

Anything Is Possible with Emily Vanlandingham

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 Emily Vanlandingham.

[00:00:12] But a quick reminder, the Home-Based Food Entrepreneur Conference is happening this week, so if you haven't signed up yet, you can still catch the rest of the conference live and you will get access to all the recordings that you can watch on your own time.

[00:00:27] It is an incredible deal at only \$35 and you can sign up right now by going to cottagefoodconference.com.

[00:00:35] Alright, so I have Emily Vanlandingham on the show today. Emily lives in New Orleans, Louisiana and runs a very unique cottage food business called The School Bakery. Her home bakery is specifically focused on school celebrations. Basically she makes it really easy for busy parents to provide cupcakes, cookies, cake, et cetera, for their kids' class party. And she delivers her products directly to the kids' classroom. So definitely a unique business model. And she's actually in the process of franchising it to a second location and hopes it will spread across the nation.

[00:01:15] Now, before starting this business in 2021, Emily already had a lot of experience in the food industry under her belt. She's now been through culinary school twice. She built and ran a separate food business.

[00:01:28] Selling can preserves for almost a decade. She helps start a couple restaurants. She's been a caterer, a food TV producer, a cooking instructor. She runs a separate food entertainment business. And oh, by the way, she's a mom too. Pretty crazy, right? But it hasn't necessarily been easy.

[00:01:48] And Emily's open and honest nature reveals both the triumphs and the challenges she's faced along the way. And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

[00:01:59] Welcome to the show, Emily. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:03] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Hi David. Thank you for having me.

[00:02:06] **David Crabill:** Well, Emily, can you walk us back to, I don't know, maybe when you got started in the food world? I know you, you've been at it for quite a number of years.

[00:02:16] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Oh my goodness. Um, I never thought I was going to be a chef ever. Not in your wildest dreams. I received my undergrad from George Mason University where I studied food media. And then I found myself working for Jose Andres the founder of World Central Kitchen.

[00:02:37] My uncle had worked for him for a fair amount of years while I was growing up. And he needed help one day at, Heleo in DC and called begged me to come and help him out. And he was like, Emily, come and, and stand at the host stand and seat people.

[00:02:53] I literally never left after that moment. I stayed until the end and the managers were telling me, you can leave now.

[00:02:59] And I was like um, I think I work here now. and I had an absolute blast for the three years that I worked with Jose and opened O E M L, the Mexican small plate concept and did a lot of his media And I traveled to Spain and worked on his TV show that was filmed in Spain. And then at some point I had just decided that I really wanted to go and get formally trained as a chef at the Culinary Institute of America.

[00:03:28] And so I went to the CIA the following year then I found myself in New Orleans for extern where I am now. And I've lived here for the last 15 years. Done lots of different projects along the way and have started and built up through different companies for other people and for myself.

[00:03:46] it's been an interesting and eventful and very fun journey.

[00:03:51] **David Crabill:** So I saw that you graduated with a degree in food media from college, and that was before you even went to the CIA. So you had some interest, I guess, before this.

[00:04:02] **Emily Vanlandingham:** I did. It kind of all just snowballed from working with Jose. you have to realize this was way before he was a household name. You know, there was just a group of us that were just working morning until the night to get him, to be building a platform for himself.

[00:04:18] And we were opening restaurants right and left and, cookbook writing and TV show producing and events. So, I mean, it got to the point where every day was I was in a different restaurant or a different event and you know, they would literally just call me in the morning and say, Hey, can you go here?

[00:04:34] And, I would show up and do whatever I needed to do. but the food TV thing just kind of snowballed and then I just kept going with it.

[00:04:42] **David Crabill:** Can you walk us through like how that has gotten you to the school bakery today? Like it's just a real quick overview of the last 10, 15 years, or?

[00:04:53] **Emily Vanlandingham:** When I moved to New Orleans I was on externship from the CIA to work at an Asian fusion restaurant that is no longer open and previous year before I had moved to New Orleans, I had filmed the fifth maybe season of Simply Ming with Ming Tsai.

[00:05:11] Came to New Orleans, finished my four months of externship, and then was asked back to film the sixth season of Simply Ming.

[00:05:19] And then I got a job with John Folsie.

[00:05:23] He is a local celebrity chef here in uh, new Orleans and in around Louisiana. And I was his culinary producer and I produced his biweekly TV show at a C B S affiliate, So we did that two days a week. I taught at his culinary school down at Nicholls State University one day a week.

[00:05:43] And taped a radio show on Saturday, which is another day of the week, and was literally all over the place. And then I got a job in Atlanta opening two restaurants in a new hotel at the same time. And so I went and spent About nine months to a year in Atlanta doing that and getting the restaurants opened and, set up and organized.

[00:06:05] And then I came back to New Orleans. From there I was asked to film a couple different episodes with chef Lydia Bastianich. And then I. Started my very first company called Locally Preserved, which manufactured simple syrups and preserves using five all natural ingredients and local seasonal produce.

[00:06:26] And I did that for 10 years and then enrolled in Culinary Institute of America's bachelor's program. It was the inaugural program and had not been offered before.

[00:06:36] And so there was a 21 of us, a group of us that went on the journey in 2018 and, and graduated in the fall of 2020 with our masters in food business. And my final project from that was a live music and entertainment concept that integrated farmer's market produce and hot meals from local restaurants.

[00:06:58] And so the year between the farm stand and the school, we agree was an eventful one. I lost my father in the summertime, and then by the fall it was, you know, still covid. I got it for the second time and I, I woke up from my second Covid coma, and I was freaking out because I was like, okay, listen, we got to be real here.

[00:07:21] If I'm going to go out, we got to at least go out with a bakery because I have always known that I was going to have a bakery at some point in my life. Um, during the master's degree program. I had learned about this upcoming startup um, cast iron which was integrating food and tech together. And I was like, you know, I wonder where they're in their startup process.

[00:07:44] And this was October, of 2021 and I just happened to look up where they were, and they were literally launching the next week. And I, I looked up and I was like, this has got to be a sign. I signed up, I sent an email, had, you know, I was like, all right, let's do this. I have no plan whatsoever, but we're going to just run with this.

[00:08:02] And I've really just not really had a much of a plan. Um, I've just been being creative and solving problems and, you know, trying to understand the target market. And um, I've really just been having a lot of fun with it. we started with vanilla and chocolate cupcakes. Vanilla and chocolate icing.

[00:08:21] You know, we started selling two dozen at a time because, you know, the average class size is two dozen kids. And then, you know, I was hearing from parents and they were like, oh, well my kid's class only has eight and my kid's class only has, you know, 14. It would be really cool if I could just order, you know, like one and a half doesn't And so, you know, we just kind of grew and made changes and all along the way based on what people were telling me.

[00:08:50] And now we have delivered over, 150 orders, which may not sound like much you know, when you first say 150 orders, but that actually translates to 268 and a half dozen cupcakes, and that's 3,222 cupcakes together, which means we've already fed 3,222 kids and we've delivered to 31 schools.

[00:09:14] and it's just been such a fascinating ride. I mean, to allow parents to take five seconds out of their day and just go online and order We bake and then deliver directly to the school or to your home or to your office.

[00:09:30] You know, it's just, if I can just take this one little thing and make it easier, I think I'm doing a, a good job.

[00:09:37] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, it's fascinating to me like you have such an immense amount of food industry experience and we'll dig into some of those things you just mentioned a little later. But just to kind of sum it up to some degree, if I can, you've at least been a caterer. You've gone to culinary school twice.

[00:10:01] You've been a food TV producer, you've been a cooking school instructor. You have started a very successful manufactured goods business. You've started at least two restaurants. You've managed a food co-op, you've started this like food and farm entertainment company

[00:10:21] I just don't even know how you've packed it all into what, 10 to 15 years? I mean, it sounds like many lifetimes of work. and that has led you to a home baking business.

[00:10:34] It's just so fascinating. It was, it's like not the trajectory I would've thought for someone with all of your background. So can you just describe why it was so important for you to move in that direction after all that you've gone through in the food world?

[00:10:52] **Emily Vanlandingham:** You know, it's funny though. When I moved to New Orleans, I moved here because I had this externship that I secured before I came. And when I got here, had made the decision to stay. And when I had made that decision to stay, I had, you know, a job. And then from there, after I left John Folse I didn't really have a lot of different opportunities.

[00:11:18] The only opportunities were to work in a restaurant. And at the time, you know, I had gotten married and I had a little baby. And the more time that had passed, I really had a hard time finding, a long-term job. And so I just, you know, said yes to every opportunity. You know, when Lydia Bastianich calls, you know, you say yes, you know when certain people call you say yes.

[00:11:40] And you know, it's funny though, like all of these things, they build right? Um, I don't really know what the end goal is.

[00:11:49] I just really like to do things. I'm an organizer. I like to solve problems, you know, and think about things in different ways. I'm, I'm really creative. I am both brained actually. And as much as I love a spreadsheet I also love the design and creative process as well. And, usually, what comes out of Emily when she's doing something is something. so much fun

[00:12:18] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like you get over-committed, like you say Yes, too much.

[00:12:22] **Emily Vanlandingham:** no, no, not really. My capacity is quite great. I think I actually do perform much better when I have a lot going on. I do like to be busy. I don't, it's like this contradiction of my left and right brain, right? Like, I want to go, go, go. But I also need to make sure that like, we're being smart about it and clear-headed and um, we take time to rest and adapting self-care and paying attention to how I feel. You know, I ask myself that every day. Um, I mean, I'm a single mom. I'm just trying to pay the electric bill, you know, and it's up to me to make sure that happens.

[00:13:05] **David Crabill:** I don't think there's been anyone I've heard of that's built a cottage food business or a bakery specifically catered towards school celebrations.

[00:13:17] So can you tell me a little bit about like why you felt like it was important to have that specific of a focus on this business?

[00:13:26] **Emily Vanlandingham:** I actually had this idea when my kid was in kindergarten and I was just blown away when we started him at his new school, at St. Catherine's. And in pre-K and kindergarten, all the parents take turns and every day of the week, a different parent brings in snack share. And in my mind, I just kept calculating and thinking about the movements that these families are making in their everyday lives just to accommodate this concept. Right. So for a, you know, a few years back then I spent just watching, sitting back and watching talking to my friends, all the other parents at school other friends around the city.

[00:14:06] I'm like, what do you do for your kid's birthday? You know, what do you do when there's just regular snack share and it's not a birthday?

[00:14:12] And, I mean, I didn't really know what I was creating in hindsight. I just saw that this was an underserved area. I mean, I have parents say, it's like eight o'clock the night before their kid's birthday the next day. And I get a call and they're like, I just went to like four stores all over town just to find four, six

packs of vanilla cupcakes with vanilla icing for my kid, because it's the only kind this kid will eat.

[00:14:42] I hear all kinds of crazy things from parents, and I have heard this since, my kids started at, a big school. in pre-K four in kindergarten. every family just alternated days of the week bringing snack share. So you're, already bringing in enough snacks for, one to two dozen. And when I look at the food system that already exists and what everyone has been doing on their own, you know, I see Bakers and they open a bakery and they struggle. They try to make it a few years, and then they have to close, right? Because they're just selling one cookie or one cupcake, or, you know, and they, they try to make up the difference in doing wedding cakes and, and parties and whatnot.

[00:15:22] And, you know, from a food system standpoint, it doesn't make sense, right? Because it's a lot of work. And then when you're selling something with a very small profit, that's a lot of work too, right? Because you got to make up the money somewhere.

[00:15:36] **David Crabill:** So I know I clearly, you're, you're passionate about it and I would imagine that this makes its way into your branding, right? Because this has got to be one of the biggest selling points of, buying from you instead of going to someone else.

[00:15:50] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yes. I hope so. I hope it translates. Um, from a branding perspective

[00:15:57] I thought about long and hard, you know, what, will it look like? in the very beginning, I had a hard time like thinking about like a direction.

[00:16:07] And so I just started like with. A black chalkboard and a neon cupcake. I'm like, okay, well my personality is definitely more neon. Right. and I chose neon as opposed to, you know, like other baby or school like graphics because, you know, my kid is now 11 and when we were talking about this together, he was like, you better not embarrass me with this mom. Like, this has got to live forever.

[00:16:35] He was like, mom, you got to like do something cool. I mean, like, I'm older, you know what I'm saying?. And, and so I was like, all right, let me, let me look at what has historically been used for the different age groups, right? As far as marketing goes to children. And the neon really does capture that older. Kid, pre-teen, pre-adolescent

[00:17:01] and so we went, I went with the neon and I'm pretty happy with the way the branding has gone.

[00:17:08] **David Crabill:** So I know that you created your brand to be for, an older demographic, but you've now. Served over 3000 kids, right? Like how have the demographics actually worked out? who are you mostly serving in schools? Is it older kids or younger kids?

[00:17:27] **Emily Vanlandingham:** It's a wide variety. Um, I mean essentially in regards to the branding, I mean, I'm marketing to the parent, right? Cause the parent is going to order the cupcakes. The child has a very low bar, they don't need a \$5 cupcake. that's not the point, that's not the concept at all.

[00:17:46] The concept is that parents and kids want to celebrate holidays and birthdays with their children at school. And they want them to have wholesome foods. They want, to know what the ingredients are.

[00:17:59] You know, we just, I started with vanilla and chocolate and we grew from there.

[00:18:03] You know, I think the next one was um, king cake. Cause if you live in New Orleans and you are in business and food, you have to have a king cake flavored something. You have to, or your business is going to suffer during the months from January until Fat Tuesday.

[00:18:19] essentially from back to school and Halloween, we are hectic until the end of school. And what's funny is that I, we just made our first year in October. back in May, I was like, all right, let's see what happens for the summer.

[00:18:32] I don't know what's going to happen. We'll see. And it was literally like, someone flipped a switch, orders were nothing, right? And I was like, oh, we got to fix this.

[00:18:43] I was like, well, the, there's some parents that might be really excited to get their cupcakes for the year at a discount.

[00:18:51] So I thought, all right, if you order in the month of June with this coupon code um, you'll get 20% off.

[00:18:59] And then if you pre-order in July, you get 15% off with the coupon code.

[00:19:03] And it was interesting, you know, I won't say not a ton of people ordered, but a, a lot of people did. Enough people ordered during the summer for pre-order to make me say, okay, this is something we can keep going with this.

[00:19:15] and now uh, we just launched our sugar cookie kits and I wasn't sure how this was going to go over. And I'm, surprised how it has been received. I have found parents are sending in these cookie sugar cookie kits for snack time for their kids to have an edible food related activity at school. I mean, that just blows my mind because that tells me that we are not only onto something, but we can really dig in there.

[00:19:48] **David Crabill:** That is fascinating. So are you planning on having the cookie decorating kits be something that you also like, advertise as something to deliver directly to the schools?

[00:19:59] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yes, We do. They're on the website. Um, I just committed to having one for every holiday. And they're also sold by the dozen.

[00:20:08] **David Crabill:** So what would you say is the best seller that you have of all the things that you offer with your bakery?

[00:20:16] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Oh, our bread and butter is the birthday party cupcakes, No doubt.

[00:20:21] And as far as the products go I heard loud and clear from a lot of parents about, okay, well my kid in pre-K four and kindergarten, I don't really want to give them a whole cupcake.

[00:20:32] And I was like, oh yeah, that's a good point. So we need mini cupcakes for them because they have mini hands, right?

[00:20:38] And then we, we did cookies and we did the cookie cake and the whole cookie cake thing. That is just a wild thing. Uh, I know that the Great American Cookie Company is making a fortune selling these kids cookie cakes.

[00:20:54] For us, the cookie cake has been a game changer. And when I started to think about the design of it, it couldn't just be a cookie gig, right? Like to be able to compete with a company like the Great American Cookie Company, it had to be significantly. A better product, and not just in ingredients, but in the design of it.

[00:21:15] So I thought about, well, what is it like for the teacher or for the host of a birthday party to cut the cake and, pass out the cake to a class of 24? And in my kid's school, you know, they really only allow 15 minutes for these types of things to happen. And so to make it be as efficient as possible for the teacher and the class to execute a classroom celebration, that cookie cake really does need to come pull apart.

[00:21:45] And parents love that, So it's really unique. I mean, it sounds like you're directly working with the schools, right? Like you're not delivering these to parents to take to their class. You're actually delivering to the school itself.

[00:22:01] yes. It's, that's a funny point. in the beginning, before I launched, I had drafted, I mean, I spent like a weed drafting this really nice letter, and I was like, okay, I am going to send a letter to all the schools in the area, all the big ones, right? Because I didn't just want to launch this business blindly and be like, Hey, I'm doing this now.

[00:22:22] Right. You know, I wanted to know what they thought about it. Was this something that they would allow me to deliver? Was there something I needed to do to be able to deliver to these schools? Right. Is there an approved vendor list or, you know, are there community partnerships that you have with other, other businesses?

[00:22:41] I knew it didn't exist before now, but I had a lot of hesitations cause I thought that the schools might have an issue with it. Right. I reached out to my kids' school and they were like, yeah, it's fine. we don't have any stipulations.

[00:22:55] It just has to be nut free. I'm like, okay, well, well that's easy. Right? All of our recipes are nut free. And I sent that letter to all the schools and no one responded to me. I was like, okay, well I'm just, we'll just trial and error. We'll see. You know, and every, time I delivered to a new school, I made it a point to ask the administrators in the office, like, okay, hey, my name's Emily.

[00:23:19] I'm at The School Bakery. Is there a process that we should assist them, we should put into place? You know, like when I deliver

[00:23:27] because every school's different, you know, and you kind of have to be accommodating and, and we're there to make their lives easier, right?

[00:23:36] Not only the parent, but the schools because there's all this information that the school needs to get that treat. Where it needs to go. And if you are ever wondering how much information and what it is like for the person

that's receiving that, those administrators, they are dealing with, you know, 600, 900, 1200 kids.

[00:23:59] And in the beginning of the day when the bell rings, there's kids that are tardy. There's kids that forgot their lunch, there's kids that are sick, and they're all coming up to this one woman or male who sits at the desk and is the traffic director. Right? And those people need a very direct way.

[00:24:21] So in the beginning, I remember when I brought the boxes in and I'd hand them to the lady, the majority of them are ladies, in fact. And they ask, what's the kids and then they stop. And as her eyes look down at the box and her mouth just drops open, and she's like, wow, all of the information that I need from you is already on this label. I'm like, yes, yes. I have thought of it all., the kid's name, the kid's school, the kid's homeroom, and then I just directly put that on the label of every box. And so it's, really quite easy for the administrators to receive that classroom celebration, treat box, and pick up the phone and call the teacher and say, Hey, Ms.

[00:25:14] Geisey, you have a delivery here for Grayson's birthday. And it just makes it easier on them, you know.

[00:25:22] **David Crabill:** Well, I was wondering about the regulations or whatever, cause I've always heard that schools have, it's pretty strict in terms of what they can allow into their school, like food-wise and, you know, I didn't know if they would have an issue with you being a home based business. has that ever come up in terms of like what the legalities are in Louisiana or just school specific requirements that they have to be thinking about.

[00:25:54] **Emily Vanlandingham:** It has not actually you know, from the get go I was licensed. I have food handling licenses. You know, I do have a master's degree in food business. I do take it very seriously. there's no difference really between me being a mom who's baking cupcakes for my kids' birthday and bringing it to school for the entire class, right?

[00:26:21] Because there are parents that do that. So really we have found that the only stipulation is in fact the nut free stipulation. We are looking to bring this concept to other areas and other cities, and upon doing some preliminary research in the area, some of the people that were interested in, having this as a business of their own, you know, they, they were like, well, I already bake, but I, I have nuts in the kitchen.

[00:26:52] You know, and we use seasoned pans so we don't wash them. And I, I just can't take a risk, you know, if although the recipes are nut free, there are some, things that you need to consider. um, if there is, there is a school that has a child that has a severe nut allergy, that child's on lockdown, that, that, classroom is not having any outside treats whatsoever. You know, and, and that's just the rule that the school makes for that child and his class.

[00:27:19] So they, the, parents in that classroom know there's no outside. So, the number of children with severe allergies is not as great, I think as most people think it is. I think with the marketing and communication that we have had around food allergies and children has, while at least scared people beyond their wildest imaginations which is probably why that something like this hasn't been created yet.

[00:27:46] And then on the flip side, I wanted to make sure that we were thinking about the inclusivity of, those children in a classroom. Cause there's usually only one, right? One kid has celiac. One kid can't have dairy, one kid can't have soy which means they can't have sprinkles.

[00:28:05] We do have gluten-free, dairy-free vegan and vegetarian options for all of the things that we, make.

[00:28:11] I spent six months last year working on a custom gluten-free flour blend. And it's something that I blend myself. And you know, when I first started, we would bake every day now, but when I first started, you know, we didn't bake every day and. we started getting requests, oh, there's one kid in the classroom that can't have gluten.

[00:28:30] I'm like, okay, well we recommend that you just order gluten-free cupcakes for the entire class. You know, cause I bake by the dozen just like I deliver by the dozen. I can't just bake one gluten free cupcake. when I have found, though, it's so beautiful because the parents really agree with this idea that no, we want to be inclusive of everyone.

[00:28:51] We want to just open the entire classroom's idea to that, you know, we can eat gluten-free, we can eat these other things. and when you have a product like ours where I've taken such great care with a special gluten-free flour blend, they can't tell the difference.

[00:29:07] and then you open a, an entire classroom. Their mind just, they get opened up to the possibility like, oh, okay, you know, this is an option.

[00:29:18] **David Crabill:** So I know that you've only done this business for a year and a half or so, but have you noticed a lot of parents that come back either for a sibling or for the next birthday? Like do you have a lot of customer retention?

[00:29:35] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yes. Usually it just takes one time. because once they experience it for the first time, it's a no-brainer. Why would you not? when your kid's birthday comes up, you can just go online 24 7 and then your job is done after you order, you're done. And we send a message the day before that says, Hey, just to let you know your order has been confirmed.

[00:29:54] And you can expect your kids' classroom celebration, treats to be delivered as promised tomorrow morning. And then after they're delivered, they get a second delivery confirmation with the exact time that they were dropped off at the school.

[00:30:06] **David Crabill:** And I noticed that you have this creative like email list, email reminder.

[00:30:12] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yes. So yeah, you can go in online and you can sign up for a reminder. it's funny, it does work. When you give me your, child's birthday or your whoever's birthday, you know, the beginning of every month, I try to send it on the first or the second. And then it just says like, for instance, Hey, February, it's your birthday time to order your cupcakes.

[00:30:32] And there's a little section at the bottom that highlights any new products that we have. It's just real simple. I really just started sending separate email blasts based on holidays, just because that's where I'm in my process. You know, I'm, we are working on our first um, franchise deal and now and for another market and I'm, whenever I am creating, I'm like, okay, this has to be applicable in all, all the markets, right?

[00:31:00] **David Crabill:** So can you expand on that? You, so you're actually creating a franchise model around this business for people to take in their own communities.

[00:31:11] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yes, Hopefully by the time this launches we might be beta testing our first one.

[00:31:18] **David Crabill:** Can you share a little bit about why you feel like you're ready? Like you've gotten to the point where you feel like I mean, it's a

year, year and a half isn't too long to have run a business before franchising it. Right.

[00:31:31] **Emily Vanlandingham:** you know, I have the right person. It is someone that I have a, a preexisting relationship with in food and work. And it's also in the perfect market to test this out in. you know, we're just winging it. I mean, it's different because when you're opening and franchising a brick and mortar, it's a very different landscape than the idea of opening an online bakery in a franchise model.

[00:32:00] there's, you know, the legality and there's the organizational and the local licensing and insurance issues. But we're not building anything. You know, we're still following the other local food laws and, you know, as long as you follow your local food laws, anyone can do this. And I never, ever wanted to open it up as brick and mortars all over.

[00:32:25] But I do think it has a significant value within our food system. And to give another revenue stream to preexisting private chefs or preexisting bakers or preexisting you know, businesses. It just, it helps, right?

[00:32:42] **David Crabill:**, you know, you're in New Orleans and food is such a big deal in New Orleans. Do you feel like, a lot of your success has been based on just the location where you.

[00:32:55] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yes. I mean, new Orleans is a, is a big, small city. There's a lot of schools,

[00:33:02] and there's lots of kids.

[00:33:03] uh, I just recently learned that there's going to be a downward tick in the population in our city especially for children, you know, not a lot of people are having kids. And so they're going to be some school closings in the next year or two, So it'll be interesting to see how that affects the bakery too. But I do, I do think that New Orleans was the perfect city for this to be tested and, executed. And it's been a really beautiful experience. I don't have any family here, aside from my 11 year old kid. And just to be a part of all of these little children's birthdays and classroom celebrations is the funnest, most joyous thing I have ever done.

[00:33:46] It brings me an incredible amount of joy. It is relatively easy, I have organized it and set it up in a way that works best for me. And, I wake up in the morning and we get ready for school and I get the cupcakes in the car and I drop

my kid off at carpool, and then I start delivering to all the schools and you know, then I usually go to the park and have a walk or you know, run errands, pick up supplies if I need, and then I come home and start my day and bake again.

[00:34:16] We bake the day before. So, you know, I don't have to wake up at the crack of dawn in the morning. And it's relatively easy just to like, get the boxes together and get out the door. Right. And so it just, it's so simple because it's organized in a way that makes it that way, you know?

[00:34:33] **David Crabill:** It's such an interesting business model because you've intentionally kept the product itself very simple, right? You, it's not like a super duper fancy cupcake and you're really selling convenience and simplicity and, you know, somewhat healthier treats for kids. So because of that, have you been able to increase the price of your products?

[00:35:00] Like are parents paying a lot more for that convenience?

[00:35:04] **Emily Vanlandingham:** the price will be based on the market. I think in New Orleans, \$2 a cupcake is really fair for a simple cupcake. You know, our profit margins, I have, you know, I buy our ingredients at the cheapest place possible with the best quality and the good thing about baking cupcakes is that it's just a few simple ingredients.

[00:35:26] You know, milk, eggs, butter, Um, Some vanilla. flour, and sugar, right? And it's allowed me, to be creative in the design of, okay, for king cake cupcakes, we going to have, metallic purple, green and gold cupcake liners for vanilla cupcakes. We're just going to do plain white for chocolate. We're going to do, you know, espresso, dark brown.

[00:35:49] And this also helps me in organizing my mind, like whenever I, I spread out all the pans at the beginning of, when I'm baking, I'm like, okay, I need to do eight and a half dozen. So, you know, two dozen are cookie cakes. That's like a light brown liner. One dozen is vanilla, one dozen is chocolate.

[00:36:08] And you know, like the rest is like Mardi Gras and so then I'm like, okay, that keeps me, focused on what I need to make it's funny because one thing I hear from parents is like, they say, how, how do you keep all of this straight? And I'm like, because.

[00:36:26] everything in my mind that I do has to fit in a box. I have to organize it before I do it. And so, you know, it has to be very clear. Which makes it easy

to explain and teach others, like for, you know, franchising, like I've already done most of the organizing. to the point where I'm like writing a manual about, you know, how to execute one order.

[00:36:50] these are the lists of where you buy things. This is how you do it. This is, what you do when you have to make the label and, and then deliver it. I'm just a natural organizer, so I, I built it that way, which makes it easy for me to digest this thought of taking it national. I mean, there definitely are moments where I have been like, what am I doing but you know, it's good. It's good what it's going to do for everyone, and it's going to be a really beautiful thing. I'm, I'm happy to see and hear how it's received.

[00:37:20] **David Crabill:** Well, it's not the first time you've taken a food business to a big scale. I, I know you did the locally preserved business, and I wanted to ask you a little bit more about that because quite a different business, right? And with this bakery, you're really just selling everything pre-orders, so it's not like you have any um, inventory sitting around.

[00:37:45] Whereas when I think of a, a preserves or a jam and jelly business, I think you've got lots of inventory sitting around, right?

[00:37:53] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Exactly, but with the school bakery that we do have a little bit of inventory because we do make it easy for parents to add on, you know, two dozen napkins, a birthday candle, a birthday hat. We have these fun little happy birthday glasses and it's really like a party and a box.

[00:38:10] It can be a party in a box. So it's funny to see parents like add in, like, all the things or just one thing or two things. But you're definitely right about locally preserved because all of our containers were glass. So just having to like deal with the whole glass aspect is, a big hurdle for a small producer.

[00:38:29] I mean, We did exist for 10 years. We sold to many bars and restaurants and consumers all around the greater New Orleans area. we sold wholesale to restaurants for cocktail syrups. And, We even had a store that carried our products in Western Louisiana and St. Francisville. We also sold in Jackson, so it was really like regionally.

[00:38:50] **David Crabill:** So what was the impetus for locally preserved? Like where did that idea come from and like, you know, how, how did you go about creating this business in the first place?

[00:39:03] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Well, I was doing a lot of private cheffing back then. Just really small parties.

[00:39:10] And so really just kind of happened on accident. I had my very first client was like, Hey, I want to make a cocktail.

[00:39:17] Can you help me like with a syrup? And I made her like an herb syrup. And then the next time I made her like a fruit and herb syrup. And then she started buying them for her wedding presents and bridal shower presents. And cause you know, new Orleans and society, you host a lot of parties. And so she said, you should really sell these. And I thought, okay, well I guess I'll try to make it a go. And I asked if I could come to the local farmer's market and they said, sure. And I sold out that first time. I could not believe it. I went home with nothing. So I was like, oh, okay, well let me see.

[00:39:53] I guess I'll do it next month. You know, and it just kind of snowballed. And then when it definitely became a life on its own, I was accepted into our local entrepreneur cohort uh, business called the Idea Village and was in their accelerator program and called the New Orleans Food Challenge and actually won the pitch competition at the end.

[00:40:15] And then the next year I was included in the big idea. And so that was very exciting. And, through that we rebranded from the first version that was Feed Me, Eat Pretty, and then we rebranded into Locally Preserved.

[00:40:29] **David Crabill:** When I think about jams and jellies, I think like low margin, right? Like especially if you're having to buy the produce means so much produce that goes into these jars. I mean, what was your experience? I don't know if because it was local, you were able to bump the price up or did you find it difficult to get that kind of business off the ground or scale it?

[00:40:55] **Emily Vanlandingham:** No, not really. And back then, you know, it was, it was really the very, very beginning of the natural food movement. You know, there wasn't anyone else doing that. And in fact, it took me almost a year to convince the food and drug to give me a license because they didn't know what to do with it. was like, what do you mean you just, you want to sell simple syrups with produce?

[00:41:19] You know, it was just this concept that they didn't understand.

[00:41:22] And, people back then were. Just thrilled to be able to buy this really interesting flavors like strawberry basil and blackberry, lemon and watermelon

mint. And, but I used the yellow watermelons and so, you know, that was a whole another thing. Like people would look at it and be like, what is that

[00:41:46] And you know, I just used my creativity to, create these really interesting flavor combinations. Now it's everywhere, right? It's the norm. But back then, when we first started, it was not the norm. So I could charge, you know, and, people were willing to pay.

[00:42:02] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like this was like a wholesale business, right? How many wholesale accounts did you end up getting Eventually At one point.

[00:42:11] **Emily Vanlandingham:** It was not necessarily a wholesale business. I mean, we had maybe 20, 25, not, not very many, you know? because once it started catching on, I found restaurants know, they just started making strawberry basil syrup on their own instead of buying it wholesale for me, because at the end of the day, it's five ingredients. and if they really wanted to develop an interesting bar program, they all have a kitchen, they can do that themselves. Uh, I would just set up at the farmer's market, you know, every day of the week and sell, and then, you know, we would ship orders and deliver locally. And that's how we did it.

[00:42:48] **David Crabill:** So would you say that the simplicity of your product and the replicability of it was the downfall or like, because people were like, oh, I can just do this, myself, and you got knocked out by competition?

[00:43:05] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yeah, I would say that's accurate.

[00:43:07] **David Crabill:** So as you think about the things that you learned from locally preserved, obviously running that business what are some of the things that you took into the school bakery that you feel like have worked out really well?

[00:43:25] **Emily Vanlandingham:** I mean, just applying the basic concepts of business, you know create the branding, you know, set the books up. Right. It's the foundations, when you apply the basic business foundation to any business, I mean, it's a foundation.

[00:43:40] And, you know, business has always been really interesting to me because there is, you know, like the marketing and creativity aspect of it of being able to create anything based on your wildest dreams, like the school

bakery, let me, create this business where I can bake cupcakes for parents and deliver them to the school for them.

[00:43:59] Yeah, I can do that. the possibilities are endless. Anything is possible.

[00:44:04] **David Crabill:** I've just been thinking about how much you've done over the course of your career. And it's just so immense. As you think about what you've done over the last decade or two, do you have any regrets?

[00:44:20] **Emily Vanlandingham:** It would've been so nice to get in with a company and, you know, work from the ground up. I would have loved to have had that opportunity. I think because I am creative, I am both brained. You know, it has been very difficult for me to find a home. And, you know, I've really just been navigating my life um, in my professional career with the mindset that I will just do everything possible to show the world what I am capable of.

[00:44:57] And one day it may or may not pay off. Um, but hopefully it'll, I mean, I wouldn't say I made it yet, but I definitely feel the energy. I feel it's coming here very, very soon. And I, I'm excited for it. I, I, I really feel, although I have done a lot of interesting things that I'm just really beginning,

[00:45:20] **David Crabill:** I saw something online where you talked about startup burnout. Can you expand on.

[00:45:28] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Ugh, it's tough. being an entrepreneur is really hard. You are your own boss. You are wear many hats. You do all the things whether it's accounting and bookkeeping and delivering and baking and graphic design. And, you know, just taking the time to think about what needs to be done, make lists, get supplies you know, rotate inventory first in, first out.

[00:45:51] All the things that we learn in culinary school and in the kitchen. And um, it can be a lot. And when you're working in a, a traditional restaurant kitchen, it's very physical. It is a physical job. Uh, I am probably the most in shape I have been in, 20 years.

[00:46:10] And it's been a process. And last year when I was starting the bakery, I was like, oh, I got to get it together because this is going to kill me if I don't lose weight, if I don't, you know, work out. and I started running again also because I was eating a lot of cupcakes and you find yourself, taking all the stress out on things like running.

[00:46:30] And you know, when I realized that I was taking out my, you know, aggression and, the exhaustion and just trying to drive myself forward I was, you know, hurting my body.

[00:46:42] And then when I stopped to rest for a few months, I realized that I was like, oh my goodness, I am really tired. I am really hitting burnout hard. And then I started doing this reiki meditation on Saturdays, which I felt like, okay, this is good. This is going to bring me some real clarity. But it will be like, not as physical as running. And so it's always on the back of my mind. I'm always looking for something to do that makes me feel rested and reset. But, doesn't take that much time out of my day cause as a single mom and, an entrepreneur with two startups, I don't have that much time to myself.

[00:47:23] you know, and, and, and I battle with it because I feel like I need to be working. I have so many things. I have so many irons in the fire. There's always a list, there's always something I should be doing. But you also need to rest. You have to rest.

[00:47:37] You have to have time out and

[00:47:40] my mind says, I can do it. I can do it because I can. I believe that I can do anything.

[00:47:46] **David Crabill:** You made a comment earlier that was a little surprising. You said that you were almost like an accidental entrepreneur, right? Like you are an entrepreneur, you started many businesses, but you wish you could be uh, office worker. I don't know if that's the right term, but like, you wish you could work at a big company for a long time.

[00:48:11] **Emily Vanlandingham:** I mean, if I had had a more stable work environment, I would've chosen that by all means. I, I became an entrepreneur because I had a hard time finding a job, and then it seemed like I was good at it. I mean, now it feels like I'm just riding a bike., and you know, as we are growing the school bakery, it's weird.

[00:48:35] I was at a breakfast luncheon yesterday and I was looking around the room and I had tears in my eyes for a couple seconds because I had, for the first time, been in a room with other people and had felt. I wasn't the one that was like scraping at the bottom and, just starting out anymore.

[00:48:53] You know, like people were asking me about things and asking me for help, and it was such a beautiful experience. I mean, I did not take it lightly,

you know, I was like, wow, this feels good. I, because I know I've earned it, right? I know I have earned it, I have done it. I have slept and made sacrifices and said yes to everything.

[00:49:16] And I would've definitely gone a more traditional route had I been given the opportunity.

[00:49:21] **David Crabill:** So without being able to maybe go the corporate route, like are there things, looking back on your entrepreneurial journey, since you've been doing it for a long time, you feel like there are steps you would've changed in how you built the businesses that you manage.

[00:49:41] Like, are there things that you would've done differently looking back on.

[00:49:46] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Yes, but I did do it differently this time. You know, it was evident after I closed, locally, preserved, I took a long hard look at myself and thought about what I needed to feel confident in moving forward, what I wanted to do. And I always, always wanted to get my M B A and go to business school. And then it just so happened that I learned about the food business program at the Culinary Institute of America. It was like the first cohort, the inaugural cohort was going to start in like two weeks.

[00:50:22] It was an obscene amount of time. That was just, it was like two weeks later, you know. Or not, not a lot of time between the time that I had found out about it and the time that, everyone had to be in Napa. Because it was an 18 month program

[00:50:35] and I really loved the confidence that the program gave me.

[00:50:41] I had actually had developed this whole other business plan that I had applied for my entire two years of the, of school um, that I was planning on launching at the end of graduation.

[00:50:53] But after the pandemic hit, I knew economically speaking, that that concept was not going to work for at least five to 10 years post pandemic. And so I thought, what am I going to do now? I'm headed into my last seven months of the program. I sat outside at the end of a dock one day and the weather was so pretty and I thought, okay, these are my, favorite things.

[00:51:13] if I could choose anything in life what would it look like? Right? my perfect day just happens to have music and good food and a farmer's market produce.

[00:51:22] And, I will say that I did not plan originally on producing the farm stand in two and a half months. I took the summer and really, battled with myself about whether or not I was going to be able to produce a concert like this, you know?

[00:51:40] And how to start, you know, like I could have done it very differently. I could have done it, crunchy and small. I could have done it in a field, I could've done it at a friend's bar. I could've, picked up any parking lot, right? But in my mind I had this idea that I could not let go of it.

[00:51:58] And I started running the numbers and I was like, you know, if we do it at this capacity, we really could make a great impact for the city, if we just sold enough tickets. And I will say in hindsight I will likely never do a show in two and a half months again, because it's just not feasible to sell out like that.

[00:52:19] You really do need more time. But what happened was I made a site visit to the Shrine on airline which is it used to be the home of our farm baseball team called the Baby Cakes and now it's home to the Nola Rugby team. And so it's a big facility. It's, underutilized. And I called and I was like, Hey, what's the calendar look like? I'm, this is what I'm doing.

[00:52:45] they said, here's an interesting thought. The weekends for Jazz Fest are open. And that year Jazz Fest had been canceled again. And, my heart broke again because I just was hearing what everyone was saying about Jazz Fest and I was like, well, we can't go to Jazz Fest, but we can have a farm stand.

[00:53:03] And so I made it happen.

[00:53:05] So with every concert ticket, we included a hot meal from one of four restaurants, four or five restaurants.

[00:53:12] You also got a farmer's market produce box, and then you had a choice to donate that farmer's market produce box back to the second harvest food bank. the first two concerts were driving because they had to be you know, we were still on lockdown here.

[00:53:28] And we had two concerts three bands for each one.

[00:53:32] And it was successful by all means. You know, it with one exception of, ticket sales. we did have a good turnout, you know, it was really amazing time and to see everyone out and, and having a good time. And people brought AstroTurf and they brought their vans and people flew in from Philadelphia.

[00:53:50] And It was a beautiful time. Um,

[00:53:53] I love to study the food system and then create businesses where I think we should go. And,

[00:54:00] I am very excited to keep going with the farm stand in the future and, and not just in New Orleans, but I think Getting cities back to work and, and working together, right? Because it's just about reorganizing the existing system.

[00:54:17] **David Crabill:** So, as you look ahead what are your goals for the.

[00:54:21] **Emily Vanlandingham:** Well, for the farm stand, I would like to build a venue, an outdoor venue In New Orleans, there isn't one. I would like to see us have an Open air amphitheater, but still welcomes like any type of drive-in versus seating. because, our entire city is built on tourism dollars, whether without having a space where we can operate business as usual for these industries, we are going to be in the situation again if there's another pandemic. And so I really would like to create a space where we can prevent that from happening in the future. and then for the bakery, you know, I would like to take it national and get the franchise model rolling. And um, who knows? Emily has all kinds of ideas in her mind, but right now I'd really like to see the school bakery become a vehicle, for addressing healthier access to food in and out of school. And I, do feel strongly that the school bakery is a good vehicle for that.

[00:55:25] **David Crabill:** Emily, thank you so much for coming on the show now. If somebody wants to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:55:36] **Emily Vanlandingham:** We are on Instagram, if you want to learn about the school bakery, it's just at the school bakery. If you want to learn about Farm Stand Live, it's at Farm Stand Entertainment. If you want to follow me personally, it's at Feed Me. Eat pretty, I'm pretty social so you can find me on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn.

[00:56:00] You can visit our website www.theschoolbakery.com or www.farmstandlive.com.

[00:56:09] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:56:14] **Emily Vanlandingham:** it has been such a pleasure speaking with you. Thank you for having me.

[00:56:20] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:56:25] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/86.

[00:56:32] And if you are enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcast. It doesn't have to be a long review, but it's truly the best way to support this show and will help others like you find this podcast.

[00:56:46] And finally, if you're thinking of selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground to get the course go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

[00:56:58] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.