

Live In The Moment with Alisa Woods

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 am talking with Alisa Woods. But first, are you building an email list for your business yet? If not, you really should be collecting customers email addresses and emailing them on a regular basis.

[00:00:23] Even these days, email continues to be better than social media for generating consistent sales, and the best part is that you own it. Once you build an email list, nobody can take it away from you. I personally use Convert Kit to manage email for my fudge business, and I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a free email marketing system for your business in less than one hour. So to learn more, you can go to forrager.com/email.

[00:00:55] Alright, so I have Alisa Woods on the show today. She lives in Des Moines, Iowa, and sells macarons, custom cakes, dessert trays, and other baked goods with her home bakery, Sift n Sprinkle. For many years, Alisa followed in her grandmother's footsteps by competing in dozens of baking competitions at the state fair.

[00:01:16] For a long time, she toyed with the idea of starting a baking business, but it wasn't until she lost her job during the pandemic that she dove all in, and now her business is thriving. Alisa has been on her local TV station many times to promote her business, and she even made a cake for Elton John's 75th birthday.

[00:01:38] In this episode, she shares how she promotes her home bakery by getting on TV, building Instagram followers, and competing in state fairs, all while living in the moment and finding the right balance between business and family. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Alisa. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:00] **Alisa Woods:** Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:02:02] **David Crabill:** Alisa, can you take us back to how this all got started?

[00:02:07] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah. So many, many moons ago it was just me and my husband and I thought, I'm going to start this little bakery. I like to bake. And so I started what was called Buttery Bun Bakery at the time. I love an alliteration. So, I came up with buttery bun. And I didn't really run it very well.

[00:02:26] I just kind of made cakes that people sent me from Pinterest, and it was a, an addition to my, the job that I had and I wasn't feeling it. And so eventually when I had my daughter uh, about almost seven years ago, I decided, Let's just give this up for a while, so then in 2020 I was laid off with many other events people. I was working in sports and entertainment, and no one was going to any sports or entertainment, let alone the ticketing, which is what I did. And I couldn't find another job. Nobody needed anybody that specialized in creating tickets to events that just weren't happening.

[00:03:04] And so I had had my second child at that point. Just a little stressed out and I was kind of just stress baking. And I found that if I really poured a couple of hours into making macarons, that was a couple of hours that I wasn't stressed out about sending uh, resumes and applications out. And so I had some people asking, Hey, are you starting the bakery up again?

[00:03:28] Can I buy? And I said, you know what? Let's do this the right way. Let's get really good at food photography. Let's, you know, utilize some of your experience with social media from the past. Like, let's do this the right way. And so out of that was born Sift n Sprinkle, which is the in-home licensed bakery that I run now.

[00:03:50] I ran it for about a year before I decided to get our kitchen here at my house licensed. And now I sell wholesale macarons at a couple places here in Des Moines, as well as tons of custom cakes, dessert trays runs the gambit really. And that's where I am now.

[00:04:10] **David Crabill:** So when you say that you are licensed, are you inspected as a commercial kitchen or are you using home food processor?

[00:04:18] **Alisa Woods:** Yes. So I am a home food establishment right now. Some of the laws in Iowa have recently changed and I've just kind of been grandfathered in. My license needs to be re-upped in September and I did have somebody come and inspect my kitchen. So that's kind of where I stand right now. Need to fill out some paperwork. But I am a licensed home food establishment here in Iowa.

[00:04:44] So what my license covers is we did like The time and temperature controlled items. So I, if I wanted to, I could do a cheesecake filling, you know, the curds and stuff like that in my cakes. But the main thing that I was focused on was the wholesale aspect, which is something that I couldn't do as just kind of Iowa's version of the Cottage Law Bakery, which was just like an unlicensed home bakery.

[00:05:13] **David Crabill:** Well, we'll get into what you sell in a little bit. I want to walk back a little bit. You started with the business and I know you've been baking well before that. Can you describe?

[00:05:24] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah, so growing up, my grandma baked for the Iowa State Fair, which if anybody has been to the Iowa State Fair, you know, we go all out. We are just the home of all things fried food. But we also have one of the greatest food contest systems of any other. State fair. We have hundreds of contests and these contests are, you know, it's other businesses in town. All the way down to, like I did one last year. I hosted one last year and I said, you have to make a macaron or you can make a macaroon.

[00:06:02] so there's a lot of cash prizes, gift cards, gift baskets and it's really a fun community. And so my grandma had done these contests at the Iowa State Fair.

[00:06:14] And Her whole basement was covered in these ribbons.

[00:06:16] And I decided one year about 11 years ago that I would enter the Iowa State Fair.

[00:06:24] So I baked a couple things. I made a lemon lavender cupcake, so it was a lavender cupcake with dried lavender, filled with a homemade lemon curd. And I made my own American buttercream,

[00:06:37] it ended up, that one cupcake ended up winning me two blue ribbons,

[00:06:41] And so I was totally hooked. And so the next year I did 10, and then the next year I did 20. And then I think the next year I was pregnant. So I backed off, did maybe 15, but before the pandemic, I got to up, I think to 40 entries. Is was I what I was up to.

[00:07:02] And eventually I got to a place where professionals aren't really allowed to do most of the events.

[00:07:08] And so when I got to the point where I could no longer because I was, I, you know, I.

[00:07:13] Owned a licensed bakery. I was kind of making too much baking to enter those. Then I started doing their professional contests which were like cake decorating. cupcake decorating. They had a gingerbread house one. that's kind of where I'm at this year. It'll be my second year hosting a contest at the state fair and just kind of grew up a little bit in the food contests at the Iowa State Fair.

[00:07:39] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I was going to say, I, I'm sure the other bakers are grateful. You've moved up to the professional level so they don't have to compete with you anymore.

[00:07:47] **Alisa Woods:** That's what my dad always says, and I'm like, okay, you say that. But honestly, like the bakers there are incredible. you would be shocked at how good a lot of these bakers are and how delicious they're they. I mean, they bring it, and I had to raise my game. And I think that a lot of what I went through at the state fair, losing and getting the feedback and stuff like that, it has really made me kind of the perfectionist that I am in my business now.

[00:08:14] I want things to be crisp. I want them to be perfect. I want all of my cookies to look exactly the same. You know, I want you to have a consistent product. And a lot of my experiences with these other incredible perfectionist. You know, amateur bakers and cooks in the Iowa State Fair. It helped me hone my craft.

[00:08:36] **David Crabill:** Do you think someone should compete in a state fair to help promote their business?

[00:08:41] **Alisa Woods:** Yes. So if you are a specifically a cake decorator I think that the state fair is an incredible place. There are thousands of people who come through the el well building because, so once you make your goods, if they get a ribbon, then they put them in their cases and people walk by and see your name But the, great thing about the cakes is that it's all judged like the day before the fair starts.

[00:09:11] And then they put them in the display case with your business card. And I had so many people send me messages and be like, Hey, I saw your cake at the Iowa State Fair and started following you on Instagram.

[00:09:24] So I think that it's, a great. Place to, display to advertise your business. It does not cost a lot of money. Honest, I think it's like \$5 for 10 entries.

[00:09:34] And if you're a business, you can't do any more than 10, contests. They don't have more than 10 contests for professional people. So you're spending \$5 and then you have to buy the supplies and everything like that. And you have to pay to get into the fair if you want to go and look at the fair stuff.

[00:09:50] But if you're a professional person I think that it is a, worthwhile marketing fee.

[00:09:56] I think that it's worth the time spent doing it.

[00:09:59] **David Crabill:** Well, 40 entries. I mean, it just, it sounds insane and I think you're definitely the most experienced, fair competitor I've had on podcast so far, probably will ever have. And I just, I mean, you're a pro now, right? So are there mistakes that you see newbies make or, or advice that you had to give to somebody who wants to enter into a fair?

[00:10:24] **Alisa Woods:** Yes, 100%. And I've even considered like doing consulting for this because when I first started a coworker of mine's wife did the fair and I got with her and she said, listen for the cookie contest, don't use a paper plate, use a styrofoam plate. Because when you put that cookie down on the plate and it's a paper, white paper plate, and they lift the cookie up, you're going to see a little ring of oil If you put it on a styrofoam white plate, they're not.

[00:10:52] And it's like, I would've never thought of that. I would've wasted an entire year of entering cookies

[00:10:59] but my biggest tip is sit down and actually read the rules. Get out a highlighter, highlight the things you might forget. Because if something says, put three cookies on a white disposable plate, it'll say, put three cookies on a white dessert sized disposable plate.

[00:11:19] Not a dinner sized. if you put four cookies on, disqualified, if you put it on a dinner size plate, disqualified. If you put it on a glass plate. Disqualified. Like if the cookies are overlapping on the plate, they don't like that. If the cookies are a little bit big, they don't like that.

[00:11:40] If there's all of these little things. So along with very specifically reading the recipes, go and listen to some of the judging. Listen to what feedback they're giving when they say, you know, when I tasted all of the lemon bars, the lemon really came through on this. The crust was a little bit thick on that.

[00:12:01] Take all of that and write it down somewhere. Now, I say all of that and one year you're going to get somebody, say you're going to enter the same lemon bar contest two years in a row. One judge one year is going to say, the lemon in this was overwhelming. The next year somebody's going to say The lemon in this was not enough, and it's going to be the exact same amount of lemon.

[00:12:24] So there is a little bit of luck that goes along with it as well. You never know what judge you're going to get or how they're going to feel about what you bake, but you just have to bring something that you are proud of, something that you think tastes great, something that you think looks good, and something that you think is worth entering or else you're really going to it It's not going to be worth it for you. So those are, kind of some of my tips, honestly. I could go on for ages about it. Like with your chocolate chips, maybe consider making sure there's the same amount of chocolate chips showing on the top of the cookie, which sounds insane. It sounds crazy, but that's one of the things that I've brought with me to my business now is saying, let me look at all of 12 of these cookies that I'm putting out.

[00:13:16] Do they all look like a cohesive family? They don't need to be twins, but do they look like siblings? Like, do they all look like they belong together?

[00:13:26] So my two biggest things. One, read all of everything. And then second, go and listen to the feedback that they're giving other people. Listen to the feedback that they give you.

[00:13:38] You know, look at their faces when they're trying things. Do they go back for a second bite? Do they have to take two or three tastes of your frosting before they decide what they think? That could be a good thing they, that could be a bad thing. take that feedback and use it for your next entry.

[00:13:54] **David Crabill:** Well, I know you did these competitions for a long time, so you're clearly passionate about it and didn't seem like you're really thinking about starting a business around this too much, at least for the first few years. Then you lost your job, right because of the pandemic, as you said, and

do you feel like you would've ever started this business if you hadn't lost your job or if the pandemic hadn't happened?

[00:14:19] **Alisa Woods:** I, for a long time wanted to open this business, but I was very comfortable in my job. I was good at my job, I was well liked at my job, I was useful in my job more than anything in my life.

[00:14:33] I want to be useful and so I was comfortable there and I was making fine money. I was paying our bills, you know, both my husband and I had a full-time job. We were good, we were average. Everything was fine. I would've loved to leave my job and do something, do baking, like pursue this. But in my mind it was going to take like me going viral on the internet for baking.

[00:15:02] It was going to take like me entering a Food Network contest and winning it. You know, it was going to take something crazy and insane because I wanted to remain comfortable and I wanted to make sure that if I quit my job and started a bakery, that it would be immediately successful and I would immediately make the same amount of money that I made and I could immediately use the spreadsheet that I used for my budget and never, have to worry about money.

[00:15:27] And so I was very, Convinced that someday, this'll happen someday. You know, it's the five year plan, but it was the five year plan for the entire nine years that I worked at the event center. The five year plan was eventually I'll quit and start this bakery. So I don't know if I would ever have done that. And the pandemic was the perfect time to do it.

[00:15:53] So During the pandemic, they, you know, increased the amount of unemployment they were giving people because so many people got laid off and I was earning more than I was at the event center. And. I did not take that and say, well then I'm not going to apply for any jobs. I'm not going to show up to any interviews.

[00:16:11] You know, I applied for 10 or 15 jobs a week. I was applying for jobs outside of what I was doing. I was applying for as many jobs as I could possibly do because I wanted to be useful and at home I just wasn't useful. And so I wasn't taking advantage of that money, but I was storing it away like a little squirrel in, in the fall.

[00:16:37] I was storing it away. Because I was like, what if all of this goes away and I'm no longer comfortable? And so as we kind of like built our

savings, I started this bakery, you know, and the bakery was adding a little bit, the bakery was enough to like pay our minimal bills.

[00:16:54] We weren't going out to eat, you know, we weren't going on vacations. we weren't even sending our kids to daycare. it was like we didn't need that much money to live off of. And so my husband's job and my bakery were paying our bills, and we were storing away this money. And it got to a point where, I had built into this community of bakers, I felt like I belonged in this space. I,

[00:17:19] I got to a place that really culminated when the event center asked me to come back. And my old boss, he called me and he said, I think I know the answer to this, but would you like to come back? We're hiring everybody back again.

[00:17:33] I was like, I'll think about it, but the answer's going to be no. And I was like, I'm not super comfortable. I'm not back to making what I was making at the event center. But all of a sudden, like after spending this time at home, after, building into something that I was really super passionate about, after waking up at, six 30 in the morning, perfectly happy to go to work, I was like, I think that I just have to bet on myself here and.

[00:18:05] I was lucky enough to have a year there where the government was giving me enough money to bet on myself moving forwards. It was like, I spent a year with somebody just like teaching me how to swim, and all of a sudden I was like, okay, like I'll jump off the board

[00:18:23] and I was just kind of able to avoid that time that a lot of people take the first couple years of a lot of people's business, they don't make any money. I was kind of able to avoid that, which was my, like biggest hurdle, to quitting my job.

[00:18:40] And so I think that the pandemic changed a lot and it was not, Overwhelmingly positive for anyone, I don't think. But I think that the pandemic brought about an opportunity for me to do something that I had always wanted to do, and I don't think that I would have ever done it without the pandemic, which just blows my mind.

[00:19:03] **David Crabill:** Well, now that you've gotten a taste of what it's like to run your own bakery and you, you know, kind of where it's taken you, do you wish that you had embarked on that five year journey sooner?

[00:19:16] **Alisa Woods:** I don't think that the community in Des Moines, like five years earlier was the same community that it is now. I'm thinking about a lot of my friends who started their businesses here in Des Moines, like Chelsa Bread by Chelsa B, Pie Bird's pies even Holly from Prairie Rose, like a lot of the people who started their businesses started it during the pandemic and out of necessity and out of just like a total 180 from what they had been doing.

[00:19:51] And those are people that I talk to like every other day about this community. so I don't regret. not leaving my job earlier to pursue this because it just feels like this is the right time and the right community

[00:20:08] So I think that I'm happy with where I'm at and honestly, like everything that I learned. Leading up to now has really helped me in the position that I'm in right now.

[00:20:20] So when I first graduated, I worked in sales and then I, I was in New Orleans. I was a guest services supervisor at a horse track,. And then I moved back here to Des Moines and I worked in social media at Channel 13 at W H O, Uh, When I was at the event center, I worked a little bit of sales. I worked with Some of our sponsors, our, our suite holders, um, building the website and doing like HTML stuff. And then I had head of hand in managing our ticket office employees and I created a, a ticket office manual.

[00:21:00] And I learned what it was to be a good boss and a good leader. And I learned how to be efficient with my time management and I got really passionate about, you know, time management. And so I think that, If I hadn't had one of any of those things, I think that my business would really lack. I have two employees, one who just recently got a full-time job and so she's just kind of working with me here and there, but she was working with me three days a week, baking with me.

[00:21:30] I have a virtual assistant and so I am a manager and I have to use a lot of those skills that I learned in the last five years of what I was doing at the event center to manage employees and to, be a good leader and a good boss. And I used the social media that I used at, Channel 13.

[00:21:48] Now, I have a lot of that knowledge of how to market myself on social media, how to engage with the community on social media, how to build like a community that I want to be a part of on social media. And so I think that while on one hand I wonder what I could have learned in five more years. At some point you just have to cut the cord and I think that I cut the cord at a time that I'm really satisfied with, and I'm really happy with it.

[00:22:16] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I, I noticed that you really excel in communications and media, and you've been on TV a lot, like, way more than most of my guests. Like was that because of your connection with your previous job?

[00:22:34] **Alisa Woods:** It was. So I kind of have a way of just like, Inviting myself places elbowing my way into friendships. That's just sort of like what I do. I just start to kind of show up and nobody ever asks me to leave. And so when I was working at 13, I got to be really good friends with Megan Ruther, who's the host of Hello Iowa, which is a morning show that WHO puts on

[00:22:59] so I had babysat her kids when I was working at Channel 13, and both her and her husband became really good friends of mine, And so then when they started on Hello Iowa, I was like, Hey, love the show.

[00:23:13] I have this bakery. And she's like, yeah, why don't you come on? so I came on and then when I was about to go, I was like, Hey, like how about we do something for Christmas? I have these cookie ideas. She's like, yeah, definitely. Let's do it. So I came back and, I had pitched a lot of things to them.

[00:23:32] So I also have a sports podcast, which is totally out of left field. Sports pun and so I had kind of pitched and my other friend Aaron, who works at W H O, had pitched me talking about sports. And so I went and talked about sports and then they're like, well, why don't you talk about like some food that you're making for the tailgate because our demo is like probably older women, you know, stay-at-home moms, stuff like that.

[00:23:59] Like this is kind of our demo and I think they would be interested in that. So then I started talking about like these at-home tailgates that we had these socially distanced at-home tailgates we were having. And it just kind of naturally the thing that viewers. Responded to the most were my baking segments, my cooking segments and stuff like that.

[00:24:20] And as I got deeper into the business, those were the things that I wanted to sell more than really just like talking about sports, which is something that I also love. But I had to kind of think about my bottom line and think about where I could get that marketing. And so it's really just been, the opportunities have arised because of the

[00:24:43] connections that I have at W H O, but also I am consistent and I come consistently prepared and I come consistently with interesting ideas and well thought out ideas. They can ask me, you know, Hey, we had somebody

who couldn't come in two days. Can you come and do that? Yeah, I can come and do that. And so it really took me just being available to them just sort of showing up.

[00:25:10] And also like when I go on the show, then I do a lot on the backend. I send the clip to a lot of people. I post it on my social media, I comment on all of their things. I tag them in my post. I do a behind the scenes, you know I try and do reels and stuff, things that a lot of eyes get on.

[00:25:29] So it's sort of an opportunity for both of us to market each other. And I think that a lot of the time people want this, well, I want free advertising. Well, they're not in the business of free advertising. They're in the business of meeting the needs of their consumer, which is the viewer. And If you're not being a part of meeting the needs of their consumer, the viewer, then you are not, probably not going to be invited back as much as you would like.

[00:25:58] **David Crabill:** Yeah, so I mean you've been on TV so many times, like you've learned what works and what doesn't. And so when you try to pitch an idea, like what kind of ideas do you try to pitch or how do you set things up to make sure that they're achieving their goals?

[00:26:16] **Alisa Woods:** So when I was working at Channel 13, I was writing a lot of their website content and kind of the idea of that was you're writing for a 12 year old, you're not actually writing for a 12 year old, but like the language that you use and the content that you're writing needs to be accessible for someone with like a 12 year old mindset because we want it to be simple and easily digestible and we want it to be something that everybody can access, accessible, and interesting to the most wide variety of people.

[00:26:51] And so what I first try and do is I try and think of something that's really trendy. And so I'll go on TikTok, I'll go on Instagram reels, I'll see what's like trendy and interesting in the world of baking. And a lot of the things that are on TikTok and Instagram that are trendy in food are not the things that people are going to the bakery to buy.

[00:27:14] They're the things that they're like making in their microwave. And so, I think, okay, so how can I scale that up a little bit to be bakery worthy, but not too much that it's, oh gosh, I'll never make this. And then I also like to think about like, What time of year is it?

[00:27:31] Obviously Christmas is an easy one. Is it National Cinnamon Roll Day? Maybe it is, you know, like, I like to kind of think about what time of year

it is, what things people are like, Ooh, I'm going to do that in the next like two weeks. I'm going to go buy the ingredients to do that. I'm going to remember that.

[00:27:50] And then I have an idea and then I cut it in half. So if I have an idea to make a cookie, I say, how can I cut the amount of time that I'm talking about this cookie in half? Because I not only want to get all of the information out in a really clear and concise, easily digestible way to the person viewing, but I also want to have time to talk to Megan about it.

[00:28:16] I would not want to get on the show and just be like, hand to face, Megan, I'm going to make my thing. You're not going to have any time to ask me questions. We're going to be rushing.

[00:28:26] So I try and really keep that in mind just as somebody who has worked in media before. prepare less time of talking because you'll inevitably chit chat a little bit longer.

[00:28:38] Megan will have a question about something, and you'll want to talk. You'll ask Megan to do something as a part of your recipe and it'll take her a little more time than it usually would take you. I have never done macarons on Hello Iowa for a number of reasons.

[00:28:55] One, they take forever. Two, there are a lot of macaron recipes around that just anybody can find. And yes, they're kind of interesting. And yes, they're my best seller, but I just don't think that they make for that great of TV because, you know, through the magic of TV here, they are dried through the magic of TV here they are baked, and now we've filled them, but we can't eat them because they need to mature.

[00:29:23] you have to think about what can you do in a 30 second spot. It's almost like you have to think about your elevator pitch. So find a recipe, and then cut the amount of time that you're going to do in half. And there you have a segment on fill in the blank, local TV show.

[00:29:42] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, it is TV, right? So you're talking about like a three minute segment and I watched a few of your clips and I was actually surprised at just how simple you make it. I mean, it, I, I, the first one I think I saw was the pie in a jar. And I, I mean, can you give people a sense of just like, how simple are we talking? Like it's really simple, but it's effective.

[00:30:08] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah, I mean with the pie and the jar. So the way that I would make it you know, I would go and, pick blueberries at the local blueberry farm, and then I would come home and, you know, add lemon juice and sugar and corn starch and I would make my own filling and then I would let it cool.

[00:30:27] And you can do all of those things. Or high V sells a, a blueberry filling, throw it in this jar, like I can make my own pie crust and I do make my own pie crust, you know, and then I could, you know, roll it out and cut it. Or you could just buy the pie crust. And for me, there's two totally different ideas, and one is that somebody can.

[00:30:51] Get very detailed and make a pie filling and make a, pie crust. And those people know how to make a pie filling in pie crust. And they're not going to see you making a pie, filling in pie crust and pie in a jar on TV and be like, oh, wow, I'm going to try that. Because they've already thought about it and they've probably already tried it.

[00:31:12] The person that you want to capture is the person that's like, I would never be able to make a pie in a jar. And it's like, yes, you would. It's two ingredients. Let me show you how easy it is. When we talked about like cookies, well you can make this, pecan shortbread, you can make this, Cookie yourself with your recipe. That was your grandma's recipe. And, put a thumbprint in it.

[00:31:38] And this is how you make a really simple dulce de leche in your instant pot. Or go buy a log of cookie dough and make a ball and press your thumb in it. Like anywhere you are on the scale of baking, you can make this one thing. And I would say that that is even one of the things that I try and think of, I think, okay, like if there's somebody who's like me who wants to go gangbusters with this and wants to like grow their own carrots in their backyard for a carrot cake, heck, Do it.

[00:32:12] But if you need to just buy a carrot cake mix at the store, I love you and I want you to do that. And I think you're still going to love this recipe.

[00:32:23] And let's hold hands, sing Kumbaya and do it together.

[00:32:28] **David Crabill:** Well, let's talk a little bit about what you actually make in your business. What do you currently offer and what's your best sellers?

[00:32:38] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah, so I do, macarons is probably what I'm like most famous for. It's my logo, it's two macarons. So my most famous item is probably my churro macaron won multiple blue ribbons at the Iowa State Fair. I make my own dulce de

[00:32:57] Delicious. But I sell macarons at two different places here in Des Moines at Creme on Ingersoll. And then at Kava, it's kind of coffee shop down by Principal Park.

[00:33:08] If people are familiar. So I sell macarons there and then I do a lot of custom items. So cakes, tons of, tons of cakes. I do like drop cookies, chocolate chip cookies often. But one of the things that's really, really popular that I do is a dessert tray.

[00:33:24] So think like a charcuterie, but desserts that I make. So a typical. Dessert tray would have like miniature brownies. My fruity pebble drop cookies, it would have macarons, always has macarons on it. It would have palmiers on it. It would have maybe rice Krispy treats, maybe lemon bars miniature.

[00:33:48] Cupcakes sugar cookie, frosted with delicious, buttercream, all of those things just like piled up on a board and you set it in the middle of your table and everyone's like, oh my gosh. It's just a, a pile of delicious foods. And so that's probably one of my most popular things along with the macarons.

[00:34:10] I sell one or two of them a week. it's also like one of my most favorite things to make because. it's not just one thing. I get to make like five or six different things and I don't know, it's just fun for me. It makes it fun. I'm also working on a YouTube channel, just something fun that I've always wanted to do. I like to hear my own voice. I like to look at my own face, so why not just do something fun on YouTube?

[00:34:38] **David Crabill:** So what would be like the breakdown? got wholesale accounts, you know, you do cakes, you do these dessert trays, like where do you make like most of your sales? Like how does that break down?

[00:34:52] **Alisa Woods:** So my most consistent sales are of course, my wholesale. I do about the same of those every week. So I know that I'm going to have those to bake. I know that I'm going to have that income. Any given week is going to be different. So I'll have some weeks where I'm doing like tea at the castle down at Salisbury house um, and that'll be my entire

[00:35:13] week. but then I'll have other weeks where I'm making like four cakes and two dessert boards. And then I'll have other weeks where like I have a pop-up at Vinyl Studio, but it's a kind of a smaller pop-up.

[00:35:26] And so I'll have that plus, you know, four or five cakes plus somebody wants three dozen macarons. It's every week is so incredibly different. I could not give you like a typical breakdown of what I do.

[00:35:42] **David Crabill:** Since it is all over the place. And your wholesale accounts are so consistent, like are you wanting to add more wholesale accounts to bring in more consistency?

[00:35:54] **Alisa Woods:** I would love to do more wholesale accounts. Um, I don't know, is like the simple answer. I think that, like I've spent a lot of time thinking about like what is my goal in this business? Where do I get in this business, where I'm done growing? Where it's like I have what I'm doing, I want to stay here, I don't want to do anything new.

[00:36:18] I don't want to grow. And I don't know that I'm ever going to get to that point, but I would like to get a little bit closer that I am now. I would just like to get to a point where everything. Is maybe a little more expected, but then there's also a little bit of room for creativity.

[00:36:39] and the benefit to me for wholesale is if somebody wants macarons, right? Freaking now Go get them If they want to buy macarons from me, it's going to be two weeks.

[00:36:51] So You want to give a four pack to your best friend for their birthday?

[00:36:56] Go get it. I'm not going to sell you a four pack of four different macarons because it doesn't make sense for me business-wise to do it. But it does make sense for me to send 24 4 packs to creme each week because then I'm making 24 of each flavor. Like it, it makes sense business-wise to be doing that. And if that's what people want, then that's how it's going to be accessible to them.

[00:37:21] So for me personally, like yes, I love the consistency and everything, but my mindset is how is this the most conducive to.

[00:37:31] Being accessible to people who love what I do, because if you love what I do, I just want to like provide it for you because I love you so much,. And so like

[00:37:44] I'm just like spit firing here, but if it's like, if I can be doing like 50% wholesale, maybe a couple cakes because I love them and I love my, customers who like order cakes for all of their kids' birthdays and every reason under the sun.

[00:38:01] I want to leave room for that. I want to leave room for my dessert trays because when I take a picture of them, it's like a where's Waldo of incredible desserts.

[00:38:09] And it just, it brings me joy and people keep saying that they love them, and if they love them, then I love them. and then leave that little room for, for YouTube and for creating and, for social content, because I also love that like, you know, what I don't love is the, like 30% of time that I have to spend figuring out my taxes and stuff like that.

[00:38:31] So if I could have the perfect world, it's somebody else does all of that jazz for me and I am. An artist I'm an artist in my kitchen studio creating art and somebody else handles the government for me. like, that's just my dream.

[00:38:48] **David Crabill:** I'm sure uh, many listeners will be able to resonate with that, I comment, well, you've done a lot of cakes. I know. Do you have a favorite cake that you've done?

[00:39:01] **Alisa Woods:** Okay. So my favorite flavor of cake, I will start with that. My favorite flavor of cake is an almond cake with raspberry filling and white chocolate frosting. If you ask me, well, I want a cake, but I don't know what I should do. That is the cake. That's what I want for my birthday. That is what I love.

[00:39:19] My favorite that I've ever. Decorated and if it was not for this person, it would not be my favorite I ever decorated. But I told you that I used to work at the event center. Well, they called me when Elton John came to town.

[00:39:35] And it was just so happened to be his 75th birthday, and they asked me to make a cake for Sir Elton John's 75th birthday. And so I made a cake with all of the things with the yellow brick road and it had a rainbow on it and it had piano keys and it had stars and sparkles and feathers and all of the things on it and making it, I listened to his music and I talked to my kids about Elton John

and like what he meant for like so many amazing communities and what he meant for the music world.

[00:40:12] And so like the process of creating it was so incredibly fun for me. And so that I would say is probably. One of my favorite cakes I've ever made. And then just like day to day, my favorite cakes to make are any that just have a ton of candy on

[00:40:30] top and there's just something about like the indulgence and the extra, and that's probably why I love my trays because it's like just holy crap, look at all of that stuff in one place.

[00:40:41] it's over the top. I love. Over the top.

[00:40:45] **David Crabill:** Well, that is pretty amazing that you're able to. a cake for Elton John 75th birthday. And did you get, like, more orders from that? Did, like, were you able to get more noticed in your community because of that?

[00:41:03] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah, definitely. Like when I go to popups, somebody will stop by with their friend and they'll just be looking at stuff and then she'll go, you know, she made Elton John's cake. They'll be like, what? Show me. Let me see it Like almost every popup that I do um, I did get on a couple of TV stations, a couple of the news stations covered it and stuff. And It was a very exciting thing. I had always thought, like I had these little daydreams of, yeah, I used to work at the event center.

[00:41:30] Wouldn't it be cool if like Ed Sheeran wanted a cake or something, I never, never in my life was like, or maybe like Elton John, you know, I was never like, maybe like Beyonce. I, I couldn't even, I couldn't even imagine, you know what I mean? Like, I like maybe the most recognizable, singer of all time.

[00:41:49] I couldn't have even imagined that much. And so I think that I did get a lot of business from it. and it's something that people just like, enjoy talking about,

[00:41:57] **David Crabill:** you, you mentioned the dessert trays and that is really unique concept. and Is that an idea that you just came up with or is that like a, a trend or a thing?

[00:42:09] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah, so it was pretty like early on and somebody ordered pretty much a dozen of everything that I made. She's like, okay, I want a dozen of these New York style cookies. I want a dozen pop-tarts. I want a

dozen macarons. I want a dozen brownies. Can you just put them all on a tray together? And I was like, I don't like.

[00:42:27] What do you mean? She's like, I don't know, just figure it out. And I was like, okay. So I just kind of piled everything together and I had been making like charcuterie trays because they're so popular. And I was like, let me just go like charcuterie vibes. And I put like some chocolate covered pretzels on there.

[00:42:45] And I put these little like chocolate caramels on there to fill in some of the little spaces in between things. And at the time I was just like, I was dying for a white marble background. And so of course I set up my white marble background. It's just a big sheet of paper that's looks like white marble.

[00:43:02] So I set it up and I took some pictures from this angle and that angle, and then I took one from like straight above and I was like, That's the shot. Like, that's the money shot. That looks really cool and it's the perfect size for like a, an Instagram post. And it was like, oh, dang, I gotta do more of these.

[00:43:20] And so people saw that and they're like, yeah, we want to do that too. And so it slowly started to get into this thing where it's like, okay, there's 75 different items on this tray. They're all bite sized,

[00:43:32] I tell people it'll serve 24. I mean, it'll serve far more than 24, if not everybody takes three.

[00:43:39] But I want to allow the opportunity for everyone to take three, because that feels like a serving size.

[00:43:45] **David Crabill:** Wow. They do look great on Instagram. You now have over 4,000 followers on Instagram and like what have you learned about photography and posting on social? Because you, seem to be pretty good at it.

[00:44:03] **Alisa Woods:** Thank you. Yeah, so when I first started doing it, I spent a significant amount of time like learning Lightroom on my phone creating presets. I bought a bunch of presets, like if you go to Etsy, you can buy presets for \$2 and they send you 10 presets. It takes a little bit of time and a little frustration to figure out how to get them into your Lightroom.

[00:44:26] They just don't automatically show up there. But it was important to me, so I figured it out. And then I played with those presets and changed them a little bit and renamed them, you know, and, and made them my own and

decided on three presets that I really like. And so when I first started, I only used those three presets because then, My grid would look exactly the same, and I always had the exact same background.

[00:44:50] It was my white marble background and I always took the pictures in the same place in my kitchen. I have a corner where there's windows on either side of the corner and the natural light comes in. I turn off all of the lights. I take the picture. I try and make sure that there aren't any weird shadows.

[00:45:11] I apply the preset and it's perfect. So for the better part of probably two years, my grid looked exactly the same and people would say, you know, I love your stuff. I love your style, I love your photography and stuff. And I loved it. But like as I got a little bit more used to working with Lightroom and a little more used to taking food photography My willingness to go outside of the cookie cutter, white marble background became a little bit more prevalent. So I started playing with colored backgrounds. I started playing with props. I started, um, making uh, creme brulee and cracking it and taking a picture of that. And I just kind of started taking a lot of pictures, close up, far away, zooming in to see what they look like.

[00:45:58] And I would say 95% of my pictures never make it to Instagram. 75% of my pictures are absolute crap, and that's fine. And perfectly happy with that. And people look at my Instagram and they're like, you're such a good food photographer. And it's like, I'm shooting 25% guys. actually, if you're looking at my Instagram, I'm shooting 5% friends, which is not a good shooting percentage.

[00:46:22] if you're a sports fan. But it's what you put out there and then when it comes to building a community, it's consistency. I was growing the most when I was posting between eight o'clock and nine o'clock in the morning. Every day. And so I have a spreadsheet of what I do every day, and at the top of the spreadsheet it would always say like, what photo I'm posting.

[00:46:43] And it would be a photo that I had taken a couple days before already edited and it was ready to go. And then between eight o'clock and nine o'clock in the morning, I would post it. And the algorithm starts to understand what you're posting and starts to reward you for that because it's not a person behind it, it's a computer and the computer wants to be able to anticipate what you're doing, but computers can't read our minds.

[00:47:06] and if they can't anticipate what you're doing, they're just going to give up on you But if I was working with that algorithm and posting

consistently between eight o'clock and nine o'clock, they were showing my content to the largest amount of people. And that's really how I kind of grew the first like 2000.

[00:47:25] And then after that it was, you know, if somebody who I was friends with at Channel 13 would post about me, I, my friend Erin Kieran, and I called it the Erin Effect, whenever she would post about me, I would get probably 40 new followers,. And so if I would be on Hello Iowa, I would get a chunk of new followers.

[00:47:43] Elton John helped me, grow a chunk if I would do a giveaway. I don't do a lot of giveaways because I find that a lot of people follow you and then once your giveaway is over, a good chunk of them unfollow you. And I just feel icky about that. Like begging for people to follow me just because of a giveaway, and I would rather kind of organically grow.

[00:48:03] And I don't think that, I think that a giveaway is a great place for people to learn about your page in, in a way that they wouldn't have learned about it before. So I'm not hating on it. I just think for the effort that it takes to do a giveaway and for like, ugh, it hurts my heart to send free things out the door, not knowing if the person actually wanted it or they just like happened to win a contest that they didn't even realize they were entering.

[00:48:26] I don't know. I overthink, giveaways, which is why I just don't do that. But I'll have little pockets of bumps where I am. Investing in the other small businesses in town.

[00:48:37] like, engaging, engaging with my friend Chelsa and building a community. I think that Instagram especially knows if you want to be there. They know that, if you're just going there to check off the boxes and they know if you're there to like, engage and build a community

[00:48:52] Um, try and not use like outside. apps. There was a time where I was using an app to kind of track how many followers and unfollowers I had. And I got dinged for that pretty bad by Instagram.

[00:49:07] And they took my Instagram page down. I freaked out, cried pulled myself together and found a friend that had somebody at Instagram and was able to get it back with like a very stern talking to about not using outside apps to log into Instagram. And so now I just don't touch it. Like I don't mess.

[00:49:27] If somebody wants me to log into my Instagram through their website or their app, it's not going to happen. Do not risk that.

[00:49:35] **David Crabill:** Well, can we talk about the algorithm a little bit? I know people have different theories about this, but in terms of the post itself, like what you write with some occasional exceptions, shortest descriptions ever, like

[00:49:51] **Alisa Woods:** Mine are. Here's the thing. When I first started another social media professional told me like, you should write this and you should use these keywords and you should use these hashtags and you should post, and then immediately have your hashtags ready to post your hashtags. And I did that for a long time and it helped me and I just got so sick of it.

[00:50:11] I got. Sick of it. And I said, listen, this is what I think. I want to post this cake. I want to say this cake looks freaking amazing. Send. That's what I want to do. And I don't know if it helps or it hinders, but that's what I enjoy. And so that is what I'm going to do. And there are a few things in the world of like social media, in the world of engagement, in the world of marketing, in the world of self-promotion that I just do because I'm sick of doing it the other way.

[00:50:44] and I, I'm not going to say that. It's like it helps or it doesn't help. I think that it has such a minuscule effect on. Like my bottom line that I'm just going to do what I like going to post something that is maybe funny or punny or rhymes or makes me think of a song and it's going to be done, and I'm going to post it because the real content, like the real hero here is the photo.

[00:51:09] **David Crabill:** Well, one thing I think is important is just making sure that you do something that's sustainable for you, right? So you can be consistent. And if doing something in the technically right way prevents you from doing it as often as you should, then it's not really helping you, right? So,

[00:51:27] **Alisa Woods:** You are a hundred percent right? A hundred percent.

[00:51:30] **David Crabill:** So you built this business after you lost your job, but also when you had really young kids, right? I mean, you still have young kids,

[00:51:41] **Alisa Woods:** I do.

[00:51:42] **David Crabill:** What has that been like?

[00:51:43] **Alisa Woods:** I come from a family, as does my husband wear. Our parents are equal partners, so my husband and I also very much equal partners. He does not babysit our children. He is the father of our children, and he is either with them or not, and I am either with them or not. And so it. During the pandemic.

[00:52:07] He worked from home a good chunk of the time. we were both working from home and he considers my job a full-time job, a 40 plus hour a week job, and he makes the space for me to have my 40 hour a week job. And I make space for him to have his 40 hour a week job. my daughter goes to we decided to send her to full-time preschool.

[00:52:32] So she was there for the entire day. She goes to kindergarten now. My son goes to full-time daycare. We are two full-time working parents and so we pay for our children to go to daycare,. And that's like, that's how I. Do it. my job isn't thought of as any more or less important than my husband's job.

[00:52:54] And we have to make sacrifices sometimes, you know, he has to skip a happy hour that he wants to go to because we had a sick kid at home and I had to be home with the kid all day and I need to do my work tonight. So he has to skip his happy hour to come home and hang out with the kids and entertain them and keep them out of the kitchen so I can do my job.

[00:53:14] And so I credit a hundred percent of this working to, I guess I could credit 50% of this working to my husband who does pretty close to 50% of the kid watching in our life.

[00:53:30] **David Crabill:** Well, it's pretty amazing to see what you've created and a pretty short amount of time now. Where do you see yourself going in the future?

[00:53:39] **Alisa Woods:** I've just kind of hopped on the train and I don't really have a destination and I want to do things that spark joy. I want to do things I'm interested in and I want to do things that like. Spark joy in other people's lives. I want to get to a place where my house is constantly clean. I want to get to a point where my lawn is constantly green.

[00:54:01] You know, I want to get to a point where I'm exercising. I've, I've included exercise and, fruits and vegetables into my life in a consistent way. And all of those things are just as important to me as growing my business. I think that I'm getting to a point where I have to realize that my life is not my productivity. My life is not. Building an empire. My life is like balancing

everything in the best way that I possibly can. My business, I'm going to take the things that get me excited. I'm going to do YouTube, not because it's going to make me some money, but it's going to get me excited.

[00:54:40] And I think eventually, like the money to pay my bills is going to come because it always has. And if it doesn't, then I get a part-time job. You know what I mean? Like, if it doesn't, then we make it work. And, I fully believe that it is, like our bills are going to get paid and our kids are going to be able to do some fun things and, and we're going to be able to go on vacations.

[00:55:02] And because we always have, and because that's just how we've chosen to kind of live our lives. So, if a brick and mortar comes my way and it feels like the right time and it feels really fun, and everyone, including the two year old is on board, then well, let's try it. Might as well, you know, if one never comes along, cool, no worries.

[00:55:26] You know, if, YouTube blows up and I have to spend a bunch of time doing that, if I enjoy it, then great, let's do it. If YouTube never, becomes anything and nobody watches my page, but I still enjoy doing it, I probably keep doing it.. If nobody watches my page and I hate doing it, I'm probably going to stop doing it.

[00:55:44] I can't see myself ever stopping making macarons. I don't want to eat another one ever in my life because I've made so many of them. I don't know if I ever see myself stopping making cakes, dessert trays. I don't think I'm ever going to stop trying new recipes. I'm never going to stop like thinking about new trends and, and fitting them into what I'm doing.

[00:56:07] But I think that there's something in 10 or 15 years that we can't even fathom right now that's going to be new and interesting and popular. That could really excite me. So I want to, like, when we're talking about my business, I want to leave the back door open. Available for that new and exciting thing. I don't want to ever kind of have my head down and just ramming forward in a way that I don't see kind of that new and interesting, exciting opportunity or, thing that might be available to me.

[00:56:40] **David Crabill:** That's definitely an interesting response, and I'm not sure if any other guest has had a response quite like that to the, what are you going to do in the future question. And it just makes me think of like that age old advice of the important thing is that you live in the moment and appreciate right now, and it seems like that's something that you do particularly well.

[00:57:03] **Alisa Woods:** Thank you. There's this John Mayer song and it's like, it says something like, I want to see it with my own eyes. And it's kind of just implying like, you can take a bunch of pictures of stuff or you can just see it with your own eyes. Like we were at a basketball game the other day and one of the basketball players took my daughter by the hand and was like, do you want to come like, check out the locker room?

[00:57:22] And we all kind of followed her. And in that moment I was like, I should take a picture of this. And then I was like, you know what? Like, I can picture it in my head right now, and it was so cool and it was like such an experience and I don't need a picture of it, to go back to. And I think that that's precisely if, I hadn't even thought of it before, but like precisely how I want to live my life.

[00:57:43] Do I take pictures of anything and everything? Yes. I'm not a crazy person. Of course I do. But I also like, just love to hop on the bus and see where it takes me.

[00:57:52] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing all that advice. Now, if somebody wants to learn more about your business how can they find you or where can they reach out?

[00:58:05] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah, so I am most engaged on Instagram. So Instagram is sift the letter n. Sprinkle. And I'm also on Facebook. I will warn you, I just push everything from Instagram to Facebook and I have somebody who answers my Facebook messages because that overwhelms me. And it's just something that I have decided to outsource.

[00:58:27] So I won't probably interact with you a ton on Facebook, still know that I absolutely love you and I do see that you're liking and commenting on my stuff and it like, I do a little happy dance for that. But Instagram is probably where I have most of my community. My webpage is just siftnsprinkle.com.

[00:58:47] You can check out what I have for sale. Unfortunately, don't ship yet, but make your way to Des Moines. There's amazing things here. and put in an order. And then of course, Creme and Kava selling max out there. And if you see me out and about, just say hi.

[00:59:02] **David Crabill:** Awesome. Well, thank you so much, Alisa, for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:07] **Alisa Woods:** Yeah, thanks for having having me.

[00:59:09] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:59:14] For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast /92](https://forrager.com/podcast/92).

[00:59:22] And if you are enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. 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.

[00:59:35] And finally, if you are thinking about 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.

[00:59:49] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.