

Creating A Smash Hit with Jill Baethge

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 Jill Baethge. Jill lives in Plano, Texas, and sells candy piñata cakes. They're pretty unique. I'll explain them in a little bit, but she sells these unique smash cakes with her cottage food business, Kaboom Chokolaka, and just like the name implies this business is focused on fun. The best way I can describe her product is like a piñata / hot cocoa bomb / cake. It's pretty unique. It's pretty hard to describe. So you haven't already seen this type of candy smash cake before, definitely hit pause on the episode right now, and check out the pictures and video on her website.

You can find a link to her website in the episode show notes. So Jill started her business under Texas' cottage food law back in 2018. And wow, her business has grown tremendously in just a few short years. Get this not only does she have a thriving custom candy cake, whatever you want to call it business that she still runs from her home today, but she now also has an entire product line in Michael's stores across the nation.

So someone can literally go to a Michael's store near them, pick up one of her cake molds and make one of her candy piñatas from their own home. How cool is that? This is what many cottage food entrepreneurs dream of. Right. It's really incredible. And you'll hear Jill talk about how surreal it still seems to her.

so I really wanted to dig into that side of her story, but equally important is what got her there. So I decided to make this a two part episode in this first part. We're going to focus on her cottage food business and how she's grown in over time. And in the second part, we'll focus on how she got a product line onto the store shelves at Michael's across the country.

And with that, let's jump right into part one of my interview with Jill.

Welcome to the show, Jill. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:15] **Jill Baethge:** Thank you. I'm So thrilled to be here.

[00:02:18] **David Crabill:** So Jill, can you take us back to the beginning of this journey? How did it all get started?

[00:02:23] **Jill Baethge:** So I would say about five years ago uh, personal storm was brewing. That kind of led me on this journey, my son, who was two at the time, he was having some medical issues and we were navigating through that and trying to, we didn't have all the answers then. So we, I had some things going on personally.

And then at work I had worked for a company as an accountant for 20 years and Put into a different position that just really wasn't a good fit for me. And the combination of those two things kind of felt like I was beating my head at work, kind of beating my head at home So I decided to ask for a leave of absence. and then a few months into it, my son was going to have his third birthday and I stumbled upon a video showing how to create these chocolate piñatas, a cupcake chocolate piñata in particular. And I thought to myself like, oh, that would be so cool.

I can do that now for my son's birthday. Well, it looks simple enough, but I was up the entire night And I did get it completed just in time for his birthday party, but a couple things happened. So the, when he smashed it open we had family there mainly, and their reaction to him smashing it open was like, you know, there was like excitement.

They were like, wow, that was so cool. Hmm. With me being an accountant, any, any time that I did something for the company, you know, there really wasn't that same reaction that I got, you know, , I saved the company money, you know, no one went "woohoo!". They just said, you know, gave me a pat on the back and said, do better next time, you know, like do more.

So that was kind of cool personally, that there was such a great reaction to it. And then the most importantly, the other thing that happened was I saw the look of joy in my son's eyes. And I knew that was something that I wanted to create. I mean, he just got to break something and get a treat for it.

And you know, most kids, most adults, you know, you really don't get to break things and get a treat for it. So I thought that was pretty cool then. And then I knew that was something I would want to recreate. And so I started making more for friends and family. And every time I did there would be somebody maybe at the party or somewhere along the way that would say you really should make a business out of this.

you know, that seed was planted. And then my work had called me back and I just decided it wasn't time to go back yet. And so I decided to resign, which is very uncharacteristic of me. And that was. Beginning of March, 2018 is when I

resigned. And by the end of March, 2018 is when I established the business got my food handler's license opened a DBA at that time.

And then decided on a name. So I actually had been working on a name for several months, but uh, finally toward the end of maybe that March, April, 2018 timeline is when I formalized the name and Kaboom Chokolaka was born.

[00:05:43] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I love the name. And how, how did you uh, come up with the name?

[00:05:48] **Jill Baethge:** So I had been mulling around a lot of different names, a lot with like maybe my name Jill in my business name?

And it was actually, I had that song like boom, Shaka, Laka that would, would play in my head at various times. And it, it was like two thoughts, just kind of smacking together. So that song was playing in my head.

And I was playing a game with my daughter and I was showing her how like if you, you know, make this move on the game, it was going to go like Kaboom, or I think initially I said kablooeey and I thought that was such a weird word. And then, so I was like, boom. And it just, those two thoughts just hit together, like lightly in my head.

And I was like, Kaboom Chokolaka. That's it. And I'm really glad that I took time to decide on the name. I see this question a lot of times comes up in like the Facebook groups I'm in on a lot of people will ask, you know, how did you, how do you decide on a name? and some people will use their name, you know, like their first name, like.

And treats or something like that. And that's totally fine, but I'm really glad that I decided more on a, on a bigger name. I think it's really helped with building a brand. And so that would be my one tip of advice.

You know, if you need to take time to formalize your business name, definitely go ahead and, and do that. If you want to use your name, that's fine. but I, I see this question. I've been seeing this question pop up a lot. So I guess I felt the need to give a little advice on that.

[00:07:30] **David Crabill:** Yeah, and I think it's especially important for your business because it's so unique and considering where your business has gone. uh, it's been especially important to have a very clear brand. and also I'd say that

a lot of people start with their own personal name and then they can always, you know, create a business name later. That's that happens a lot too.

[00:07:50] **Jill Baethge:** Oh, for sure. Yeah. it changes. I mean, even with the logo, I think I've been through like two or three reiterations of the logo, you know, So it's, it can be done,

[00:07:59] **David Crabill:** So before we keep going, can you just explain the concept of these uh, candy piñata smash cakes? for someone who's not familiar with?

[00:08:09] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah. So the way I like to describe it is like a breakable chocolate piñata is basically like a hard chocolate shell. And then it's filled with?

whatever the customer wants. Typically it is candy, but I tell my customers as long as it's legal and it fits I'll put it in there. but yeah, and then you know, they can look like any shape.

I mean, some even look like regular cakes and then they just smash them open to reveal the goodies inside. And it's an experience. So not only does it taste good because it's chocolate and candy, but it's you get The experience of hitting something. And so actually, when I first started this business I spent a lot of time explaining what I was creating because when I first started, I looked across the Dallas area across Texas, and then eventually across the us.

And I could not find really anybody that was creating the chocolate piñatas. I found a handful of people and about four out of the five of them were really small and local. then there was one person out of California. He was like the master pastry chef at the Beverly Wilshire. he has since moved on to do other things, but he had a brand and he was really like the only one that, you know, was really taking it and doing something with it.

And so that was part of the reason also why I decided to form a business. I just realized that there wasn't many people in the us that were creating these. And it just seemed like a really good, business opportunity along with just being a really neat thing.

[00:09:50] **David Crabill:** The flip side of that is that, it's not on people's radar. Right. So people aren't like necessarily looking for a candy piñata to celebrate their kid's birthday or some other party. So was that like a big barrier that you

had to overcome and trying to get this off the ground and get people actually interested in.

[00:10:10] **Jill Baethge:** Oh, Yeah, for sure. Um, it definitely was a big barrier because I was spending a lot of time explaining it. And then whenever I would try to introduce this concept to somebody, I needed to show them like a video or if I was going to like a networking meeting, I would have to bring one there and show people like, this is one of the ones I can create and just have somebody there smash it open.

And once I realized, like, It has to go beyond me describing it. It has to be a lot more visual, then people started getting the concept a lot more. So I thought like, yeah, if I just describe it as a hard candy shell or chocolate shell, filled with candy and it gets smashed open. Like people are like, oh, okay.

That's cool. But if I would bring one and somebody got to smash it, then it really like, it really left it and impression. And so initially I was doing a lot of networking and I still do networking, but initially that was what was key for trying to get my name out there. Because if I could show a group of people, what I was talking about and they had an experience with it, and then, you know, they might run into somebody, you know, everybody has a birthday.

So, you know, they, if they were having a birthday or somebody in their family were having a birthday this kind of resonated with them and they could tell others like, oh, you should go, you know, look this person up. And, and even today I spend a lot of still a lot of time trying to explain it, like I'm in Facebook groups.

And if I see somebody post like, Hey, I'm looking for a birthday cake. I'll say like, have you thought about. You know, a chocolate piñata, and this is what it is. And I might touch a video if I can, or something like that. So it's, it's definitely more the visual when it comes to these. And that's why, you know, initially I started with Instagram because it was such a visual platform.

[00:12:02] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I'd say you definitely had to have a pretty strong marketing focus for this type of business, because it was so unique. And I saw somewhere where you said that marketing was your biggest struggle. You already said that you were an accountant for 20 years. That's quite different from running this kind of business. did you feel like it was hard to put yourself out?

[00:12:24] **Jill Baethge:** Yes, I'm kind of like, I don't know if I'm an extroverted introvert or an introverted extrovert, but I, sometimes I feed off of people's energy, I guess that's the extrovert part. And then sometimes I was like, okay, I've had enough of other external energies. I need to just kind of back away. And so to go to the, to find these random networking meetings and just appear at them without really knowing anybody I had to really get out of my comfort zone and do that, but it was after I, I did a few and I realized they were, you know, it was worth it.

I was, at home mostly with the kids. So then it kind of had, had an extra benefit that I was meeting some new people. and sometimes I would go to these meetings and I just wasn't feeling it. So I would, you know, after the meeting, I might just like And just kinda you know, sneak out and not really visit, but in most cases I would stay a little bit after the meetings and try to find somebody to talk to.

And it wasn't always about business. You know, it wasn't always about me explaining what I did. It was also, you know, well, what do you do? And because people are there to talk about their business. So if you're not feeling you're not ready to open up just yet, or talk about your business, then, you know, you can ask somebody else what they do.

But um, most of the time it's easy. It's pretty easy to talk about your business.

[00:13:45] **David Crabill:** I mean, I know that you, you know, you left your job and you're gonna stay home with your kids and you have very young kids, right? Like, I think you said your youngest was three when you created your first smash cake. And that's a full-time job as far as I'm concerned. So like, was it always your plan to go back and start working?

Like what drove you to like actually pursue this business and get out and market it at now working events and on Instagram and.

[00:14:12] **Jill Baethge:** I think like, after I resigned from the job and realizing like, You know, if I really want to invest the time, this could be more than a side hustle. And I've always kind of been the financial provider for my family. So it really wasn't in me to make it a part time thing. Now, initially it really was because, you know, my focus was the kids and obviously still is, but they're both in school.

So that kind of helps, you know, with stuff. and I can be a Knight also. I can, you know, after they go to bed, I do a lot of things after they go to bed. But first

couple years was just, part-time because it was mainly for friends and family, but then It would have been in March of 2020, so right when like COVID was hitting right before that, like days before, like the world, it felt like the us shut down was I had an interview with a writer who wrote for the Dallas morning news and she was somebody I had met through these networking meetings.

And she did an article on Kaboom Chokolaka that made it, that eventually made it into the Dallas morning news. I can't remember when it hit, I think it was in like the April may timeframe. And since that article things have like really launched then. So around that time, you know, the world is shutting down people aren't going out and doing things and it's graduation.

So the article hits and all of a sudden, like things change basically overnight. My phone is ringing off the hook I make these graduation hat piñatas. Everybody was wanting, you know, there were graduations were being canceled at that time. people were just looking for different and unique ways to do something.

And that article helped launch the graduation piñatas. And I probably needed to hire somebody during that time, but because it was COVID, I didn't want to bring somebody into the home and additionally put my family at risk. So I was basically working all night and one morning I had spent, I was up all night creating these graduation hats it's like 6:00 AM.

I'm going to quickly try to grab a couple of hours of sleep before getting up and like delivering all these graduation hat piñatas. And I get this, this email in the subject line said Michael's inquiry. And it's kind of funny because I wasn't sleeping a lot during that time. And I honestly thought I had made like maybe a web submission, either asking about a product or maybe even complaining about a product.

And I was like, man, I'm so tired. I don't even remember doing that, but I guess I must have, So I don't even click on the email. I get up in a couple of hours, make my deliveries, and then when I came back, I was like, oh, I should, check out this email. and.

it was the most beautiful email. It only had two sentences in it, but it was like life-changing. the VP of food crafting at Michael's saw that article in the Dallas morning news and they picked it up and they just said we would like to discuss a partnership with you. And you know, from there things have definitely changed.

And that's the article in the Dallas morning news has really been the launching pad for things. And the Michael's opportunity has opened a lot of doors. And so from there, it's just really those opportunities have definitely kept me going, but it's also, always comes back to my mission as far as like, I want to provide a little bit of joy to some people.

And so whether I'm creating the chocolate piñatas or providing molds to somebody else to create one, I just hope everybody has a joyful, experience in either creating or smashing one open.

[00:18:14] **David Crabill:** Yeah, we're definitely to get into the Michael's singing a little bit. That's a huge part of your story. And that's really, really cool and awesome to see. It's amazing, quite frankly, before we get into that, you know, you know, thinking about how this business, just a lot of fun, right?

And I feel like that's what people really needed during the pandemic was something that was fun and could bring them joy. So you would agree that the pandemic was a big turning point, not just the article, but like the fortuitousness of the article in tandem with the pandemic.

[00:18:45] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah. It, it felt really, you know, like I obviously the, what the world, and we were all experiencing was really heavy but it did, you know, COVID did, with people trying to do celebrations at home, these chocolate piñatas really went just hand in hand with that.

So the article probably couldn't have come at a better time I get a lot of referrals, a lot of word of mouth and a lot of repeat customers.

So that has been such a, great opportunity because not only did it launch the Michael's thing, but it's really created a really good local customer base. So for the people that don't want to DIY a chocolate piñata, like they're part of, you know, my customer base and I love providing so many different things for them.

And obviously any time somebody refers me, that is just one of the best validations that you can receive in your business, that somebody loves your product is willing to refer to you and buy it again. I mean, any one of those, it's just so, so valuable.

[00:19:50] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I was actually wondering about repeat customers because, you know, I wasn't sure if you know, this is just something that's like cool. One time, you know, and it's like, okay, well that's cool. And

then we'll go back to regular cake next time. But it sounds like this is something that's definitely stuck.

[00:20:07] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah. So, I mean, in some cases, the repeat customers, they have multiple kids. So, if they did it for one, they want to do it for the others. But like my kids, for example, I always think this is funny because I always give them an option. I'll tell them, like, you know, your birthday's coming up, you don't have to have a chocolate piñata.

You can you know, we can do cakes or cupcakes or, you know, ice cream or whatever. Like this is your birthday, whatever you want to do. And every single year they're like, well, no, I was thinking, I want, you know, this type of piñata this year. And so, I mean, obviously that just, I mean, they're such sweet kids in general.

They they're, you know, my cheerleaders, I have one boy and one girl, my daughter is always like the cheerleader and my son is like, he's not the cheerleader, but he'll, he'll definitely like um, the other day he just walked through and he was just like, said something like, I don't know how you do what you do, but you do it so well, there's something, you know, and it's just, it's really sweet.

So I love that my own kids year after year. So, for, you know, my son, my very first one was for my son when he turned three and he turned seven here recently. So I've have done five different ones for him. And I'm about to do another fifth different one for my daughter as her birthday is coming up.

So yeah, a lot of the repeat customers, they either have multiple kids or they, they have made this like the standard. They want to do it every year but it's, it's also not just for birthdays. I mean, I get like a lot of gender reveals and um, anniversaries retirements and bat mitzvahs. And, you know, it's, there's so many different occasions. And then of course all the holiday ones. So it gives people different opportunities you know, if this is something, if this is the way they choose to celebrate, you know, they, they come back and like this time I want one for Valentine's day, you know, or something like that.

[00:22:06] **David Crabill:** So, can we talk a little bit about what it takes to make these, I know you said that it wasn't easy to make your first one. I mean, cause this wasn't a common thing, so it's not like you could just go out and buy what you needed to make them unlike now, as we'll get into a little bit later, but, um, how difficult was it to turn this into a business?

[00:22:27] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah, I'm not gonna lie. It was very difficult in the beginning and it still, at times can be with, with various things if I'm trying something new. And I always like to explore and try something new, but yeah, in the beginning, I would say there was, there was a lot of tears um, many broken piñatas, or many thoughts of I don't know if I had like these ideas of grandeur, like, this is I'm going to try this and it's going to work out and then it, it, it wouldn't work out at all.

But I mean, in the beginning, I basically had to start with any large cake mold that I could find typically not metal. I just, wasn't in the beginning, wasn't having a luck with any of the metal ones. And so it had to be plastic or silicone, and then I would have to somehow. make it work for a chocolate piñata.

So sometimes I would have to cut the silicone just to get the chocolate piñata out of the mold. it's always like either like rigging stuff, we're trying to find a different way to do it. And I have a ton of different ones now that I can make work. I do like to make my chocolate piñatas fully enclosed.

So like there's a front and a back or a top and a bottom, and I try to get them all to stand up. I mean, obviously some are easier than others to stand up. You know, obviously the cupcake, will stand up, but like I do number piñatas and, you know, trying to get a six or four to stand kind of requires a little bit little extra work to get them to stand.

But I really feel like that's what creates the true candy explosion is, you know, if I can create this thing that either stands or is fully enclosed and then they come over the top of it and whack it open and smash it open, then that, and the candy flies out and the chocolate goes everywhere. I mean, that's, that's really kind of what makes them so much fun, you know?

[00:24:25] **David Crabill:** So what's the process for making one of these cakes?

[00:24:29] **Jill Baethge:** Typically almost always start with a mold of some sort, and then it is melting the chocolate, getting it into the mold and building up those chocolate layers. So there's no cracks in it. And then once I have a good chocolate piñata to work with, I fill it with candy and seal it up and then decorate the outside.

That's the very basic steps to it. And that sounds like it only takes a few minutes, but I'll, I can spend like maybe four hours on one, especially in the beginning when I had like no experience. And really hadn't really like dived into

the creative part of me, you know, kind of I have learned along the way that I feel like creativity breeds creativity.

And so since I had spent so many years working, you know, with more so the number side of it that you know, when I first started, I had like a couple ideas and now it's like, I have so many ideas and I can't even get to like, you know, 10% of them or something. Like, it's just, I have a note in my phone where I'm just constantly adding things to like, oh, you should try this.

Or you should try that. Or, you know, things like that. And I love it that I have such a large selection to offer my customers, but then also to encourage others that are getting into this and creating them to show that you can do so much more with it.

You know, the hearts, the breakable hearts are basically the ones that have become so popular, but I'm trying to show others, like, there's just so much more that you can do with these. I mean, I actually made like a wedding cake piñata the other day, so that was cool that, you know, it looked like a three tiered wedding cake.

But there was no cake involved. It was a chocolate piñata and filled with candy. So it was that one was kind of cool. I love that one.

[00:26:23] **David Crabill:** Yeah, you, I mean, you have dozens of different designs on your website and I know you have even more than that, right? Probably well, over a hundred. But it's like, that's not the limitations of the creativity, right. Cause it's not just the creativity of the molds, but it's also the creativity of what goes inside of it. what have customers put inside these cakes?

[00:26:44] **Jill Baethge:** So I have my customers, I let them pick the candy and then I fill it up. So I think that that's one of the things that does separate me a little bit. Some people do that and some people will choose the candies for them, so I let them, I let them choose.

And then I go out and buy a variety of candies for them. But so candy for sure is like the number one choice. Some people have put popcorn in there, but you know, there could be a moisture exchange between popcorn and chocolate. So usually popcorn has to be individually wrapped. Alcohol is a popular one.

Some might tip on that is that you can't have any glass bottles. And there's, there's obviously restrictions around that. So in Texas I can't purchase the alcohol and resell it, but I'll create the piñata. And then if they want to, buy their

own plastic bottle, like mini plastic bottles of alcohol and put them in, they can do it that way.

people have wanted to put in car keys and I have shied away from that only because I didn't want to take the liability risk of it. So what I tell people is that I can create like a chocolate key and put it inside and maybe wrap it differently too. So it looks a little bit more special.

So then when they smashed it open they can have the real keys handy, if it's something expensive like that, there are options you know, where I can minimize my liability, but I can still create something for them that would really work for the surprise as far as like giving a car or giving an engagement ring or something like that.

[00:28:26] **David Crabill:** Now, I mean, it's, it's hard because there's nothing like this. there was nothing like this out there when you started. So what did you determine, would be the price of your cakes and how has your pricing changed over time?

[00:28:41] **Jill Baethge:** that's a very good question. Because in the beginning, you're right, there was really no one to compare it to. And because I didn't have the experience yet, even though a cake might take me, a piñata might take me like four hours, I felt like I couldn't charge for that because it was still a learning curve for me.

And so I, throughout the years I have increased my prices and it often it's at the encouragement of others, which was kind of funny. I've had plenty of customers that have said, like, I can't believe you're only charging this much for what you do. You really should charge more. so it was kind of that encouragement.

And as I got more experienced and I felt more, comfortable with what I was doing that kind of has helped you know, settle on some of the prices. And then there's Facebook groups that I go to and just basically ask like how much would you consider, you know, what would be your price of this?

And it's obviously, you know, it's taking into material cost and, time and experience and packaging costs and, things like that as well. But yeah, it's, I will admit it. I just felt like I was just, you know, throwing darts at a dart board to land on the price. And a family member was like, well, it's much easier to, set your prices in the beginning because it would be harder to raise them later.

But I have, I feel like slowly raised them, so it hasn't been too much of a shock to any of my customers

[00:30:15] **David Crabill:** you mentioned a couple of Facebook groups that you're active in. Do you remember what the names of those were?

[00:30:21] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah. So one is called breakable chocolate hearts and we discuss more than just the breakable hearts in that one. the other one has a much longer title anybody does a search for like chocolate piñata or breakables or breakable piñatas, I try to join those groups.

some are more active than others. And then there's one specifically for hot cocoa bombs. And that one is called all things hot cocoa bombs.

[00:30:50] **David Crabill:** All right. Well, I'll get the specific names there and I'll put links to those down in the show notes, and so what's a general sense of what your pricing is like right now.

[00:30:59] **Jill Baethge:** So most of mine I would say, would be around the \$50 mark. yeah, it depends on the size of it, how difficult it is. A lot of times I don't have a premium cost for candy. so if somebody wants like a Godiva or whatever, it would depend on the size of the piñata.

But for the most part, I haven't charged like a premium for that. That is one thing I might consider in the future. But for now I have not. but yeah, it's just, I try to offer some really small mini ones. So then that way, if, if somebody wanted the experience and they didn't want to, you know, the \$50 mark wasn't something that they could.

afford at the time, you know I try to offer like some small ones, some mid-size ones, the mid range, you know, the \$50 range and then some that are bigger and take more time you know, require more materials and, and things like that, then those were, you know, set a higher price as well, too.

[00:32:04] **David Crabill:** I know you said that, you know, you. Heart shape ones that are like the most popular ones. And you just did a wedding cake recently. That was fun. What are some of your favorite designs?

[00:32:16] **Jill Baethge:** I feel like every time I do a new one, I was like, oh, I like this. I really like the sugar skulls. I really like doing those. And I like the ones that are colorful. Like if somebody orders something with like a rainbow, you know, they want something more with rainbows and things like that. Yeah,

it's just, it's just been fun, kind of experimenting with different ones or I'll, I'll do something that's just like just a little design?

and I'm like, oh, I'm beginning to like this more like, you know, a, a cluster of flowers.

I'm like, oh yeah, this is, you know, something recently that I've been doing more of. And I'm like, oh, I really, really like the way these are turning out. So yeah. I can never settle on a favorite run because I feel like sometimes when I get a new mold, I'm like, oh, I really like this one. And then, then I try a new one a couple of days later and I'm like, oh, this is now my favorite.

I just have so much fun creating them that I think that's why it's kind of hard for me to like settle on certain ones.

[00:33:22] **David Crabill:** Has a customer come to you with a design idea and you've turned them away?

[00:33:27] **Jill Baethge:** On occasion on very rare occasions. And a lot of times it more so has to do with what is on my calendar. So if it is a highly custom wise one, and if I have time to really think about it and design it out, I will definitely give it a try. I love tackling new and challenging things.

So it is very hard for me to say no, but there was one Like it was, it was just too quick of a turnaround time and I would've loved to tackle it, but there would be no way that I could sit down really think about it and design it out. A lot of times when a customer comes in, if they're asking for something that I haven't made before sometimes I will, depending on what it is, I will try to steer them to something that I know I can do.

Or maybe just talk about the design as far as like, okay, well this is something I've done in the past and I can send you pictures so you can see it. would that be something you would consider? My customers have been so nice. I don't know how I've gotten so lucky, but a lot of times too, what will happen is when we'll, we're talking about designs and they're like, well, I really want something like this.

And if I think in my mind that I can do it, I'll tell them why. I really think I can do it. I also know that I can do this other one and they are so willing to work with me. They will say like, okay, well, let's try to do this one. If you can't do it, then let's do the second option.

And that has just been really refreshing, you know, that they, they trust me enough to. Work on.

you know, maybe something new, but then they also are like, Hey, if you can't do it, just go with what you know. And I just think that's, that's so great that they allow me to do all that. So it's been cool.

[00:35:20] **David Crabill:** I think one of the things that's really unique about your business is like, you know, you're smashing something with this cake, right? So like you can use a lot more creativity with it. You obviously do like the celebrations and the birthdays, but I saw some like what do you call it? Frustration cakes. Right. I feel like you've, uh,

[00:35:38] **Jill Baethge:** yes. Oh yes. The cake. So, yeah, I've had a couple of divorce celebrations. Um, But Yeah, they, you know, some, sometimes those Teeter I'm being a little bit more risqué and graphic. So those, I have a separate account to put my risqué ones in that. So I actually have two accounts and I decided to do that early on because I knew I was going to cater to a lot of moms with young kids and they, you know, wouldn't want to see a graphic design right next to like a princess dress piñata or, you know, things like that.

So I put all those under a separate account and kind of keep them separate. And then that way, hopefully I'm minimizing the amount of people I'm, you know, could offend by having some of these, you know, divorce party cakes, or I don't want to go into too much detail on it. I would think that your listeners will get the sense of what I'm trying to talk about.

[00:36:42] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I think it's pretty clear.

[00:36:44] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah.

[00:36:45] **David Crabill:** So how much time do you generally tell people they need to get their order in by like how long does it take you to turn around a cake order?

[00:36:54] **Jill Baethge:** So ideally I tell people at least probably like four days before, but honestly I cater to a lot of procrastinators, I feel like. like I said, I do have a problem saying no. And there are times where, you know, somebody might come to me the day before and we'll say, do you have anything?

And obviously every order is custom order. So it's not like I have piñatas just hanging around, ready to go the door to any random person. But I really do try

to accommodate where I can. Obviously, if they're calling me last minute, it's usually will then have to be something I've done before, you know, because I won't have time to really design it out and experiment and, even trying different colors or things like that.

So they're usually pretty understanding if somebody is calling at the last minute, but yes, I've, I've joked that I've catered to procrastinators. like, it goes back to, I just want to bring a little bit of joy to somebody and a last minute cake, I mean, I've procrastinated on stuff.

I know how it goes. You know, life gets in the way a lot of times. And there is one customer that I have, it's almost become a running joke because she'll just be like, she'll call and she was like, how are you doing? I was like, okay, well, when do you need it? Cause I know she will always call me at the last minute.

And I think I've been able to accommodate nearly every single time, which has been like four times.

[00:38:28] **David Crabill:** I mean, that's really crazy. I mean, four day turnaround time, I saw a video from you a couple of years back where you said two-day turnaround time. And I feel like, you know, most cake makers out there, like pretty standard, like two weeks is what they're looking for or longer sometimes.

So yeah, I mean, clearly you have a problem saying no,

[00:38:53] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah. I mean, I have said no on occasion and there's really only been like, I feel like one time I really should have said no,

And I said, yes, I've, I've been able to make everything else work. And like I said, I have really understanding customers, but I wouldn't advise people to be, you know, like, like sometimes I'll say like, okay, I can do all this and I can deliver it by 4:00 PM.

And I don't get there until like four 15 or something like that. I mean, obviously being on time or before is way preferable, but I've also noticed that with COVID, there's been a lot more flexibility in people's time but also, yeah, when I first started, I mean, I just didn't have the amount of orders, so I could easily turn something over in a two day time.

But, you know, obviously since with the business growing, I really, you know, prefer at least four days. And since I make so many, I mean, I have a lot of

candy here, so I'm not running to the store for every order. I have two big bins of candy and one is dedicated to chocolates. And then the other is dedicated to non chocolates, which are your, like your gummies, your Starbursts, your Skittles and things like that.

and at any given time, I might have a variety of 50 different candy and I typically go through it pretty quickly. So none, not a lot of it goes to waste or expires or things like that. It's if it gets used up pretty, pretty quickly.

[00:40:29] **David Crabill:** and you're still doing this from home, under the Texas cottage food law. So how many cakes are you typically making a week to.

[00:40:39] **Jill Baethge:** You know, it varies so much. You know, around the holidays. It's, I don't know how many, you know, but during this time, which a little bit slower in, which is kind of the reason I kind of take this time, the first two weeks of the year to.

just kind of like decompress after the holidays, and my birthday's within the first two weeks, I just kind of use this, this kind of like my me time.

So I haven't really posted a lot recently, and I'll still take orders, but I'm not really advertising heavily and stuff like that. Um, Yeah, it varies. I mean, there's some days where I don't have any and then there's other days I have two or three you know, I don't even know what my average would be because it's, it's so up and down, especially with any holidays But birthdays happen all year round and anniversaries. and since I do cater to a lot of late callers, like I think like next week I only have like two or three, but by the end of the week, I might make 10. Like it's it's I do get a lot of last minute call.

[00:41:41] **David Crabill:** What was like one of the craziest weeks that you can remember?

[00:41:46] **Jill Baethge:** I know Halloween of 2020 was a very crazy time. I think there was a stretch of like three or four days where I probably slept maybe five to eight hours. I mean, it was, my husband was helping me deliver, I don't know how many pumpkin piñatas I made during that time. And then also when the Dallas morning news article came out and then all the graduation hats during that time.

I can be a night owl. So you know, usually staying up through the night is not a problem for me. And then kind of, sometimes I'll just nap on my couch for a

couple hours and then get back to it. So yeah, the, the kids and the family know if they find me on the couch in the morning, they probably know I've had a long night.

you know, I really don't have a sleeping schedule right now and you know, obviously that's not necessarily a great thing, but since I've had kind of a wacky sleep.

schedule, I can usually roll with it. Pretty good. You know, I know, I know that that's not for everybody, but that's sort of what works for me.

You know, sometimes I'm just so tired that I come up with wacky ideas that actually turn out, people will be looking at me, like, why is she doing it that way? And it's because I don't know any better, what works for me?

[00:43:12] **David Crabill:** Considering how much you're producing at certain times. I mean, you're going through lots of chocolate, lots of candy. Where do you source your ingredients?

[00:43:25] **Jill Baethge:** It's mainly from, you know, local grocery stores obviously Michaels and, you know, some of those stores in the area, I really haven't had too much of a problem finding things. I know initially, you know, there were with COVID and shipping constraints and stuff like that. I, since I really wasn't taking like some basic goods off the shelf was the reason why I decided to continue with the business.

Cause I did think, well, if I'm, you know, with, with the scarcity of certain things, if I was using those ingredients, I was like, ah, maybe I wouldn't continue on, but it really wasn't a problem for me to find candy and the things that I need.

[00:44:05] **David Crabill:** So you've never looked into a distributor?

[00:44:07] **Jill Baethge:** No, I had it. now, there were a couple of times where I had to go to five or six stores to find what I need, but I always eventually did find it.

Here locally. and that really only happened during last year during the hot cocoa bomb craze, where everybody was creating hot cocoa bombs and then like the chocolate that I mainly used was, it wasn't just that the store that I had always shopped at, I had to go to several of their chains to find it.

so there were a couple of times where that has happened, but for the most part, it's not an issue, but I have thought, I might reach out to the brand that I like and just see if I can't work with them directly instead of trying to get their products through the stores.

[00:44:55] **David Crabill:** So I know that you, I think focused heavily on Instagram, how have you learned Instagram or promoted yourself over the course of this business?

[00:45:05] **Jill Baethge:** Sometimes it's just in talking with people, you know, following, there's obviously lots of Instagramers that will give tidbits on their page. So I try to follow, you know, some of the local ones that I feel like I could reach out to. And then some of the others that give tips, I mean, it's, it definitely is a learning process.

I have thought about, you know, hiring somebody for that, that could focus on that and keep up with the algorithm. But I haven't done that yet. And so it, it really just, you know, talking to people, trying to glean what you can from, you know, scrolling through Instagram, I follow a few people that have like a lot of followers and I will, you know, just try to see what are they do, you know, what are they doing that increases their followers and viewership and things like that.

And you know, a lot of times it just boils down to being more personable and that was something that I did not want to be in front of the camera when I first started this. I mean, I think I was like two years in, before I even got in front of the camera. Like I didn't show any really show any pictures of myself or anything like that.

And so now I do try to, in my stories, try to get on so people can see my face and sometimes it's easier to put a filter on, so people can't see my face, but Yeah. it's I know there's definitely classes to take and things like that, but it changes so often that can be really frustrating.

And so I just try to, you know, as I'm Try new things or different hashtags or, you know, a different sort of reel or video or post, and just try to kind of watch it and see what works and doesn't. it's amazing to me, what takes off, you know, like I did, I did this video over Thanksgiving and I was with my family.

We're having the, we had this big Thanksgiving reunion. So we rented out a place and the building just had horrible lighting. so I'm doing, I'm recording a video because we're going to do a family size, hot cocoa bomb for that event. And it's just, that's all that. It is like, there's no faces on the video.

The lighting is horrible. Like it has, you can see the tile on the floor. It's like this old tile on the floor. And that video, I think has reached over like 250,000 views on Facebook. And it's like, you know, there's not a lot of production that went into that video. So it's, you know, it was just kind of surprising to me, like what sometimes takes off and what doesn't.

[00:47:51] **David Crabill:** And now, I mean, for someone who didn't want to get in front of the camera for a while now you've been on TV, right?

[00:47:59] **Jill Baethge:** Yeah, it was a local show called Texas today. And they reached out to me that I was in the middle of Sam's club when they first called and I actually thought it was a scam. So that was kind of funny because I was the producer that called me. I kind of gave him the cold shoulder cause I was like, uh huh.

And I was like, I'm thinking like, you know, the punch line is going to come. Like, you can be on our show for just \$1,000, you know, like I thought I would have to pay, like, I didn't realize that they weren't a paid show. and so he's giving me his spiel and I was like, okay, Well, so how much is this going to cost me?

He's like, oh, no, you know, we're inviting you to come on the show. You don't pay anything. I was like, oh, well, let me let me know, really listen to you because I honestly thought it was, this was a scam call. but yeah, so they were, they were really sweet. That was just such a cool experience.

I mean, they, they really made it um, a really nice setting. It was also during COVID. So we had to, you know, there weren't a lot of people in the studio, we maintained the six feet or whatever. So it turned out to be really neat experience. So yeah, that's, that was a lot of fun

[00:49:13] **David Crabill:** and when did you do that TV?

[00:49:15] **Jill Baethge:** that would have been in the fall of 2020, so big. And That's part of the reason when I was describing how that one Halloween was so crazy is because that show or they, they aired my segment right before Halloween. And I had brought some fall piñatas to the studio. So like I had the pumpkin and the, the sugar skull and the football and a few others the timing of it was again, just so perfect for Halloween and a little, oh, a little tidbit of that story. So the channel was channel five here.

So I made a number five piñata and I put the NBC logo on it and the Texas today logo on it. And they were supposed to smash that one on camera and the host she didn't want to, she's like, let's smash a different one. And I was like, okay, cool. Yeah, let's uh, we ended up smashing the sugar skull.

And so like several months later, I reached out to the producer and I was like, Hey, did you guys ever get around to smashing that number five piñata? And he said, no, his boss like, keeps it, the executive producer, like keeps it in her office. She doesn't let anybody near it. Like, it's like enclosed in a cage.

So that, that piñata has kind of become like a little, a little trophy or award for them, I guess. I don't know how else to describe it, but I thought that was, that was made. I just assumed that they eventually smashed it and they kept it.

[00:50:51] **David Crabill:** Well, so this TV experience was before the whole Michael's thing. Right?

[00:50:57] **Jill Baethge:** it aired, um, so Michael's had reached out to me the summer of 2020. So the TV experience was before I had anything in stores. So I couldn't, I couldn't say anything on the TV show regarding the things that I was working on with Michaels, but it was during that time as well.

[00:51:19] **David Crabill:** Part one of my interview with Jill in the next episode, we'll hear how she got her Kaboom Chokolaka product line into Michael's stores across the nation.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/53

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Thanks for listening. And I'll see you in the next episode where you'll hear part two of my interview with Jill.