you don't have any long-term commitments with the sales or gigantic loans for expensive equipment that goes into hundred thousands of dollars.

So if I could stay in a cottage business, but bake more, that would probably be ideal for me because I would still keep things flexible, but be able to make more money.

David Crabill: [00:55:08] Well, it sounds like you're in the right vocation. You are clearly so passionate about this and I've loved talking with you and it sounds like you not only do it for the business, but also for your own personal self and wellbeing.

Yuliya Childers: [00:55:25] thank you so much for having me. I enjoyed this conversation.

David Crabill: [00:55:29] Now, if somebody wants to reach out to you, where can they find you or reach out.

Yuliya Childers: [00:55:34] The best way to find me is on Facebook. Just look for Wild Yeast Kitchen on Facebook. I have a very active page and I respond to messages and comments there very quickly. If you want to learn more about my bread, you can go to

wildyeastkitchen.com and just look at pictures and read the descriptions. But all the action is on Facebook really.

David Crabill: [00:55:58] Perfect. Well, thank you very much Yuliya for jumping on here and talking with us today, it's been a pleasure.

Yuliya Childers: [00:56:06] It's been a pleasure likewise. Thank you so much.

David Crabill: [00:56:10] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. Yuliya is clearly a very dedicated, hardworking, and passionate bread baker, and it's easy to see why her customers love her products so much.

If you are thinking about starting a home bakery or a cottage food business of your own, head on over to forrager.com to check out your state's cottage food law.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/24. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.