

Mom By Day, Baker By Night with Daniela Zographos

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with Daniela Zographos. Daniela lives in Anderson, South Carolina, and sells custom sculpted cake pops with her cottage food business, Yumsies cake pops.

When Daniela started her business back in 2013, she actually sold custom cookies and cakes, and she didn't even know how to make cake pops at that time. But now she has fully transitioned her business into only making cake pops. And these are not your average cake pops. They are custom sculpted and decorated and highly impressive. On this episode, you'll hear how Daniela has grown this business to the point of having thousands of social media followers, and often being overwhelmed by requests for custom orders.

And she manages to run her thriving business while being a full-time stay-at-home mom of two young kids, as she says, she is a mom by day and a baker by night. You'll hear what she has struggled with along the way and how her business continues to evolve. One thing is for certain, her business has brought her many opportunities along the way, and she never thought she would be where she is today.

So with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show. Daniela. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:18] **Daniela Zographos:** Hi. Thank you.

[00:01:20] **David Crabill:** So Daniela, can you take us back to the beginning of this adventure? How did it all get started?

[00:01:25] **Daniela Zographos:** Absolutely. Um, I was living in Charlotte for my college years, you know, 2007 to 2013, the beginning of it. And we just happened to move with my husband to Anderson, South Carolina, where there is a cottage food law. I didn't know anyone here. So I thought the best way to meet people was to bring my, like create a business.

I went to culinary school, so I love baking and cooking, and that would be a great place to start making. And being involved with the community.

[00:01:56] **David Crabill:** So you went to culinary school. Did you work at any restaurants, bakeries, anything like that?

[00:02:02] **Daniela Zographos:** I did not, I was an international student, so I wasn't allowed to work outside of school. So this is all just me venturing on my own.

[00:02:13] **David Crabill:** Do you think you would have, if you could.

[00:02:15] **Daniela Zographos:** Absolutely. I tried, but since I wasn't a legal citizen, I wasn't allowed to work anywhere.

[00:02:20] **David Crabill:** Got it. So where did you come from?

[00:02:23] **Daniela Zographos:** Guatemala,

[00:02:24] **David Crabill:** When did you come from Guatemala,

[00:02:27] **Daniela Zographos:** 2007 freshman year of college.

[00:02:29] **David Crabill:** Well, I can't even tell the, you have no accent or anything like

[00:02:33] **Daniela Zographos:** I went to an American school and living here has just completely vanished any trace of it.

[00:02:40] **David Crabill:** So, I mean, what got you interested in culinary school in the first place? Why do you have a passion for baking or cooking?

[00:02:48] **Daniela Zographos:** Well, living in Guatemala, all throughout high school. I was actually selling. Decorated sugar cookies. And I realized I really wanted to venture into this world. I didn't know much about it. And I just loved being in the kitchen. So I applied and went to Johnson and Wales university, which is a prominent culinary school here in the U S it's in Charlotte.

There's several campuses, but I went to the Charlotte, North Carolina one and started my adventure there.

[00:03:16] **David Crabill:** Okay, so you moved to Anderson and you started this business. So what did you start with

[00:03:21] **Daniela Zographos:** I started with decorated sugar cookies, like custom made ones and cakes, celebration, cakes, birthday cakes, wedding cakes, and then slowly got into cake pops.

[00:03:33] **David Crabill:** So what was the first year like of your business?

[00:03:37] **Daniela Zographos:** it was very interesting cause I was new in town. I didn't know anyone, so I didn't know how to start that. That was very challenging. How do I get my name out there? When nobody knows I'm new here? I don't know anyone. I don't know what it's like. I actually got a job at Starbucks to start meeting people and that worked because it's crazy.

The amount of people that just have a routine and go there every day. And to this date, half of the people I know came from. That connection, just Starbucks customers, believe it or not. I started making friends with loyal customers that would come every morning for their coffee. Uh, I would hand it out my business cards.

And from there it was just word of mouth and it boomed

[00:04:23] **David Crabill:** Wow. So you started it in 2013. And then did you get the Starbucks job in 2013.

[00:04:30] **Daniela Zographos:** I moved here in July of 2013 and kind of, we bought a house we settled in and I kind of made a plan of what I needed to do, but I needed to meet people first because I can't start a business without having anywhere to put myself out there.

[00:04:45] **David Crabill:** Did you try putting yourself out there on social media?

[00:04:48] **Daniela Zographos:** I tried, but I wasn't that successful. And I realized I needed to make connections like personal connections first.

[00:04:57] **David Crabill:** Well, I've seen, you're really successful on social media. Now you have almost 3000 Instagram followers, and now that you know a lot about social media, do you think there was anything that you could have done differently when you started out that would have helped your.

[00:05:12] **Daniela Zographos:** Oh, absolutely. Um, Having an online presence is so important, but most people starting out are so scared to put themselves out there, especially online to a bunch of strangers. now there's a whole lot more

tools on Instagram, on Facebook for businesses back then. But the main thing was, get yourself out there.

People want to see what you make, how you make it behind the scenes especially not having a storefront, they need to see how you make things like what your process is, and that will get people engaged. So I think that was a big thing. Getting scared to post things, because the pictures aren't perfect, you know, videos aren't, there was no videos.

I was not going to put myself out there like that at the beginning, you know, but I wish I had,

[00:05:56] **David Crabill:** I've noticed you've done a pretty good job of putting yourself personally out there and letting people know who you are. Is that something that you were hesitant to do at the beginning.

[00:06:06] **Daniela Zographos:** I was because I was, I'm an outgoing person, but I was always very private. Like I didn't want to invite internet strangers into. My life, you know, and I'm still kind of there's boundaries to that, but I realize d the internet has changed and the way businesses have changed and the way people interact and shop even online has changed.

So if you don't put yourself out there like that people want to relate with you and if they can they'll buy from you, they'll feel like they know you. So that's a very important thing nowadays to have online and the prominent online presence,

[00:06:42] **David Crabill:** So you started without doing cake pops at all. What up until, what year did you start doing cake pops?

[00:06:50] **Daniela Zographos:** a year in a year in, I got um, you know uh, starting out. So anytime someone asked for something, no wasn't, n o was not an option. I, yes. Can you do cake pops? Yes, I can. Did I know how to make them? No, but you, you know, you have to be confident and try. And it was very frustrating at first because they're not as easy as they look and that really got to me.

I needed to perfect it and I got really good at it and realized that was a niche here in Anderson. Nobody else makes cake pops like this, especially sculpted hand painted ones.

[00:07:23] **David Crabill:** I was going to say, I mean, I've seen your cake pops and they don't look very easy at all. to me.

[00:07:29] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah. And simple ones were hard at first. I just stuck to it cause I couldn't believe something so easy was hard, there's a lot of cakers and cookies in Anderson there's no, no cake poppers. So I realized I had to. Rebrand and stick to my niche and that's how I got even more successful and more audience online and more sales and my calendar books up because I'm catering to a very specific product.

[00:07:57] **David Crabill:** Yeah, it was crazy. So you started out with a custom decorated cookies, custom cakes, kind of the typical bakery. And now you only do cake pops, right?

[00:08:07] **Daniela Zographos:** I only do cake pops. Yes.

[00:08:09] **David Crabill:** When did you change over to saying Nope, not going to do anything else.

[00:08:14] **Daniela Zographos:** Probably it was 2017 the year my daughter was born. I'm a stay at home mom full time, and I have a son and a daughter now, and it's hard to have a business and be a stay at home mom at the same time. So I realized I had to limit my menu. My counter space is limited in my home since I work out of my home and cake pops are easy.

Once I dip them in chocolate and the chocolate tries they're ready to package. So I don't have to, I don't need counter space. So that was a business move that fits with my family lifestyle.

[00:08:49] **David Crabill:** So the reason why you switched over to only doing cake pops was because of your family making more time, making it more simple on you, but you said that it made your business even more successful.

[00:09:02] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes, it did because I found my niche. Like I said, everyone wanted cake pops and really pretty complicated ones and nobody makes them around here. I've I've actually wanted to expand and try to get, you know, an assistant, someone to help me to keep growing, but I can't find anyone that does what I do. And it's hard to train someone to, to have those artistic abilities, you know,

[00:09:27] **David Crabill:** Yeah, they look pretty complicated. So I saw, you said that you have a couple of children and that means you're a mom by day and a baker at night.

[00:09:36] **Daniela Zographos:** that's right. My baking hours are 9:00 PM to 3:00 AM. it's hard, but I it's the only way I can keep doing both.

[00:09:45] **David Crabill:** He said, do you have any help during the week?

[00:09:47] **Daniela Zographos:** I don't not with baking. No.

[00:09:50] **David Crabill:** Uh, Do you have any help With the kids. during the.

[00:09:52] **Daniela Zographos:** With the kids. Sometimes I um, my mother-in-law will help me. Keeping them for a while. When I have, when I have really big orders that I have to bake during the day too. But that's, as far as it gets

[00:10:03] **David Crabill:** I mean, you seriously, you work till 3:00 AM? When do the kids get up?

[00:10:08] **Daniela Zographos:** Sometimes. 6:30. It's hard. I don't do that every day. Um, When it's really busy, those are my hours.

[00:10:17] **David Crabill:** Wow. mean, It just seems like your business is, so successful. seems like you're artificially limiting the number of orders that you're taking, just because of the limits of your time. It's just really important for you to be a stay at home. Mom.

[00:10:30] **Daniela Zographos:** It is, it is I have the luxury to be able to stay with them. They go to school, but in the afternoons, They enjoy me being here and present. And I enjoy that too. And I've gone back and forth with, I hit a wall and the only way to grow is to actually open a shop and get out of my house with my business.

But that means longer hours in a kitchen away from home. And I don't, I'm still struggling with that balance, whether it's worth it to do it now, or once my kids are older and I have more, they don't need me as much, you know, to drive them around and do all of this. So that's still an ongoing struggle in my head on what to go from there.

[00:11:14] **David Crabill:** Okay. So you started maybe 2014, 2015. You started doing the cake pops and what was the trajectory of your business? Like um,

were you just doing custom orders, were you doing events? You know, how was your business growing?

[00:11:30] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah. I was doing both. Um, At first I was specifically only doing or looking for vendor events because that's how I was going to grow my customer base because word of mouth can only get you so far, And without driving traffic into your page, that can only get you so far too.

So I was constantly looking for vendor events, craft, fairs, anything in the area. And that helped my business grow as well, to the point where in 2017, I had to cut out events because it was just taking too much time. I had way too many orders in line that were already paid for, For me to just go out and see if I can sell this, you know?

now I only do certain events that draw a big crowd where I know I'm successful every year and I I've cut out the small little fairs.

[00:12:19] **David Crabill:** When you do events, are you bringing the super custom sculpted stuff or are you bringing simple cake pops? What generally sells at events?

[00:12:28] **Daniela Zographos:** I bring both, but the sculpted ones obviously catch everyone's attention. I try to do events and pop-ups related to holidays. So back to school, Halloween, Christmas. So people look for the detailed ones to give us gifts. But I, I have a lot of just regular sprinkled ones. Cause that's what the baby's always reach for.

And when the kids want it, you know, the parents are going to buy it. So.

[00:12:52] **David Crabill:** All right. So these cake pops, I mean, you, you didn't know anything about them at first? Uh, How did you get into them? How do you make these cake pops?

[00:13:01] **Daniela Zographos:** Well, at first when I first had that order, you know, what is a cake pop? Okay. It's baked cake and you crumble it and you add frosting and shape it and you dip it. And, but I realized that wasn't to me. They didn't taste as good when you bake a cake and then add frosting to it, like a regular cake, it sweetens it up.

And then you dip it in chocolate and it's even sweeter. And it was just, everything was too sweet. So I started playing with recipes. I found recipes online and then adapted them to myself and now I bake them and crumble them

while hot so that I don't have to add any binder to them. And so the true cake flavor.

Is inside the cake pop and I use um, really good ingredients and either candy coatings, chocolate coatings, or real chocolate to elevate it even more.

[00:13:53] **David Crabill:** So these are super high quality cake pops is what you're saying

[00:13:56] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. Yes.

[00:13:59] **David Crabill:** But so did you, I mean, I assume you started with the regular ball, simple cake pops. When did you start getting into these sculpted cake pops?

[00:14:09] **Daniela Zographos:** the more you do something, the better you get at it. So at first the goal was get round cake pops because they weren't that round at the beginning, you know, and just start perfecting the way you roll 'em the way I rolled on to get perfect spheres. And then once I got to that point, I started um, Trying to do simple designs that the base was a round cake pop.

And then from then people would ask me, can you do a unicorn, like 2017 was the biggest unicorn year. I lost track of how many unicorns I made I think the unicorns were the first figures I actually made. And from there people started asking, can you do this? Can you do paw patrol? Can you do a Christmas tree? Can you do? And from there it just evolved into all sorts of designs,

[00:15:01] **David Crabill:** And where were you learning? Your skills.

[00:15:04] **Daniela Zographos:** um, By myself, trial and error.

[00:15:08] **David Crabill:** Wow. So you didn't, you didn't find anyone on YouTube already doing this?

[00:15:12] **Daniela Zographos:** No. You know, there were a few cake, pops out, cake poppers out there. A lot of them will help you out, but they're not going to tell you how to do it, you know? It's a lot of you learn as you go, you learn by yourself. Some people reach out to me now asking for help, and I try to help them because I didn't get that help at the beginning when I could have really used it to avoid a lot of mistakes that I made. But yeah, I had to, most of it, I had to learn by myself by trial and error.

[00:15:39] **David Crabill:** Well, it looks like you're telling people how you do it.

[00:15:42] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah. I try, I try to teach people and I'm hoping that I teach classes here in town, but I'm hoping to get some online classes on my website soon. That's the next step

[00:15:55] **David Crabill:** yeah, I saw the classes. Um, how often are you doing in-person classes

[00:15:59] **Daniela Zographos:** I try to do one once a month. Usually the summertime, there's not a lot going on and I try to take the summer off to be with my kids, but Halloween Christmas, Easter holiday classes are the most popular.

[00:16:13] **David Crabill:** and how much are you charging for a class

[00:16:16] **Daniela Zographos:** I charge \$50,

[00:16:18] **David Crabill:** and how many people.

[00:16:19] **Daniela Zographos:** 10, it gets hard with more than 10 people cause you gotta, you know, I teach them how to melt chocolate and the more crowded it is, the longer we all take cause I can't I can't help people. One-on-one when it gets to a larger crowd, so I limit my classes so that they can take advantage of my presence there?

[00:16:36] **David Crabill:** How long have you been doing the classes for

[00:16:39] **Daniela Zographos:** Um, I started it last year. Last April.

[00:16:44] **David Crabill:** Last April. You started in-person classes right after the pandemic?

[00:16:48] **Daniela Zographos:** Well, so I had them lined up the pandemic hit and everything closed. So they were actually pushed back to, I want to say June when everything started opening again, and I was really nervous about it, but it was surprising. My classes kept selling out because people were tired of being their homes.

They wanted to get out and do something and a lot of stuff was still closed. So they would just sign up for these classes to go do something fun outside of their house and learn a new skill.

[00:17:14] **David Crabill:** Do you see the same people keep coming back or do you always get new people coming into the classes?

[00:17:20] **Daniela Zographos:** both, actually so in my adult classes there's always new people, but in my mommy and me classes, those are really popular. So a lot of the same mom and child, keep coming back to take a different class every time.

[00:17:34] **David Crabill:** So you said that you're trying to move into the online class realm. How's that going?

[00:17:41] **Daniela Zographos:** I'm getting organized and I'm, I'm trying to plan everything out now so that I can start filming soon to launch that in January because my, my in-person classes are more of an activity and an outing for someone to come do something fun, but they're not going to start a business out of it. So my online classes are catered to more of the people that reach out to me on social media, asking for help. How do I do this? How do I do that? Where do you get your chocolate? Where do you? So my online classes are going to be catered to businesses that need more help.

[00:18:12] **David Crabill:** So, thinking about the cake pops you've done over the years. I mean, you've, you've done countless designs. What are some of your favorites.

[00:18:22] **Daniela Zographos:** Uh, Well, like I said, 2017, the unicorns it's you think I'd be sick of them, but it was my first design out of a, besides a round one. And so I'm, I'm partial to those and you can never get sick of a unicorn, you know um, I've, I've done some paw patrol ones and those, I love making them, they have so much detail in them, but my Christmas ones are probably my favorite ones.

I do a big Christmas holiday fair here every year. Around 10,000 people come, it's a three-day event and they want to see these unique designs and the little Christmas trees, and I do little reindeers, reindeer heads. And those are my favorite.

[00:19:05] **David Crabill:** And what would you say is the most difficult design you've done for a cake pop?

[00:19:11] **Daniela Zographos:** To be honest, any new design is hard. Cause I, I got to sculpt it right. And cause you sculpt the cake and then you dip it in chocolate and after it's coated, you gotta make sure it comes out. You know, like the chocolate sets them to all the crevices. So probably any character with a real face like frozen, I had to make some Elsa cake pops and I had to make sure that it looked like Elsa and not just a little personal, the braid, you know, those types of cake pops are the hardest, the ones where you have to actually try to replicate an image of a person's face.

[00:19:47] **David Crabill:** So what do you price your cake pops at?

[00:19:51] **Daniela Zographos:** I always go, well, I have been going up in prices depending on my ability. As my ability gets better, I raise my prices, but right now, just a standard round cake pop starts at \$3 each and it goes up from there. So characters are \$5 and up, and it just depends on how many colors if it needs to be sculpted, if it needs any modeling chocolate or fondant pieces on it that I need to make separately, it just depends on the detail.

[00:20:20] **David Crabill:** And where did you start in terms of pricing?

[00:20:23] **Daniela Zographos:** Oh my gosh. I started at a dollar each and I cannot believe that. And that's something I tell people starting out all the time when they ask me about prices. Don't underprice yourself just because you're starting out. Doesn't mean you have to be cheap? You know, I didn't think I was good enough. Maybe they didn't look the best, but they still tasted pretty good.

And people came because of the taste. So I would never, ever suggest anyone underprice themselves just because they're new, you know, like I did

[00:20:51] **David Crabill:** What do you think is the lowest price you would price a basic cake pop out?

[00:20:55] **Daniela Zographos:** Uh, Maybe \$2.50.

[00:20:58] **David Crabill:** So in terms of taste, you offer a variety of different flavors. What flavors are the most popular

[00:21:06] **Daniela Zographos:** My most popular one is a triple chocolate. And then I try to do seasonal flavors in the summertime pink lemonade is my most popular and in the winter peppermint brownie and carrot cake are really popular ones.

[00:21:21] **David Crabill:** and how did you come up with the flavors?

[00:21:23] **Daniela Zographos:** Well, I started off with a basic vanilla and chocolate recipe and then went from there. That's where um, culinary school came into play. how to adapt a basic recipe and elevate it just by adding other ingredients, substituting other ingredients but you have to have a basic cake recipe, basic flavor.

And then you just add in other stuff to make it something

[00:21:48] **David Crabill:** So with culinary school, let's say you didn't go to culinary school. Do you think you would have still been able to be successful starting this kind of business?

[00:21:58] **Daniela Zographos:** I believe so I believe so. There's a lot of resources out there. A lot of recipes out there. I know everyone makes their cake pops differently. Culinary school helped me with making new recipes for sure. It was a bachelor degree, so I did, you know, menu planning and cost control and all of those classes.

So that really helped me where I think if I hadn't taken those classes, I would have struggled more with pricing and just small business things in general, because it was a business degree.

[00:22:30] **David Crabill:** So when you get a custom order in what is the process look like to get that customer out the door into a customer's hands.

[00:22:40] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah. So I have a custom order form or just a contact form on my website. And I asked for people to tell me what date they need them by first, make sure I'm available. I asked them for a minimum of 12 and from there they can choose any number and one flavor per dozen. And then detail, like what details, what kind of theme they want from there?

I will come back with a quote and some samples like just written out or pictures of I have them of, and once they accept my quote or, you know, we can, we can go back and forth for a little, for a little bit, but I don't like going back and forth too long because time is money and I will send them a final invoice and.

Once it's paid. They're officially on my books. I don't accept any order. That's not paid up front.

That was a mistake I made at the beginning. I would take an order and wait for the day of to get paid. And countless times I had people back up the day before I had everything made and it was just a waste of time, a waste of money. And those are the things you learn little by little.

[00:23:49] **David Crabill:** I saw that you have like four weeks of advanced notice required?

[00:23:54] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. Um, I'm not always booked up four weeks in advance. It just always depends on the time of year. And I tell that, people that a lot, ideally the quicker you try to book with me the, the better of a chance you have to getting on my calendar right now, I'm booked through the end of the year, just because Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, it's just busy time.

And so sometimes I can, I can fit in, you know, last-minute orders, same week orders. It just depends on the time of year. And I make sure I let people know that, but ideally four week notice.

[00:24:27] **David Crabill:** I saw that you do not charge for local delivery. And I thought that was surprising.

[00:24:33] **Daniela Zographos:** It depends. So I don't charge within a five mile radius cause I live right. I, I live like 10 minutes from downtown and most of my activities are around main street. So it's a direction I head into every day. So if it's on my way there or back or around the areas, I won't charge. Cause I'm there anyway.

But anything outside of that I do charge and most of my orders are picked up anywhere. I rarely have.

[00:25:01] **David Crabill:** Okay. And I saw that you don't do pickup from your home. Is that right?

[00:25:04] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. It, if it's someone I know which I've grown to know a lot of my customers I will do home pickups, but it's, I don't, I've, I've heard crazy stories of women being attacked by someone pretending to pick up an order and just dangerous things that I'm trying to protect myself, protect my family from people I don't know. So I've actually partnered with local boutiques downtown. They let me pick up my orders there. Fully paid, fully baked and they get foot traffic. So it's a win-win

[00:25:37] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I don't think I've heard of anyone doing that before.

[00:25:40] **Daniela Zographos:** it works. It works. Cause they're not, you know, it's kind of a loophole. Setting my stuff in retail. I'm not allowed to do that. So they're not selling it for me. It's been paid, it's just the pickup. So it's allowed and they get someone in their store that probably wouldn't have gone in there that day.

And most of the time they buy something. So it's a, it's a pretty good arrangement. I have

[00:26:03] **David Crabill:** Yeah. You know, I, that, that does make sense that it's still a direct sale and it's not indirect, but it just is interesting because they're obviously not buying anything in the store from you.

[00:26:14] **Daniela Zographos:** no, it's just a pickup

[00:26:16] **David Crabill:** It's interesting. And you don't offer shipping, correct.

[00:26:19] **Daniela Zographos:** I don't, it's just too fragile and I would only have to ship in South Carolina and it's just not. It's not worth my time with making something so delicate and arriving, melted or broken, something I'm ready to do until I figure out how to do it properly, but that takes time.

[00:26:36] **David Crabill:** But I did notice that you did offer shipping after the pandemic.

[00:26:40] **Daniela Zographos:** So when the pandemic hit orders went down because people were not doing parties anymore, you know, parties were canceled, weddings were canceled. And so I had to figure out a way to still. Make money in classes were still not available. Um, So I started making do it yourself kits.

So I would sell a kit with the dough already made in a container. I supplied the dough sticks, container, a stand sprinkles, everything to roll and dip and decorate yourself. And that was a huge hit, especially with moms trying to keep their kids entertain at home. So that's what I offered shipping. And then I shipped kits all over South Carolina.

I think it, I think it costs like \$20 without shipping and it was dough enough to make six cake pops a container of white chocolate, a few containers of sprinkles

some piping bags and a stand and a card with instructions with how to shape your cake pops, how to melt your chocolate properly, and then how to decorate.

[00:27:47] **David Crabill:** So that works so well. Is that something that you still offer?

[00:27:51] **Daniela Zographos:** I do. I don't get 'em often enough, like last year because people don't feel the need anymore, but I do still sell them. And they're big for vendor events.

[00:28:04] **David Crabill:** So, what about the kinds of tools that you use in your business? What are some of the tools you rely on?

[00:28:11] **Daniela Zographos:** My mixer that's for sure. I have two big KitchenAid mixers. But besides that, I just use my oven. I melt my chocolate in the microwave. I do use a food thermometer to make sure I'm not overheating my chocolate. Cause that's really chocolate. It's very temperamental. So you gotta make sure you're working with it properly. Um, And the crystal Katana tool is a really nifty little pen with a wax tip that picks up sprinkles.

When you're trying to do like really tiny sprinkles, you can't do them with your hands. You can't do them with tweezers. So the crystal katana helps. With that, I do use that a lot. And that's pretty much is like, as far as big appliances. Cause I have a few molds like cake pop molds. They kind of look like Play-Doh molds, like press molds that I will sometimes use um, to help me shape something.

Um, spatulas and my packaging and stuff. It's really not a lot. That's why it was convenient to stick with cake pops too. I didn't need a lot of pans. I didn't need sheet racks. I didn't need a lot of things.

[00:29:17] **David Crabill:** And I noticed on Instagram and social, you're doing a lot of video. What's your setup like for making those videos?

[00:29:26] **Daniela Zographos:** That's been a learning curve right there. Um, At first I was using um, I needed to figure out a way how to make my feed, you know, more aesthetically pleasing and white poster boards was my go-to for the longest time. Cause whenever they get dirty, I just throw them away, get some new ones and they were the perfect background, but I needed something better for video.

So I got these like food safe, wipeable poster boards from replica surfaces. And that's what I used as my background for my pictures, for my videos. I bought a

few standup lights countertop ones. So they're not too big because I knew my lighting needed to be better. Especially if I'm working at night And I honestly use my phone and that's it,

[00:30:11] **David Crabill:** and a mount?

[00:30:12] **Daniela Zographos:** And yeah, and I do use a mount. Yes. It sounds easier than what it is. So I thought I could just jump into it, but I've been learning more and more about it because I've recently partnered with a distributor Stover and company, and they're asking me to make videos for them. So it's, and they're very specific. So they give me direction of what type of videos they want. so that's been helping me and my videos get better as well.

[00:30:36] **David Crabill:** How did this partnership evolve?

[00:30:38] **Daniela Zographos:** Believe it or not through social media. I knew I needed to get myself out there again since the beginning. So anything I could post to help me get views from new people and traffic to my page stories is a great tool to use. And so every time you tag someone in the hopes of getting reshared, like re posted, then their audience will see your page.

That's how I've grown it, but I kept, every time I ordered, I found them cause I needed a new chocolate distributor and I was fascinated by their customer service and their packaging and how fast it was. So I kept sharing that in my stories and they genuinely reached out and said, would you like to partner?

And I said, yes, why not? I get free chocolate out of it now. So it, it works.

[00:31:25] **David Crabill:** So they don't actually pay you aside from just giving you free ingredients?

[00:31:29] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. And chocolate is in the, you know, big ingredients aren't they don't cost a lot of money, but chocolate's definitely the most expensive one. So that helps me out a lot.

[00:31:39] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I'm sure it's not cheap. I mean, is there a limit to how much they give you

[00:31:44] **Daniela Zographos:** No, just how much I need. Like they've never said no. You know, it's grown from a partnership to a friendship. So I helped them out. They help me out. I help their customers troubleshoot their chocolate.

They send me more chocolates. It's a pretty good relationship we've got going on.

And I would've never been able to do that without social media.

[00:32:05] **David Crabill:** is it just chocolate or are They sending you other things?

[00:32:09] **Daniela Zographos:** They said, so they just came out with their new line of chocolate and sprinkles which is mainly what I use, but they're a full-on distributor like cakes shortening fillings. They sell everything and they supply big bakeries. So anything I might need, I just ask for

[00:32:25] **David Crabill:** So you're getting almost all the ingredients for your cake pops for free, basically.

[00:32:29] **Daniela Zographos:** except for the cake base.

[00:32:32] **David Crabill:** Wow. And I mean, what's it been like to be in a partnership with them? Are you having to produce something every single week? Do you feel the pressure to produce regularly?

[00:32:44] **Daniela Zographos:** Sometimes I do. Um, I'm not a content creator and they know that. So they value my business, like my input as a consumer and as a business, as much as videos I create for them. So they'll call me asking, like, what do you think of this? Do you think this is a good move? Do you think people are going to like this?

Like, should we do that? So I, I, it's more than just creating videos for them. It's giving them like, it's almost like a consultant role. So sometimes I feel the pressure to create content and sometimes I actually enjoy just Voicing, you know, and being validated for what you're good at. And so that's, that's pretty rewarding to me.

[00:33:27] **David Crabill:** So was this their idea?

[00:33:29] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah,

[00:33:31] **David Crabill:** So you wouldn't have never thought of doing, of trying to seek out this kind of a

[00:33:35] **Daniela Zographos:** no I'm proud to say I've grown my page organically and the partnerships I've sought out have been, I've never looked for them. It's just an opportunity that rose and I took it.

[00:33:48] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, that sounds fantastic. And you have almost 3000 Instagram followers and I know you've done some giveaways. Can you talk a little bit about those?

[00:33:57] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. So I You know, every time my, I don't have a lot of content to post or I have extra cake pops from a vendor event. Or anytime I just feel generous. I just I'll post a giveaway. It's only a local giveaway cause I can't be shipping out my cake pops. Even though they're not for sale, but it's just easier.

And to grow my local base as well, since those are my direct consumers, I'll post a giveaway, whether it be for um, cake pops or a class or a gift certificate or something. And I always get a pretty good response from that.

[00:34:30] **David Crabill:** Well, I saw that one time. He didn't just do cake pops. You literally gave away 500 bucks.

[00:34:36] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. So there's another local bakery here in town and she created a page called you know, sweet giveaways or something like that. So she'll partner with a few local businesses. And we all pitch in a certain amount to make it 500 bucks. And so we all get traffic out of it and we get to help someone out.

[00:34:57] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I've never heard of someone doing that

[00:34:59] **Daniela Zographos:** I know. It's let me tell you, like here in, at least in the upstate, it's such a neat community of community over competition. Like let's help local businesses. Let's help small businesses. People actually want to support us and it's, it's a pretty good thing we got going.

[00:35:18] **David Crabill:** Have you gotten quite a bit of support via media attention as well?

[00:35:23] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes, that usually happens. When I do an event, there's a Christmas event I do every November and they want to come and highlight the event and they try to have some vendors and I always get pulled from that pool of vendors. Cause it's such a unique.

Product that I have. And it's, it's nice. And, and some local, like a local magazine, I've been called a top 10 products and in town and just a few things,

[00:35:53] **David Crabill:** I mean, have you been getting a response just mainly from local people or do you get, do you hear from people across the country?

[00:36:00] **Daniela Zographos:** I have a few followers from across the country just because they enjoy, I don't post it enough, which I should. They enjoy watching videos of how I make cake pops, And I've grown my cake, pop community from cake poppers all over the country I've made a pretty good connection with those people and we help each other out since it's not direct competition.

[00:36:21] **David Crabill:** I noticed that your business name is Yumsies cake pops, but you didn't start with cake pops. So did you actually change your business name over time?

[00:36:30] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. It was called cookies and confections. Um, And it's always something that in the back of my mind, I'm like, should I rebrand? I don't know, but it wasn't really because my main name is and just kind of like a subheading was cookies and confections. So now just the subheading is cake pops. my official business name is just Yumsies. So just parts of my logo changed and I was okay with that.

[00:36:54] **David Crabill:** So you didn't, you didn't actually have to change the paperwork.

[00:36:57] **Daniela Zographos:** no.

[00:36:58] **David Crabill:** I did notice you have a pretty strong logo and brand. Is that something that you had a designer make for you?

[00:37:05] **Daniela Zographos:** I am blessed to have my best friend be a designer. she did my branding and I love it so much that I don't want to stray from that.

[00:37:14] **David Crabill:** I don't think you need to. It's really, really good. Um, and what about photography.

[00:37:20] **Daniela Zographos:** photography. So I, I, I take my own pictures with my phone. Believe it or not. Um, I've had a few branding pictures done by

a local photographer and yesterday I did a promo video with a videographer, but aside from that, it's just me and my iPhone.

[00:37:39] **David Crabill:** And I feel like your website is a bit more sophisticated than most of the websites I see out there. Like you have a whole calendar booking

[00:37:50] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes, my friend, designer friend helped me with that too. Um, When she did my branding and she just taught me how, cause it's, it's hard to start your own website. And even though there's websites with templates out there, it's still kinda hard to figure it out. Um, So she taught me how to use it, how to update it.

And even though I don't have an online store I will post pre-orders there for holidays. That's how I, I don't take custom orders for the holidays. I do. Pre-orders so that's the only type of online shopping I'll do on my website for holidays. But yes, that's where my availability calendar is my contact form pictures.

And that's where eventually, hopefully in January, my online classes will be posted

[00:38:30] **David Crabill:** So as you grew this business, I mean, when did you feel like it really started to take off what year?

[00:38:38] **Daniela Zographos:** probably when I rebranded 2017.

[00:38:41] **David Crabill:** And one of the unique things about South Carolina in a not so good way is that up until 2018, they had a \$15,000 sales limit, really low sales limit. Were you starting to run into that sales limit?

[00:38:54] **Daniela Zographos:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. That was very frustrating. I have another baker friend and we just, one year had to quit orders for Christmas, because we had reached our cap a while back and you can't just, nobody can live off of \$15,000, you know, and it's more than a hobby.

So that cap was really frustrating, especially since Texas and other ones have like a 50,000 one.

[00:39:23] **David Crabill:** Actually a lot of them don't have any sales limit at all.

[00:39:26] **Daniela Zographos:** really I knew some did. But yeah, so that was really frustrating. And I'm glad it's done with, because that was a huge hurdle because who would want to start a business and have that kind of limitation.

[00:39:37] **David Crabill:** Well, the concept behind it is that you start from home, but then you move into a commercial kitchen. Right? Is that something you looked into?

[00:39:46] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes, that's something I looked into. I definitely knew that was the next step with being a full-time mom. I can't really open a storefront yet, but I thought about having a commercial kitchen use it to bypass all these cottage food laws and then rent it out. But that fell through because there's not a kitchen like that in Anderson to the planning for that started and then it failed and then the city of Anderson picked it up. And it's still in the process of being built.

[00:40:12] **David Crabill:** And so it hasn't been built yet when that shared kitchen actually gets built. Or if it gets built, is it something you think you'd use this.

[00:40:22] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes. Well, the initial agreement was since it was my project, I was. Be involved and hopefully be given a space to work in there, or even um, it's supposed to have a little retail spot so that you can work there and put your stuff on a shelf to be sold since nobody has a storefront that's working in there.

So hopefully that's still the case. they got a grant from the government for a million dollars to build this kitchen. So I'm hoping it's going to be big enough. It's supposed to have two or three smaller kitchens, so that two or three people, businesses can be working in there at once. And I sure hope to be able to use it.

[00:41:01] **David Crabill:** You said it was your project?

[00:41:03] **Daniela Zographos:** Yes.

[00:41:04] **David Crabill:** Well, you're going to have to expand on that.

[00:41:08] **Daniela Zographos:** And 2019. I started with a business plan I wanted to build a small, just a kitchen that I could use for my business. Be able to actually have a proper food business and not have to be under the cottage food laws anymore. But since I'm a stay at home mom, I could also rent it when I'm not using it and have some disposable income right there.

I started with a business plan. there's a South Carolina. I can't remember the, the name of them, but they go from town to town and they host like a business plan class. It was like a 10 week long class. it's for small minority for minorities.

Minority small businesses. At the end of this business plan class, whoever had the best pitch got \$10,000 towards their business. So I was in the lead for that. And then sadly, my dad passed away we were in the middle of it. I couldn't focus. I didn't finish that class, but I try to keep going with my plan.

He was my biggest business supporter in this kitchen. And so once that fell through and then the pandemic hit, I didn't feel comfortable taking out a huge loan to build this kitchen. So the city reached out to partner with me again, another partnership, you know, I didn't know how this one would turn out because it's a city. You'd think it would be a good thing? they have other things in mind, they just want to make their city grow. You know, it doesn't matter what it takes. It actually got a bit frustrating at one point because they were announcing the kitchen as their project while I was still working on it.

So kind of awkward there. And then once everything completely shut down because of COVID I had to step back cause I was not going to take out a huge loan for this. I didn't know how it was going to pan out, which I think it would have actually worked out knowing, you know, having hindsight with how everything turned out with this pandemic, but I wasn't comfortable taking out a big loan.

So the kitchen went forward and took a grant and got a million dollars to build it.

[00:43:18] **David Crabill:** I'm just curious. You have a cake pop business, you've got two kids. How in the world did you find the time to work on a project like

[00:43:26] **Daniela Zographos:** It's again um, while they're at school and at night, it's, you know, if you can, you will.

[00:43:35] **David Crabill:** That's pretty incredible. Well, hopefully that gets built at some point and you can use.

[00:43:39] **Daniela Zographos:** Thank you. So, yes, I hope. Um, And that was my thing. They asked me, well, if you're not going to do it, can we move forward with this and that was really hard to just give away my project. but I thought it might, you know, with a million dollars, they can build it bigger and

better and faster than I can. And I still need a space to work in. So it was a bittersweet sacrifice.

[00:44:00] **David Crabill:** Well, maybe not faster.

[00:44:02] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah. Right. It's it's in it finally got approved and it's they're doing bids right now for construction. So once those bids go, it should go by.

[00:44:10] **David Crabill:** And did you want to do the shared kitchen so you could sell in retail stores, or so you could do perishable types of cake pops. What was the main reason.

[00:44:20] **Daniela Zographos:** The main reason was so I can put them in retail. That way I could go away from the custom orders, which take a lot of time and just be able to wholesale more.

[00:44:32] **David Crabill:** And do you already have retail shops reaching out or partnerships

[00:44:36] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah. There's no, there's a few that have reached out, but I've had to turn down since I can't do it. um, they've asked me to, you know, to just keep them posted on when I'm able to do that. And another thing was, I wanted to do classes there as well. Like other types of classes, not just cake pops, but just it's a full-on kitchen, so I can do any type of class

[00:44:56] **David Crabill:** with your business focused on cake pops? Why do you think you would be offering other kinds of classes.

[00:45:02] **Daniela Zographos:** I loved making cakes and I want to go back to that. And that's something again that I kind of had to learn on my own. I'd love to offer a class on how to bake cakes and decorate the like stack decorate.

Everything is still related to cakes and stuff, but my passion was culinary. So I'd love to go back to that.

[00:45:21] **David Crabill:** So, if you could look into the future, where do you want this business to go?

[00:45:27] **Daniela Zographos:** There's a lot of routes that it could go. I always have to see just what happens. You know, one is getting into a kitchen and being able to wholesale my cake pops and maybe add some other things back to

my menu that I had to take out. Two, is I know cake pops are simple and that's, what's in and my niche, but I've always wanted to have a coffee shop with like fine French pastries that nobody really does that around here.

Or three have a blowout, a full-blown out bakery. It just all depends where when I can do anything and what it's going to look like,

[00:46:05] **David Crabill:** Well, what are you working on next?

[00:46:08] **Daniela Zographos:** my classes online classes. That's my next project.

[00:46:13] **David Crabill:** As you think back over the years, I mean, you've been doing this for what eight years. You've done events. You've done a lot of custom orders. Are there any memorable moments that stand out to you?

[00:46:26] **Daniela Zographos:** Memorable moments would probably be when I first started. Oh, this is another thing I did. I went on Etsy first. I thought, well, that's some way to get traffic when I don't know anyone in town that was before I knew I wasn't allowed to do that. And I got so many cookie orders from California.

It's crazy. The amount of people that wanted my stuff outside of where I was. And that was a memorable moment for me. Like people actually want my stuff and they don't even know who I am, where I am any of this. That was hard when I had to shut it down. Cause I knew I was going to get in trouble. I hadn't realized that.

And so I had to completely regroup and almost start from zero again, to try to find a customer base. Another memorable moment was when I had my son, my first baby, I stopped baking for a few months and I realized how much my business actually meant because I kept getting so many emails and messages of when I'm coming back, because I have this and I need cakes and I need cake pops and cookies and cupcakes, and the community wanted me.

So I definitely wanted to make it work. And when I rebranded that it grew even bigger. And whenever I'm sought out, like, like for you for an interview and, and for a promo video yesterday and this partnership, it's, it's memorable moments that give me validation in what I'm doing and that I'm doing it right. And that feels good. and now I'm still going. Cause I don't want to let it go. Cause it's my only outlet, outside of cake pops, I'm just mom. So it's nice to

have something for myself. That nobody gets to step into otherwise I would have grown this thing way bigger by now.

[00:48:04] **David Crabill:** Well, you're doing a great job. And I look forward to seeing where your business takes you in the future.

[00:48:11] **Daniela Zographos:** I appreciate it.

[00:48:12] **David Crabill:** And if people want to find you or reach out how can they get in touch?

[00:48:17] **Daniela Zographos:** my online presence is more prominent on Instagram. My handle is at yumsiescakepops. Or through email yumsiescakepops@gmail.com.

[00:48:31] **David Crabill:** Perfect. Thank you, so much for coming on the show, Daniela and sharing with us.

[00:48:37] **Daniela Zographos:** Yeah. Thanks for having me.

[00:48:40] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/46.

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