

Don't Let Life Crush Your Dreams with Carla Jones-Harris

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 Carla Jones Harris. But real quick, I wanted to check, have you created a website for your business yet? And if you have, do you pay for it?

A lot of entrepreneurs still think they need to spend money to get a good website, and that is simply not true anymore. I am a really big fan of Square Online. That's what I use for my Fudge business' website. And I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a totally free website in less than an hour.

And in case you think free also means cheap. It's actually quite the opposite. I think Square Online is hands down the very best website tool for most cottage food businesses, and it's even better than any of the paid services out there. So if you wanna learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to forrager.com/website.

All right, so I have Carla Jones Harris on the show today. She lives in Pennsauken, New Jersey, and sells gluten-free baked goods with her cottage food business, The Piping Bag Bakery. As you may know, New Jersey has only had a cottage food law for just over a year, and Carla is the first entrepreneur that I get to feature who is using that new law.

But Carla's business journey goes way back beyond just the past year. In fact, she started creating a business plan for her bakery over 30 years. But life got in the way of her plans, and she didn't start selling her baked goods until 2009. And then after a few years of selling traditional baked goods, decorated cakes, cupcakes, et cetera, life got in the way.

Again, after dealing with many health issues. Carla was diagnosed with celiac disease and had to completely remove gluten from her lifestyle, which put her business on hold indefinitely. But she loved baking so much that she started trying to bake gluten free. And after lots of trial and error, finally created some pretty unique and nutritious baked goods, they even impressed people who don't think they like gluten-free baked goods.

So with that, Carla changed the direction and mission of her bakery and decided to niche way down and only focus on items that she would personally eat. And that means not just gluten-free, but also ingredients that are organic, low-glycemic corn free, pasture-raised, fair trade, no oats, no rice, no potato, et cetera, et cetera.

These are highly specialized baked goods. And as you can imagine, They are also highly priced, but people love them and people are buying them. Carla's business journey is quite fascinating and has involved lots of transformation to get to where she is today. And with that, let's hear all about it and jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Carla. Nice to have you.

[00:02:57] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Thank you, David. It's wonderful to be here.

[00:02:59] **David Crabill:** So, Carla, I know you have your business today, but your aspirations for starting a bakery go way back. Can you take me back to the beginning?

[00:03:10] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Wow. Yeah, I think I wanted to have a baking business way back in 1991, I don't even know when the idea popped into my head, but it came from somewhere and I couldn't shake it, so I started to bake. At home and take it into work. I worked for my, father who owned a, refuge business.

And I would take things in and, and let people taste them and ask for their honest opinion. And at the time, the business was located near the University of Pennsylvania. so my father had the great idea for me to take a business course at Wharton School of Business. So I did, I would get off of work and I would drive down there, take the course, come back home, cook dinner, take care of my infant son spend time with my husband, and then I would do my homework for the course I.

Worked on packaging. I worked on marketing. I worked on the financial, you know, side of, running a business and then I would work on product. I knew that I wanted something organic. I knew that I wanted my packaging to be recyclable. I knew that I wanted market to people who were health conscious. But many years passed and I was just baking at home. Finally, I guess when I got divorced from my first husband and remarried, my second husband who I met at my job as a teacher we did a lot of, Youth events at my church, we would have the youth come here and I would cook and bake, and they fell in love with my baking. So I was doing events for, the job. I was doing three tiered cakes. I was making cakes based on themes I would do anything. I just fiddled all the

time. I would be up until five in the morning, jump in the shower, get dressed, pack everything up, and take it to work.

Be to work by seven 30, serve it at whatever function we were doing, and then come back home, clean up the kitchen to start all over again. and I loved it. And people at work would say, You know, when you retire, you better do this. So I said, Sure, that's not gonna happen. In the meantime, I got really, really sick and I was going from specialist to specialist and I found that I had IBS or irritable bowel syndrome. And then a couple of years later, I was diagnosed with celiac disease I was devastated because the day that I was tested, I had not eaten gluten, no gluten whatsoever. In fact, that I'd been an entire year. And the doctor, when he read my results, he said, You know, I know you're supposed to eat gluten the day of the test, but how much did you eat?

I said, Well, I've been off of gluten for a year. He said, no gluten whatsoever. He said No. And he said, Well, what are you doing? I said, I'm baking. He says, You have to stop. You cannot continue. So I had to give up baking, and it was torturous for me. One day I decided, okay, well, I had a couple of friends with celiac disease and I would often bake for them. And so I decided, Okay, I'm going to do this. I'm going to convert all of my recipes to gluten-free recipes. I had no idea what I was doing with flours, protein contents liquid absorption. I had no idea. out that there was a commercial kitchen near. And I knew that I wanted to actually bake, for profit, I should say.

So I rented the kitchen at \$25 an hour and I tested all of my recipes over and over and over again. And in the meantime, the person who was running this kitchen, which is on the property of the agricultural center in Morristown New Jersey, I decided that, with her encouragement that I wanted to also sell at the market now, she would taste my thing.

She's a sourdough bread baker and she's phenomenal. She mentored me through the whole process of running. A commercial kitchen, how to bake out of one, how to time everything, how to organize it, how to be efficient, and use the basic, kitchen tools to do really specialized tasks. So she was also my test taster and she loved my things, which is for me was extraordinary because she is not gluten free.

She doesn't need to eat it. So I went through the entire process of applying for the market, which if the amount of time that it took to get the cottage law passed in this state is any indication, getting into a commercial kitchen and selling in a market is very difficult. But I went through. I remember Donna, who was my

mentor at that time, telling me there are a lot of moving parts and most people bail after the first two tasks involved in becoming active in the market.

If you can get through them all, I will guarantee you they will accept you in the market. Well, I got through them all, but they would not accept me at the market because they didn't think gluten-free was a thing. But I was, persistent. I continued to rent the kitchen, which at the end of the day I spent about 1100 just on recipe development packaging, you know, the whole nine yards.

So I think they had pity on me,, and they let me start the market. So I did the two holiday. Markets that year and for the next two years, I was there for every market every Saturday of the season. And that's where it started. I just fell in love with the whole process of baking and baking gluten free

[00:09:19] **David Crabill:** So when you were taking that business course in 1991, you crafting the concept of your business and then it was many years before you actually started your business. When did you actually start?

[00:09:34] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Well, to be honest, I didn't go The legal route. I was baking as a hobby. And so I guess I started baking as a hobby in, want to say 2002. I started baking for events at school. I wasn't being paid for it, but eventually people offered me money and I had no idea how to price what I was making because it was so far off of what I had envisioned when I was taking the business course.

I didn't really know how to price. It was very, very low, I would say, for the amount of time and effort that I was putting into what I was baking. And then I started. finding my niche in terms of what I really wanted to work on. I wanted to work on things that were specialty, and so I started charging for my things probably in or nine, and I came up with a business name.

I had business cards, I had a logo packaging, everything except for the business license and the green light from the state, because at that time, as you know, there was no cottage law, and I had searched and searched for a commercial kitchen, but could not find one anywhere. That was within 10 to 20 miles of my.

[00:10:57] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like you were going through quite a bit of effort back in 1991 to kind of formulate your business plan, but then, it was a long time, you know, 10 years before you really started baking for others, and then ultimately wait 17 years before you actually started a real business.

So what do you feel like happened there that derailed you from your initial business goals?

[00:11:24] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Well, first of all I was a teacher full time and a mother and a wife, and I was also studying, taking my uh, master's courses and trying to, I guess just really hone my professional skills as an. and then my first husband and I separated and divorced, and I was a single mother for many years.

I could not really devote time to anything other than my studies and my full-time job, well, my full-time job as a mother, my other full-time job as a teacher. And then the time that I was spending with the ministries in my church. So I would say that pretty much it just didn't have the time. And then when my first husband and I divorced, this is no reflection on him but I began to dream about the things. Would bring me joy. Baking was one of them. Spending time with my son was another. And gardening. So I think I just, there was a time of, emotional healing that I needed to go through. the divorce, I spent a lot of time trying to pour into my son's life uh, because he was missing the father piece in the family. And then yeah, pretty much my career as a teacher just really took all a lot of energy and I just did not have the emotional or physical energy to devote to a.

[00:12:58] **David Crabill:** Well, it's perfectly understandable, and given how passionate you are about baking, you obviously running a pretty successful business at this point. Looking back, is there any part of you that wishes you had started selling sooner?

[00:13:12] **Carla Jones-Harris:** I think that had I sold sooner, it would've been much more difficult for me to make the leap to gluten-free baking, because at that time I did not know that I had celiac disease. I did have medical issues, I went through so many uh, specialists and a lot of testing. Most doctors denied the fact or the possibility that I could have celiac disease or irritable bowel syndrome or, uh, the most recent uh, diagnosis is Sjogren's disease. Because I'm African American. They were thinking, Oh, there's gotta be something else because genetically, your people don't get this.

Um, So I think that I'm glad that my life unfolded the way that it did. And now that I am retired from teaching, now that there's the cottage law now that my son is grown, my second marriage is healthy I have the energy t o dream, to create, to do all the things that I need to do for my business, where it is at the moment.

[00:14:23] **David Crabill:** it looked like you did start selling non gluten free baked goods, right? And you were operating under a different name initially.

[00:14:34] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Yes, yes. I was that was before I was diagnosed with celiac disease, and I was primarily doing all gluten products under Carlos Sweet Creations. And I would do an occasional gluten-free or vegan version of the traditional baked goods for special orders only not knowing that I myself needed it.

[00:14:57] **David Crabill:** But you know, it also, you weren't just selling traditional baked goods, but you're also, your business looked completely different. You were selling like decorated cakes and things that I don't really see on your menu today.

[00:15:12] **Carla Jones-Harris:** yeah, you won't see those two things. I mill my own flour, so I don't do the traditional basic gluten free mix, which is heavy on white rice brown rice uh, sweet rice, potato starch, tapioca starch, things like that. Oats. I don't do those flowers because as a celiac we tend to react the same to those flowers as we do to wheat or barley or rye. And the other reason is because those flowers have a really low nutrient density and because celiacs have a problem taking up nutrients because the, little hairs that line the intestines have been pretty much destroyed by the autoimmune system. we really need our foods to be nutrient dense.

So I made the decision to change the flour that I work with and that limits what kinds of baked goods I can produce reliably and consistently.

[00:16:20] **David Crabill:** So I know when you started to sell you were operating under the table and then you did eventually go the legal route, right?

When, when did you actually get a kitchen to sell?

[00:16:35] **Carla Jones-Harris:** 2018, I started baking out of that commercial kitchen and selling in the farmer's market that's associated with the Ag Center in Morristown.

[00:16:45] **David Crabill:** So we're talking about quite a long time between when you were initially thinking about starting a business to when you really legitimately started and rented kitchen. And is this tied into when you retired as a teacher?

[00:16:59] **Carla Jones-Harris:** I retired in 2021, so I was already doing this for three years as a legitimate business before I retired. And I retired because the school District of Philadelphia at the time was so indecisive about what they wanted us to do in terms of the pandemic, that it was really stressful for me and knowing that I have certain autoimmune issues.

My husband and I just thought it was best that I not return to teaching. So that allowed me. Then to focus on the fact that the cottage law was up for, you know, review and they were expecting it to pass. So it was perfect timing because for the two years, for 2019 to 2020, the farm kitchen was closed. When it reopened, it opened to people that were baking with glutenous flour. And I could not be in that environment. I cannot inhale it. It should not be on my skin, and I definitely cannot ingest it. So I was then out of an and I was going to pivot once again and buy a food truck that I was going to outfit as a bakery. I was going to park it in my driveway and bake out of that I was going to use it as a catering truck where you could just park it on your property at your event and, you know, people would come out and be served their gluten-free desserts from the truck. But when I spoke to the officer at the health department, he assured me that the law was going to pass like very, very soon. Save my money and just do it out of my. Indeed it passed in October of 2021, so I've really only been doing this, I would say two summers of Farmer's Market and I've been baking out of my home since March of this year.

[00:18:57] **David Crabill:** Well, I mean, I don't think that necessarily tells a full story, right? You have quite a lot of experience selling, but I guess you were focused for the. You know, the summers that you were off as a teacher and then obviously ever since the cottage food law passed And I was going to ask like, what was it like going from a commercial kitchen and I assume you didn't have limits on, you know, what you could sell, if you could sell perishable goods, if you could ship your products, and then now going to potentially a much more limiting cottage food.

[00:19:32] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Wow. To be honest with. I was limited in that kitchen because it is run by the county. Burlington County actually owns that kitchen and runs the Ag Center. So they were very strict about what I could produce and sell at the market. So I did have quite a bit of restriction.

Obviously I didn't have the restriction on income but I did have the restriction on what I could sell. I will say that space wise, obviously it was much larger than my kitchen here at home, I had ice machines and freezers and electric ovens and gas ovens and convection.

Just, it was a beautiful kitchen, but here in my kitchen, which I had to rip out, down to the studs in 2016 because of mold issues, this kitchen has no gluten in it whatsoever. There's no residue, there's nothing So, That's perfect for me because the other kitchen, the commercial kitchen, I had to clean from top to bottom before I brought all of my equipment from home. Roll everything in there, bake, break everything down, and then clean the kitchen again from top to bottom and bring everything home. that was a pain., obviously I don't have to do that here. So I actually find that baking out of my home kitchen is much more freeing in terms of time. I don't have to pay the \$25 an hour to bake, I don't have to.

Try and get the glutenous flour residue off the walls and out of the ovens and off of the handle, the poles on the drawers, none of that. I don't have to do any of that, So I would say that there were a lot more advantages for me doing it as a CFO.

[00:21:20] **David Crabill:** Wanna get into what you actually produce. But can you take me back to when you were diagnosed with Celiac, and I know you went through a whole cleansing process. What was that whole process like? How did you feel through all that?

[00:21:38] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Well, first I cut out all animal products because I had no idea what the issue was. So I was a vegan for six and a half, seven years, and I concentrated on baking vegan. And then when I was diagnosed in, I think it was 2016 I started a lot of Bob's Red mill gluten free flowers.

And I didn't particularly care for the consistency of the baked goods and my body didn't particularly care for it either. So I noticed that. those flowers didn't do any good for me. So I decided to do the autoimmune protocol. So you basically, all sweeteners are eliminated, all grains and seeds are eliminated, All spices that come from seeds are eliminated all nightshades like tomatoes and eggplant and peppers are eliminated. No. Nuts. So all of those things are eliminated and you, you bring healthy fats into your diet. You do a lot of fermented things like cabbage or coleslaw or beets or any of those fermented things you do. Oh, you have to, I'm sorry.

Eliminate all dairy as well. You can do kefirs as long as they are not dairy based. You have to do grass fed or wild cot or pasture raised proteins, fruits and veggies. That's pretty much all you do. And that worked wonderfully for me. It was amazing for me. I lost weight, my skin cleared up. I did not have the urticaria the rashes.

I did not have all of the edema that I was dealing with. In fact, before I was diagnosed, I swelled up so badly. One day my autoimmune system was on red alert to the point where my husband rushed me to the emergency room. I didn't know that I had slits for eyes. I don't know how, how to describe how large my face had grown. I had no idea. I just knew that I was itching all over and my face felt like The skin was being stretched over like a bowling ball. it was very uncomfortable. But he took pictures of me every, I wanna say every 30 seconds until he couldn't stand to look at me. It was so bad. The emergency room physicians put me in front of everyone, bleeding, broken bones you know, screaming in pain.

They just rushed me immediately to the exam room and began treating me. They thought it was lupus or angioedema, hereditary angioedema. They had no idea. And that is when I started the journey of Going to all the specialists and finding out that, it was celiac disease.

But the whole time that I was on the autoimmune paleo protocol, I had energy. I didn't have brain fog. I slept well. I was off of my inhaler. it was a life changer for me. that was what pushed me and spurred me on with my baking. And I even developed a gluten free sour dough starter based on teff flour. And that's what I make my rolls and my my bowls from, my sandwich loaves from, I just decided that. If I'm going to beat not beat the disease because there's no cure. But if I'm going to beat all of these symptoms and all of the setbacks caused by celiac, then I really have to take care of my body and be very conscious of what I put in it.

And I was able to, after a year, almost a year and a half on the protocol, I was able to introduce things back into my diet. There are things that I don't do at all. There are things that I do very limited amounts of, and then there are things that I was, I'm able to enjoy on a regular basis. But it's also because there's absolutely no gluten in my.

[00:25:49] **David Crabill:** So given the limitations that you still have, I know it's not as limited as it used to be. Does it ever feel frustrating to you or limiting when you're out and about and you can't eat things that other people can?

[00:26:03] **Carla Jones-Harris:** I would say that I've shifted my perspective and it doesn't bother me that I can't eat those things because the cost of eating them is too great, it has allowed me to explore ancient greens and other ways of enjoying food that other people don't have. I view it as they're missing out on more than I am when it comes to not eating things that.

they are eating. I find it extremely difficult to eat out because even though every restaurant is supposed to train their staff on allergies and how to mitigate cross-contamination and all of those things, A lot of people just. Think it's a fad or they think it's as simple as washing their hands. And some of them think, Oh, I don't even have to wash my hands. I can just throw on a pair of gloves. But then they will pick up something that is contaminated with gluten, or they'll set something down on something that is contaminated with gluten, and then they'll hand it to me and I will have to literally refuse it.

I have walked out of restaurants, I have returned things as soon as they hit my plate, I mean, at the table, because I just, I can't take the chance I've I've learned to become very bold about my expectations when I go into a restaurant now. And I, I don't, I don't mind. I like eating out. It is not something that I have to do. I love cooking at home, but I'd say that is the greatest problem. And sometimes I'm afraid to eat out because I've gotten cross-contaminated and I have been in such pain for days over the slightest amount of gluten that has been introduced into my body because someone just didn't follow the protocol of mitigating cross-contamination. I'm, pretty okay with it.

[00:28:03] **David Crabill:** It's easy to see why you're so passionate about this. So let's talk about some of the things that you produce how difficult was it to transition your baked goods into gluten-free variants?

[00:28:19] **Carla Jones-Harris:** It was pretty difficult. I'll say that it's, not because it's hard to do, it's just learning the temperament of each flower, of each grain. So when I switched to ancient grains, they have a totally different personality than gluten based flowers, they have a totally different personality than things like rice or corn oat. So that is what took me the longest, was to figure out personality behind buckley and teff and amaranth and milin, and sorghum. I figured out how to manipulate all of those flowers in conjunction with arrowroot as a binder, as a starch, and, uh, zanthemdom or, uh, psyllium husk and flax meal, flaxseed meal, those three they act kind of like a dough conditioner, and they really help to improve the texture of baked goods that are made with gluten-free flowers. And then when I realized that part of the reason why I didn't like the way things tasted or their texture was because those packages of flowers sit on the shelves for a long time. So I then realized that I could maximize not only the nutritional density of my products, but the taste and the texture by buying grain and milling it fresh and using it as I need it. So that took me, I want to say, Probably from 2016 or 2017 until 2020, maybe 2021. I was selling, but I was tweaking the whole time.

[00:30:12] **David Crabill:** Yeah, no, I, I've seen online people just are blown away by how good your products taste. And I, I imagine you get that all the time, right? Or people just truly shocked when they try your products for the first time.

[00:30:25] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Yes, they're probably not as shocked as I am that they enjoy them so much because a lot of my client base they are not celiac sufferers. They don't need to eat gluten free. So the fact that they choose it because they like. The taste of it. that's what blows me away is just that they really enjoy it.

I would love to say that it's my talent as a baker, but I think it's also because I don't skimp on my ingredients.

[00:30:53] **David Crabill:** Yeah. And so can you just go overview what you actually produce, I have a triple chocolate cherry chunk cookie, which is my best selling cookie. And that is, it only has a quarter cup of flour in it, a quarter cup of cocoa, and the rest is three different kinds of chocolate, sugar, butter, vanilla, and tart cherries.

[00:31:16] **Carla Jones-Harris:** And it is very, it's a decadent cookie. It's nice and heavy and thick and I had two year old children trying it at my markets and they gobbled the whole thing up and the parent says, Okay, I need a pound of that. and that blows me away because that's It's a really, really specialized cookie.

Oh, it also has saline cinnamon in it. Just to pump up the, chocolate. One of my other really, really requested scones is my lemon ginger scone. And that's made with Meyer Lemons when I can get them and crystallized ginger chunks. It is not cakey. I don't have an egg in it, so it's pretty close to the English scone in texture.

That's one of the favorites I just put out this year, A Mexican Street corn scone and it is made with the New Jersey Sweet Corn. I could not keep it on the table at the markets. I had people coming to different markets to find me for that scone, I had people buying 6, 10, 12 of them at a time because they didn't want to not get them the next time they saw me.

That was a huge eye opener for me first of all, people like seasonal, and second of all, I need to put more savory into repertoire so it was very popular. My sourdough teff rolls, dinner rolls are very popular. my pear, p um and peach. Frangipane t arts are very, very popular. I've had people follow me from one

market to another, buying several of them, six, sometimes eight of them at a time. Oh, I have a hazelnut chocolate pear tart that I do for the holidays and that's very popular and my shingled crusted apple pie is very popular.

[00:33:13] **David Crabill:** I was surprised to hear that you said that you had corn scones, cause I read somewhere that you, your products are corn free, right?

[00:33:22] **Carla Jones-Harris:** My products are corn free in the sense that I have no corn flour. I chose to do the corn scone because as a vendor at the farmer's markets, we are encouraged to use the produce and products that other vendors at the market bring to highlight them. It's in a community effort to support each other.

We buy from each other, we highlight each other's ingredients, and I couldn't resist the fresh organic corn that I was finding. And as a rule, I don't use it in any of my flour mixes. I don't use it in any other product except for that one. This year, that was the first time ever I've used corn

[00:34:08] **David Crabill:** You know, you, you're so highly specialized. You have vegan products, you have gluten-free products, but one thing I didn't see was keto. Like it seems like that's a hot thing, but you've chosen not to go that route.

[00:34:22] **Carla Jones-Harris:** I have chosen not to go that route because already ditched down. I think as far as I want to go, I don't wanna go that far. And I think it's justified because when I sell at a market and I'm not the only gluten free there I still can maintain my space. As long as I don't go too far out of my gluten-free box. If that makes sense. So, to give you an example, at the market I sold at this year in Burlington, because of my two year absence from that market due to the pandemic and the fact that that commercial kitchen was full of glutenous flour, the head of the market had three other gluten-free bakers lined up this year. When I applied, after I had gotten my permit from the state as a CFO, she said to me, I love you. You, you were the first gluten free baker at our market. You are great. The people love you, but I don't have room for you because I already have three gluten free bakers. One of them. Is keto. One of them only does like cakes and cupcakes and really sweet, frosted things.

And the other one I forgot what her specialty was. So it worked out for me. Had I even had keto things on my menu, she would not have allowed me into the market so I'm okay with not doing keto.

[00:35:54] **David Crabill:** Well, it sounds all great and delicious. but it also sounds really expensive. Your ingredients, super duper specialty ingredients. Can you talk a little bit about what you're actually spending on some of the ingredients that you have to get?

[00:36:14] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Yes. I do try to get as many bulk ingredients as possible, so my supplier for my grains, my sugar, some of my dried fruits Is nuts.com and a five pound bag of arrow root costs me about \$32 for the five pound bag. A pound of the tart cherries, it's 1899. Migraines are pretty much for a pound of all of the grains. It's between 4 55 and 6 55. My, my nuts for my granola come from Mom's organic Market. Walnuts are like 1399 a pound. Pecans are about 1999, a pound almonds, which I have to blanch and peel and cut myself because I can't find any organic ones anywhere. Uh, They are a pound. The coconut that goes into my granola mixes, I wanna say 1399. Four or five pounds, I think the chocolate that I use is very expensive. not only is it gluten-free and organic, but it's also vegan. It's also dairy free. So two four ounce bars are \$4. and the recipe for my triple chocolate cherry chunk cookies require two bars, one bag of chips, which is, I wanna say 6 99, a cup of cherries. So that's about what, \$5 for that, eggs, vanilla, things like that. Yeah. I'm spending quite a bit of money on ingredients, but my customers tell me we can taste, these are quality.

I mean, literally they will tell me of another baker who has been in business way longer than I am, has a storefront, a restaurant, a cafe, whatever. And they will say that, you know, my cookies or my scone. Or my muffins or my granola is they can't find anything like it around. And so they are willing to pay the price because they know that the ingredients are quality.

It's kind of hard for me to not want to continue to provide that when I get that kind of feedback.

[00:38:33] **David Crabill:** Yeah, so obviously with these high ingredient costs, you're gonna end up with really high prices. So can you run down some of the pricing that you currently have today?

[00:38:46] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Sure. I will say that I did have to raise my prices after, I guess they were the same for the last three years. ounces of my granola, which is grain free is 1350. a pound of cookies is \$26. You can get a four pack of scones for \$20, so I sell them for five a piece. My, uh, loaf of sourdough bread is 12. A dozen of the rolls is \$24. Pound cakes, depending on the ingredients range between 30 and 34. And that's usually the loaf. The full loaf is usually two pounds. Um, I do sell, one pound and two pound loafs. yeah,

so pretty much a tart or an apple pie. Serving eight to 10 people is about, I can go up to. Dollars. A two pound tray of cookies is 54. if people find it too expensive, then they don't buy it or they buy on the low end. But I usually, during the holidays, I get orders that can go 2 25 to 300 for one order because they're buying a cake or a tart, you know, two dozen rolls a cookie tray. Yeah. That's pretty much what I, what I.

[00:40:02] **David Crabill:** So how do you come up with your pricing? Are you just charging based on what the customer's willing to pay, or are you just trying to calculate it out based on your ingredient cost as a base?

[00:40:15] **Carla Jones-Harris:** So there are two things that I do. I do cost out and I do look at what my peers are charging for similar products. I don't really go by what customers will pay cause I really never know, I'm really never sure what or confident I should say about what they will pay. I'm always doubting. I went up on my granola and they paid it.

I went up on my cookies and they paid it. I mean, I'm paying \$8 a pound for organic. European style butter and I will have to go up again. My grains just went up eggs went up. I will have to probably do a price increase in the new year.

[00:40:55] **David Crabill:** I mean, I know most of your customers don't have diet specific needs, but I'd imagine you are attracting the people who are super highly conscientious about what goes in their food.

So do you have to field a lot of questions or do you get customers that are really high maintenance?

[00:41:15] **Carla Jones-Harris:** I do have customers that are very high maintenance. What I learned in my first year of selling at the market was to stop going home and taking every comment into the kitchen to try to tweak my products to please everyone. The very high maintenance, they would come back, "Oh, my husband's going to love this."

And they would come back the next week and say, "Oh, he didn't really eat it. I think it was too sweet. Can you give me something that's sugar free?" And then I would try to do that. Or, "Oh, well, you know, you've changed your flours and the texture isn't as nice as the one that you used to make. Can you make it with the flours that you used to make just for me?" You know, I quickly learned not to do that. I just quickly learned to stay to my vision for my products.

Some of my customers, need to understand why I do gluten free. A lot of customers think it's a fad and a way to get. More money by charging higher prices. So I have to do a lot of educating about what happens to a person whose body attacks itself because it thinks this protein that is found in everything is like cancer and it's an invader and it needs to be gotten rid of.

So I do a lot of telling my story. the fact that we've lost four children because of the inflammation and in my fallopian tubes or because my body just is on high alert and, sees the developing embryo as, something to be destroyed. Or the fact that I don't think as clearly as most people do, because I have.

Brain fog a lot of the time due to inflammation in my body. So yeah, I have to do a lot of educating, Sometimes I have to do a lot of explaining as to why my prices aren't as low as other gluten-free bakeries prices. And then I can only hope that it resonates with them if it doesn't resonate with them.

If it's really not an issue for them that, something has brown rice or white rice or potato or that I don't know that it's not hormone and antibiotic free milk or butter. if it doesn't matter to them, then it's fine. I'm not going to change their mind by. Giving them, the stats or the details on celiac disease or nutrient dense or nutrient poor foods.

People will buy what resonates with them. And I'm okay with that.

[00:43:42] **David Crabill:** So I'd imagine that you have had a lot of customers who can eat your products. They can't eat other people's products. So what are some of the stories that have come out of running this business?

[00:43:57] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Well recently I had actually, he wasn't a customer, he was just someone who was, at the farmer's market and I, I saw. In his wheelchair, go back and forth in front of my table. a couple of weeks in a row, he would do the same thing until finally he stopped in front of my table and he said, What do you have? I have to try what you have. I assume everyone who stops at my table has to eat gluten free. Not the right assumption, but that's what I assume.

And he admitted to me that had gone past my table on several occasions thinking gluten free, that is gonna really taste horrible, so I don't want it. He said, But I heard people walking away from your table week after week after week. And I just had to get it. So he, bought, I don't know. Two different cookies, a pound apiece. He bought the corn scones and a couple of other things. He walked away with a good \$80 worth of product and the next week he

came back and he said, You know, I'm not gluten free. He said, But I, I just am blown away by these cookies, the triple chocolate cherry, chocolate cookies. He wanted those over and over and over again.

And I, it's humbling. It really is humbling. I'm happy to hear it, but I'm more humbled to hear that what I do in my kitchen, what I'm doing out of like my need for improved health and quality of life. is making other people happy. Like they, really enjoy it. So that was one story that just really kind of made me extremely happy.

Another one would be a little boy whose mother would come to the market and she would just stare at the things on my table. I think she was from somewhere in Eastern Europe and her son would tag along with her cute little boy. And it was one day when I had Raspberry Windsor cookies for sale. And she comes from a, place in Europe where Windsor cookies are like, that's, that's the cookie, especially during holidays. So she bought a half pound of. And her son ate them in the car before he got home and she came back the next Saturday. She ordered more just for him. This went on for most of the summer.

And then one day she sent me an email with a picture of him eating the cookies. And then she posted that on her Instagram account. And I don't know, it just made me so happy to have found something that makes people happy. I mean, people give gluten free a bad rap. It's cardboard. or it's overly sweet or, you know, it's overly salty or crumbles when you bite into it. I just, **I'm just happy that I'm doing something that actually matters.**

It just felt really good to have customers head over heels with a product that was birthed out of my illness, my discomfort, you know, my pain, my uncertainty about like what my life is gonna look like for the rest of my life.

You know, losing children. Having problems like putting sentences together because my brain just doesn't work the same way or walking around with a swollen face, you know, in public and people going, "Wow, what is wrong with her?" Or breathing problems. Like all of that pales when I think that I'm making a difference in a lot of people's lives, whether they need gluten-free or not.

[00:47:37] **David Crabill:** So You're selling at markets, I know you've also sold at events, How much of your sales have come from in person events?

[00:47:47] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Oh, I would say after the pandemic, 85% um, before I started selling this year in, at the markets, I was selling my granola, and that was going really, really well until like, that started to drop off, like in, I'd

say March or April. And then the, the market season kicked in, so was doing a lot of online sales for, granola. But that was a very small window of time from probably May till has almost a hundred percent of my f my sales has been with markets and events.

[00:48:28] **David Crabill:** how do you prepare for a market? What does that look?

[00:48:32] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Oof. so I am a grandmother and I have grandchildren that I pick up from school. So what I try to do is on Monday, will get all of my packaging together. I'll plan my menu and I will do my shopping. On Tuesdays, I will prep all of my ingredients and refrigerate whatever needs to be refrigerated.

And then on Wednesday, which this year was a, a market day, I do all of my baking for that market. On Thursday, I prep for both Friday and Saturday. If I have a Saturday market I will bake everything off on Friday for Friday's market, bake everything off on Saturday for Saturday's market, and repeat the process the following.

[00:49:20] **David Crabill:** I did notice that you offer like pre-orders, you have monthly subscriptions. Are there many subscribers that you have?

[00:49:31] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Unfortunately, no, So I have people who will ask for four bags of granola, but they won't order them online through the monthly subscription. I'm not quite sure why I have people who do subscribe on my website and the loyalty program, and they do take advantage of that.

[00:49:50] **David Crabill:** Can you talk about how the loyalty program works?

[00:49:54] **Carla Jones-Harris:** So I've set it up that you obviously put in all of your. contact information, and then you purchase. And after purchasing a hundred dollars worth of product, your next purchase is discounted by \$10. I have had several people take advantage of that. When they order through the website, it automatically tallies their points and they are able to redeem their points.

[00:50:19] **David Crabill:** It seems like this type of business, you get a lot of die hard customers, a lot of recurring customers. How many of your customers are recurring and. And how many are new?

[00:50:34] **Carla Jones-Harris:** so at the market that I have been selling in since 2018, actually it started in late 2017. Most of my customers are recurring, so I'd say about 90% are recurring, 10% are new. At the new market, obviously everybody was new in the beginning, and then probably 10%. Of my customers from the old market started coming to my new market as well. And then by the end of the market, I would say 90% were recurring, 10% new

[00:51:16] **David Crabill:** What it's, it been like when you have gone into a new market? if you don't have a presence there, and I don't know, your prices are really high. Maybe they can, they can see that from a distance. Do people kind of stay away at the first few markets, or do you find a lot of success when you go into a new market?

[00:51:38] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Well, I had a lot of success at the new markets. In fact, both new markets, my profits were probably 50% higher at the new markets than at the old market. So I did not find that people stayed away at all. I was selling out at the new markets while I was going home with product from the old. And it could be because I wasn't the only gluten-free baker there. In fact, there were probably on any given Saturday, there are six, bakers there, three traditional bakers and three gluten-free bakers at the new markets. I was one of two bakers at one market and I was one of maybe four bakers and the only gluten free. So that could be why my sales were higher at the new markets. But it did not seem at all that my prices were off putting to my customers at the new.

[00:52:32] **David Crabill:** As I think about your story, it just seems like there's a lot of transformation in it, a lot of changes, and you just moved from one phase to the next and keep getting more and more successful and more on purpose. how do you feel like the business has transformed?

[00:52:53] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Wow. I used to be the type of person who kind of took what life gave them and that was it. I didn't dream beyond what was happening. I kind of became stagnant in a lot of areas of my life. I've always had dreams and aspirations, but sometimes when life kind of like kicks you around a little bit, you can tend to kind of like, just stay in your corner.

And hope life doesn't notice you. So I'm not that way anymore. I have become more focused and intentional and more proactive about pursuing my dreams. I have always had a sense of doing things authentically. So I shy away from things that aren't feeding me in that sense. If I have to pretend to be something or someone else in order to get a sale, I don't wanna do it.

If I have to compromise quality, because I, I respect deeply the person who is putting their trust in me and is releasing their financial resources to me in exchange for my product. I don't ever want someone to feel like walking away from my table or walking away from my my porch. That they've been taken or they've received less than they expected I, or that I was only in the transaction for the financial gain.

don't, that is something that just cannot do. So I am very intentional about building the relationship. It's hard because I am pretty much an introvert But I have to push forward because I do more than bake. I think I change outlook on people's lives. I, have people who will only come to me because they know I will not give. Certain grains or certain ingredients, they know that it's not in there and it won't be in there. They know that if they say they can't do gums, that I will find a substitute. I don't give them something. In general, barring, barring the corn stones,, I won't give them something that I won't eat myself.

So if I'm taking care of myself, they trust that I'm taking care of them. That's really important to me. So I have become more passionate about the person that I am serving, then the product that I'm serving them. I have found a way to, to keep pushing forward. And I used to not be like that.

As I said, I used to let life kick me and keep me down, and I just don't do that anymore. It's just life is short. I'm 60 years old. I have been blessed enough to be able to retire and do something that I love. And so I wanna, I wanna go after it with a lot of passion and purpose.

[00:55:55] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like the success of the business follows from when you are on purpose with helping other people?

[00:56:04] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Yes, I do. I really feel like if I focus on numbers, if I focus on profit margin, which really important Then I will probably lose the focus of who I'm doing this for. And so my success it's kind of weird to say that, but my success really does hinge on taking care of the people who put their trust in me.

I think that's what's growing my business. But I do know that there is a delicate balance. Because I still need to be business savvy. I still need to do all of those things, put all of those things in place. I need to be able to pivot. I need to be able to cut costs when I need to and not be afraid to raise prices when I, I need to make all of those really sound business decisions while holding intention um, customer care.

[00:57:09] **David Crabill:** So, as you look ahead in your business, what are your goals? Where do you wanna take this in the future?

[00:57:17] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Well, I am just getting the hang of the, you know, being a CFO, I probably want to continue taking uh, my business as far as I can. As a CFO, I would love either a food truck, bakery, or a small storefront. I am looking right now into rebranding, so that my emphasis is more on the granolas, the customizable scone muffin and pie or cake mix side of it.

I still want to be able to offer, know, like scones and muffins to people to eat there in the storefront. But I don't want it. I, I'm not interested in doing wholesale. I'm, I mean, I've been approached by several people this year to provide for them, but I cannot due to the law. you know, I've been offered space to do a popup, but, if I did do retail, I don't know if I could handle that, it is a thought. But for right now, I'm just looking at eventually a storefront or a food truck.

[00:58:33] **David Crabill:** Well Carla, it's cool to see. How your business has evolved over the years and where it is today, and I'm looking forward to seeing where it's headed in the future. so if somebody is interested in learning more about you uh, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:50] **Carla Jones-Harris:** They can find me on Instagram at the piping bag Bakery one, on Facebook, the Piping Bag Bakery, and on my website, thepipingbagbakery1.com.

[00:59:05] **David Crabill:** All right. Awesome. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us.

[00:59:10] **Carla Jones-Harris:** Thank you, David. It was a pleasure.

[00:59:12] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast. For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/78. And if you're enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcasts.

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