

Rachel Laukala with Cakepops by Rachel

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager Podcast, where we talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home.

[00:00:08] I'm David Crabill, and this is actually a pretty significant episode for me. I happen to be publishing this on the same day that I published my very first episode of the podcast five years ago. It's kind of hard to imagine that it's already been five years and 135 episodes.

[00:00:25] And kickstarting the next five years of the podcast, today I'm talking with Rachel Laukala, who is one of the leading cakepop experts in the country.

[00:00:33] And if you would like to meet her in person, she will be the keynote speaker for a brand new conference this year for cake pop makers, called What's Popping Con.

[00:00:43] This conference will be the ultimate celebration of creativity, community, and cakepops.

[00:00:48] Whether you're a seasoned pro or just starting out, this conference is designed to inspire, educate, and connect cakepop enthusiasts from all over.

[00:00:57] With playful sessions, expert-led workshops, exciting shopping opportunities, and plenty of chances to meet fellow decorators. What's Popping Con is the perfect place to elevate your skills, spark new ideas, and have a blast doing it.

[00:01:11] This conference will be held on May 4th through 6th in Kent, Ohio, and you can get \$25 off registration by using the coupon code FORRAGER. F-O-R-R-A-G-E-R. To learn more and register, go to whatspoppingcon.com.

[00:01:29] All right, so I have Rachel on the show today. She lives in Ravensdale, Washington and sells, you guessed it, cake pops with her bakery, Cakepops by Rachel. Rachel started her cake pop business back in 2011. And although it was steadily growing at the time, she stopped it to focus more on work and family. But when she had her third son, she realized she wanted to spend more time at home, and her business was reborn.

[00:01:55] The rest is history. Within the next few years, she quit her teaching job, started hiring help, Moved into a commercial kitchen and now sells well over 1000 cake pops per week. She now has over 116,000 followers on Instagram and runs an online school for cake pop artists called School of Cake Pop. I know you'll love this interview with Rachel, so let's get right to it.

[00:02:20] Welcome to the show, Rachel. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:23] **Rachel Laukala:** Thank you. Oh, I'm so happy to be here.

[00:02:26] **David Crabill:** Well, Rachel, can you take me back to the beginning of this journey? How did it all get started?

[00:02:31] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah, so it actually started probably about 14 years ago. I actually got a book. It's literally Bakerella, her very first cake pop book.

[00:02:43] And anybody who's ever made, like, cake pops probably knows that name or the book I'm referring to. Yeah, and I just was like, oh, this looks like, looks like fun. And my sister in law was pregnant with my niece, who's 13 now, and asked if I could make the cute little owl cake pops in there. I took it on, terrified.

[00:03:03] Pretended like I was very confident, and I might have cried a few times making them because I wanted them so badly to be perfect and brought them to the baby shower. Everybody, like, couldn't believe it, just loved them, thought they were so cute. And honestly, it was kind of like a snowball from there.

[00:03:21] I was just doing them on the side for friends and family. Kind of decided that I'd make a Facebook page and just, like, really got out there through word of mouth. I was relying on people liking what I made and telling their friends and family about it.

[00:03:37] And I still like living in an apartment. So I had to figure out a place to be able to make my cake pops with Washington state. That was a whole different story. Having to go and find a kitchen that I could rent out. Then I had to move into a house. it was all over the place. So I got set up with the cottage food.

[00:03:55] License. Geez, I don't even know what year that was, but it was a few years after I was just doing it for fun. And then like life changed and I had three boys like fairly close together, two, three years apart. I was teaching like

three quarters of the time. So I was, you know, cake pops really fell to the wayside.

[00:04:13] I just completely stopped doing it. I just couldn't anymore. I was not enjoying it. And then after I had my third son, I was really just feeling burnt out. I was missing time with my boys. I was seriously sitting. I am 7 months pregnant with my 3rd son.

[00:04:30] And I was sitting on the couch googling ways I could work from home or like, teach from home or something, and my husband was like, Why don't you start making cake pops again? And I was like, geez, I never even thought about that. So, here it had been, you know, almost 10 years since I really had made any.

[00:04:45] I got my cottage license renewed. I started doing it while I was still teaching. So I did almost a full year of teaching and making cake pops again, getting the word out. Whole different ball game with social media being out there. And that's kind of 2019 is when it really just took off and I did operate under cottage food for two full years? Cause I, I'm trying to think of when I started wholesaling, I 2022 probably is when I started, when I got the food processor license.

[00:05:15] Alright, so yeah, 2019 is when you really kicked it into gear, and then 2018 was when you, you know, started looking into Revamping your business, but pre kids, when you were initially starting your business Was your business ramping up like were you getting more and more orders and was growing quite a lot?

[00:05:36] Yeah, and I was, it was like, you know, it was a good bad thing. It was just word of mouth, like I said, and once people would find me, you know, then they'd tell their friends, but it was almost like I was feeling a little bit overwhelmed. Like I have such a hard time saying no, I got better. But especially back then I was like, well, if these people like my stuff, I want them to tell other people, I got it. I gotta do it. I gotta take it on. And so. That's where I feel like I was like, no, I'm starting my teaching career. I'm just having kids.

[00:06:03] **Rachel Laukala:** I got to let something go. And it definitely was not because I didn't have enough business. I was taking on too much, I think. And it was growing, but I just, I had to stop.

[00:06:15] **David Crabill:** Did you ever consider moving forward with the cake pop thing instead of moving forward with your teaching career?

[00:06:23] **Rachel Laukala:** Oh no. Nope. I never in a million years would have thought that this is where I would be. Like I said, I truly love teaching. I do miss the kids. I miss some of the aspects,

[00:06:34] but I just knew. I wanted to be home more. And when I started and you know, I'm starting my career, I, you know, I went to college for this, I have student loans that I need to pay. I didn't have any kids at the beginning of that. And then here I am, you know, however many years later and I have these three little boys at home that I'm like, man, I feel like I'm missing out. I'm basically working to pay for childcare. Like I need to change something. and I was scared. It was really scary to think.

[00:07:02] I'm going to quit the stable job with a retirement and insurance and I'm just going to try to figure out how to work for myself and make this happen for myself. So that's why I did both of them for a year to see if like I could really make this happen and it was definitely a leap of faith, but my husband was definitely credited for to take the leap,

[00:07:24] **David Crabill:** Have you ever thought about where you'd be now if you had moved forward with your cake pop business and Not moved forward with your teaching career.

[00:07:34] **Rachel Laukala:** I don't know if I've really ever thought of that if I would have, you know, started this. I definitely didn't imagine my cake pops being in like, 20 plus locations around the Pacific Northwest and seeing the internet side of my business. I just kind of saw it more as a hobby, even though I was like, I had a business license. I was running legit. I just kind of saw it as a hobby. Like, Oh, who could really make money like a living wage off of this? It's just, yeah, I don't, I don't think about it, I've ever really thought about it.

[00:08:03] **David Crabill:** Why do you think that you were so good at making cake pops? Like and you're not just making normal cake pops, right? You, you make very elaborate sculpted cake pops. Like do you have an art background?

[00:08:17] **Rachel Laukala:** You know, my dad is an incredible artist. And so growing up, I never liked to officially do any sort of art classes or anything like that. You know, I played some instruments, but mostly I was a sports gal.

[00:08:30] So It's just always kind of been under the surface. I love to write. I love calligraphy. It's actually another hobby I have. it's just something I really enjoy. It's a peaceful thing for me, like kind of a break from my mind. And I had no clue that cake pops could be a form of art form I guess I just think I kind of

got lucky with my dad and just being around him and kind of found my niche I guess and was like hey people really like these and I was in my area I'm like Not to toot my own horn, but there was nobody who could make that.

[00:09:03] Maybe other people could make cake pops, but nobody could do, like you said, the super detailed work that I could do.

[00:09:11] **David Crabill:** Well your story is really interesting 'cause you know, you started twice. At two very different times and I'd say the cake pop movement um, you mentioned the cake pops by Bakerella book, which I would say probably started the industry kickstarted it. Would you agree with

[00:09:28] **Rachel Laukala:** Oh, a hundred percent. A hundred percent.

[00:09:31] **David Crabill:** Yeah. and that was back in 2010, 2011. I think that cake pops were like a really hot thing back then because it's been quite a long time since I've had a cake pop business on the show. It's not something I really even realized until we booked you for this and I was like, wow, it's been a while

[00:09:51] I've had four businesses that focused on cake pops on the show There have been others that do them kind of on the side, but the last one was like episode 55, which was over three years ago and all four of them started in 2012 or 2013 so right during those years when it was a really hot thing You know, you restarted back in 2018, 2019, Did you find less interest, or did you find it just to be as easy to start as before?

[00:10:24] **Rachel Laukala:** Well, I felt like I actually, just being in a totally different phase of my life, I felt like it was almost easier to start. One, because I did have people who still would be like, Are you still making cake pops? Could you please help me? Would you just be on the side for me? You know, people still remembered that I had done it before.

[00:10:43] I was fortunate to restart with, you know, I had a little mini portfolio of my previous work. So when I quote unquote came back, people were super excited to like to share that out for me. And then, like I said, I also had the help of social media. Whereas before, yeah, there was Facebook, but I didn't really know how to utilize it.

[00:11:02] Like I had a Facebook page for my business, but I didn't like to maintain it or post regularly, nothing. And so I think it was a little bit. easier, honestly, coming back because you know, I was more stable. I was living where I currently live, and I'm going to raise my kids.

[00:11:18] My friends are all having kids at the same time. So lots of little events and parties and gatherings. so I think that I found it a little easier to kind of get the ball rolling, I guess.

[00:11:28] **David Crabill:** Well, the other thing you didn't mention that I would imagine probably had something to do with it was, you know, you had a lot more experience making cake pops at that point. I'd imagine your skills were significantly better in 2018 than they were back in 2011. and I think people would see your products now and maybe feel like that's unattainable, Or is this going to take a long time to reach your level? Do you have any thoughts about that?

[00:11:55] **Rachel Laukala:** Well, I have people say that to me because I have a lot of students and I tell my students and remind them all the time, and they're like, Oh, you made that look so easy. That looks so easy. I remind them all the time. it was not, and sometimes it still is not easy. You're seeing my middle when you're at your beginning.

[00:12:12] Like, we can't compare. We're not apples to apples. This is apples to oranges. You can't look at where somebody's at and be like, Oh, that's just gonna, I'm never going to get there. I had that moment too, when I started.

[00:12:23] And you have to be so patient with yourself and persistent. And so I tell my students all the time, like, it took me so much practice that nobody saw, nobody sees. It took me so much practice and it's been Years and years and years and years and I remind people all the time. I've been doing this for 14 years. Yes, there was a break in between but still it is an accumulation of years and years Practice and trying new ways, trying new methods and failing a lot.

[00:12:53] **David Crabill:** So I guess the real important question is where Are we on the cake pop trend movement, right? Is our cake pops, in your opinion, still a viable business or were they just a fad that has come and gone?

[00:13:10] **Rachel Laukala:** This is a great question. I obviously definitely don't think they were a fad. I actually think they're kind of making a comeback. like, my business is unique. I would say that I don't sell anything else. I don't make Rice Krispie treats. I don't do strawberries. I don't do any other type of treats.

[00:13:30] It is. It's literally only cake pops and I don't know if there's a ton of other people whose business is solely that. but with the new ways of making cake pops that have just come out recently, I'm not sure how familiar you are

with the cake pop world, but My friend, Amy, who owns Daisy makes innovations came out with a new product last year that I think is really changing the game for cake pops and making it so much more accessible to a wider variety of bakers because cake pops used to have a really bad rap for being like.

[00:14:05] A horrible treat to try to make. Like, very hard, very challenging, very frustrating. What I love about what she created was a new way to make cake pops where it's more like a cookie cutter method.

[00:14:17] Instead of rolling and shaping with your hands. And it made it a lot easier for people to make these beautiful, fun shaped cake pops without having to try to rely on their own skills to be able to shape things and sculpt things. And, they would take so much time.

[00:14:31] There is no conceivable way to make that a business because you're just spending so much time. There's like not even a number you could put on how much to charge someone for that product, if that makes sense.

[00:14:43] I actually almost quit making cake pops again.

[00:14:45] Because I was getting burnt out from trying to make them like that, and making so many of them. I think if you're just trying to just hand sculpt them, hand shape them, hand roll them, it's not realistic to make that. Like you're so busy. I mean there are people who do it.

[00:15:01] It's just not for me I was not making enough money for how much time it was taking me to do them I still do make some cake pops like that, but it's not the majority of how I make them I shifted to making them with these New cake pop molds that just make it so much faster you roll the cake dough out like cookie dough and then instead of Measuring each scoop and then going in and rolling them.

[00:15:23] You're just like cutting them out like cookie cutters So it's like two steps are combined into one and then you have a lot more time to do the fun stuff like decorating them so these, I think in this last year, Cake Pops are really making a big comeback. Not that I really think they went anywhere, but I think so many more people are like, wow, I'm gonna try that.

[00:15:41] **David Crabill:** And then they can see how much easier it is to make them. And make quality cake pops still so I still, I do think that it is possible to still run a business making just cakepops and having that be your main source of income.

[00:15:57] I want to talk more about the burnout that you faced. What year was that?

[00:16:02] **Rachel Laukala:** So, like I said, I, you know, revamped, got up and going and was very excited because I was getting a lot of orders and I was like, okay, this might be an actual realistic possibility in 2018 -19. And it took off so fast When you're just getting started, You're kind of like, Oh, I got to take every single order. I had to take every single order and it doesn't matter what kind of order it is or what theme or how many I'm just, I gotta take it. Cause I don't want to lose any business. What that did to me was I lost all joy. I wasn't making things that I wanted to make.

[00:16:35] I was just doing it because somebody had asked me to, I was swamping myself With orders to where I was barely getting them done, and then, and then I also had like three little, little kids too. I had just quit my teaching job and then 2020 hit and that was a whole nother story that I could go into, but it was just. I was making these very detailed cake pops that were taking me so much time, which I love. I truly love doing that. I still love doing that. I love the very detailed, artistic cake pops that nobody else can make.

[00:17:07] Well, not anybody else, but you know what I mean. I love that, but it was like the only thing I was doing. And I don't think I was also charging enough. I didn't understand how to break down my pricing, how to incorporate my time into my pricing. And I was like, this is miserable. I'm hating what I'm doing.

[00:17:27] I'm not seeing very much money come in compared to how much time I was putting in. I was making money, but I'm like, man, I'm working so much and I'm like in my, you know, cake pop shop. Well, that's what I called it. Just like the area of my kitchen. And I just felt like I was like, this is the opposite of what I wanted.

[00:17:44] This is like why I left teaching in the first place. So I talked to my husband about how this is getting to be too much. There were a lot of tears and like, I don't know what to do. I heard I quit my job and now I'm feeling overwhelmed. And that's when we kind of, I was like, there's got to be a different way, a more efficient way to make cake pops.

[00:18:03] So where I can make more, I need to make more quantity wise to make more money. But not having it takes up so much of my time. Another thing that helped is I finally conceded to hiring some help. Like, I don't know

what took me so long to do that. At first it was just with the little stuff. Just folding boxes or Helping me cut stuff out like prepping packaging.

[00:18:26] It was just with that and even that was like such a breath of fresh air to finally have a little more time to do things that I really wanted to do.

[00:18:35] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I feel like when I think about the many stories of burnout or almost burnout that I've heard, almost always it comes down to not investing in help soon enough.

[00:18:49] **Rachel Laukala:** Yes 100 percent and I think a lot of people who want to start their own business feel a similar mindset to me to where like well, you know, I started this like I should be able to do this by myself. I should be able to take this on. I, I shouldn't need the help.

[00:19:04] And I, I think I do that as a mom even as well. And it's not true at all. It doesn't mean anything. It means you're a human who has an awesome amount of work. Like you're getting more work. That's great. But that also means it's okay to also need help. I don't know why that happens, but Once I realized that I could get help and still make what I like to do it was a breath of fresh air and it honestly it changed my business completely

[00:19:32] **David Crabill:** I think the other side of it too that people don't think about is at the point in which you start really feeling like you need help, like when you're Feeling overwhelmed. You're so busy that you can't invest time because it takes more time to hire somebody and teach them how to do everything. And so it's really, when you start to feel that pressure that you need to make the investment instead of waiting until you have to make that investment,

[00:20:01] **Rachel Laukala:** Absolutely, and I think it's like a snowball effect of like thinking. Okay Yeah, I have to take all this time to train someone. I don't even have the time But then also I need to pay this person too And then figuring that out is that was a very huge learning curve for me as well, because, you know, most people who get into this business are not business people, like we don't have a business side mindset, I guess.

[00:20:24] I don't know if that's wording it right. Luckily, like, I'm a numbers gal, I used to be a math teacher, love numbers, love the numbers side of it, I don't know if that's unique for me but I think it's hard to rep, like, man, now I gotta figure out a whole new set of, like, taxes, and, like, payroll taxes, and all these different things, employment, security, that's daunting too, and so it's like,

nah, I'd rather just do it all myself, which, then you're just stuck in the same place.

[00:20:51] **David Crabill:** you're a numbers person, but you said you had. Problem pricing and accounting for your time. So what have you learned about that over the course of the last 14 years? I guess.

[00:21:04] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah. So when I say I'm a numbers person, I do, I, I enjoy seeing like working inside of like, you know, a spreadsheet, having everything ordered and organized I can do the basic math of like, okay, well, if I'm spending this much money, then I need to charge this much for what I'm, what I'm making.

[00:21:21] Like, that makes sense to me. This is how much you're spending. Then yeah I got to charge at least that much plus a little more to make money, to make this a business and not a hobby. But what I did not know about the business side of it was, accounting for like a profit margin. Didn't know what that meant or was.

[00:21:38] Accounting for my time. Like it seems like that would be something that would just come naturally to think like oh, I need to count my time No I needed to break it down to like how much do I want to make per hour and I need to set the clock and Say how much time is it taking me to make this cake pop one cake pop 20 cake pops, Two dozen cake pops how much actual time set a timer?

[00:21:58] Is it taking me? If I want to make this certain amount of money per hour, I need to factor that in. So while I understood the number side of like, well, I'm paying for this and I, this is how much it costs me to get these boxes and bags. I could do that, but I didn't understand the other side of actually being able to pay myself and account for an actual profit margin.

[00:22:18] If that makes sense.

[00:22:21] **David Crabill:** Do you remember what your pricing was like back in 2011-2012? jeez,

[00:22:28] **Rachel Laukala:** 2011 I probably was like, what do you want to pay me? Like, I just was like making them and like, I don't know, I think, you know, 24 for a dozen. Does that sound okay? I was very insecure. Like. I'm very stressed out about giving somebody a price and then as my talent, I'm like, no, this is, I have a unique talent.

[00:22:51] Like I began to gain confidence in pricing and then I learned more about pricing itself. So I probably started out charging, I don't even know if I was charging 2 a cake pop back when I first started. And I remember when I came back and restarted in 2018, obviously It had been a long time. So, inflation just had like things that started costing more, but I was like, no, I have a talent.

[00:23:13] I need to account for that as well. And I had changed my pricing quite a bit. And I remember somebody sending me a nasty message and was like, I can't believe this is what you're charging for a dozen cake pops. This is outrageous. This is what you used to charge. And now you're charging this. And this person wanted extremely detailed cake pops. Wanted them to look like some sort of a character probably frozen because that was all the rage for many many years and I made I'm making them in my nightmares frozen cake pops But it was something super detailed like that and at first my I got so upset and my feelings were so hurt But I was like, no, I am NOT in the wrong here.

[00:23:51] I'm outside of her budget and that's not my problem. I am NOT being unfair. I am pricing according to my talent, my time and my materials . It's not a me thing. It's her thing and that took me a really really long time to get to that place.

[00:24:09] **David Crabill:** Where are you now in pricing?

[00:24:13] **Rachel Laukala:** So on my website We have a few different tiers of I do things a lot differently My main source of income as far as selling cake pops, physical cakepops, is from wholesaling so those we sell at about two dollars and forty cents per cake pop but then our regular cake pops like on our website, the very most like basic cake pops like they're just the round disc shape like I was telling you um, Those go for about 39, a dozen.

[00:24:42] And then from there we have a whole bunch of differences, like, if people want a custom order, those we do, we price a little bit differently. So like our standard disc pops for those, you know, \$38, \$39, a dozen. But if people want the round ones, like I was talking to you, the more classic style people think of those are like, even just the most basic, just. Basic, basic round cake pops, I start at 4 a cake pop, so \$48 a dozen. And then from there it goes up to as much as the character pops I'm telling you about that look like Pokemon or like other things, those just start at \$85 a dozen. So that's a, I know that's like a really wide range, but it's really, it's kind of hard to just have something priceless, you know, when people are ordering something so custom, but that just kind of gives you an idea.

[00:25:27] **David Crabill:** What are the most expensive cake pops you've sold?

[00:25:32] **Rachel Laukala:** Oh, um, I can't think of a specific one, but I know I've charged 100 a dozen for a set of just 12 straight characters. And I feel like that's probably The most expensive I've charged for like one dozen cake pops.

[00:25:51] **David Crabill:** Well, what is the largest order that you've ever had?

[00:25:55] **Rachel Laukala:** That is kind of tricky too because what changed a lot with that is when we started doing wholesale and really grew that side of our business And we regularly have orders of over 100 cake pops. That's like a normal size order for some of these places but I mean I've done orders of a thousand.

[00:26:17] I've done 1500 for some companies, like just one at a time. And that, that would be probably the most for like custom orders.

[00:26:28] **David Crabill:** Do you have any orders that were particularly memorable?

[00:26:33] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah I really enjoyed it, like, I remember being so happy with this order. Jeez, it was probably, it was when I restarted my business, and it was Somebody wanted an Alice in Wonderland theme, and this was one of the, definitely the more expensive orders. And we did these really cute, upside down, like, Alice dress inspired, ruffle cake pops.

[00:26:54] But my favorite part was, I did a dozen Cheshire Cats in ice cream cones. So like, the little cat was coming out of the top of the ice cream cone. And that, I don't know why, it was probably one of my most favorite.

[00:27:10] I loved how they turned out. The customer was like, over the moon, excited about those. I remember I had a Fresh Prince of Bel Air order that I really loved. Man, there's been so many over the years. I can't even think of them.

[00:27:23] **David Crabill:** It's so funny that you mentioned the Cheshire Cats because as I was scrolling through, of course, you just have so many amazing Cake pops and especially like the animal heads like there's so much artistry in there But for some reason the Cheshire cats really stood out to me and I was like, wow I cannot believe that you put the time into making those Just looks like they would have taken forever to do.

[00:27:51] **Rachel Laukala:** Yes, those aren't even ones that took the most amount of time. I've done like a dozen Yoda. Baby, remember when Baby Yoda first came out, those were super popular, and I remember those took me a long time, and I just, I remember thinking, what did, what was I thinking, saying I would do 12 of these, because you know, you want them to look uniform, and I've done like horror movie characters, like all the classic Halloween movies, those ones are definitely some of my favorite, and I reshare them all the time, I don't know, you could get me going for a really long time on, like, my favorite cake pops that I've made,

[00:28:25] **David Crabill:** I did want to ask you about Duncan Hines because I know that's been something that you get commentary on Using box mixes. Is that something that you still do today?

[00:28:37] **Rachel Laukala:** Oh, yeah, 100 percent Absolutely. I think it's the best way to go for cake pops. I know other people make them from scratch, but I think that it just gives the Best consistency like it's a really good flavor. I doctor it up, but oh, yeah I stand behind the box mix 1, 000 percent

[00:28:56] **David Crabill:** Well, I know there are some people that are like, oh you, you can't use box mixes, like you have to make homemade and I don't care about that. I mean, I think it's perfectly fine for people to use a box mix in their business, but what I wonder, and I've always wondered this is, is the cost of the box mix. And have you compared what it costs?

[00:29:17] Like, does it cost more to buy this pre-made mix versus buying the ingredients yourself?

[00:29:24] **Rachel Laukala:** yeah, it's probably an added cost I would say because I still add like flour and sugar and everything In my cake pops, so maybe I'm not using as much powdered sugar as some people, so I have that cost plus the cost of a box mix, and the box mixes, they're not going down in price, that's for sure.

[00:29:43] But really, like, when it comes down to the breakdown of what it costs me to, I get 50 cake pops out of a box mixed with how I make them. So, really. It's not that big of a difference compared to what it is for the taste. I've never made them from scratch ever. So I can't, I can't really speak. But also again, back to the factoring in the time, for me, it's less time to have to make a scratch cake mix.

[00:30:08] And we just doctor up that box cake and with how many cake pops we're selling per week. I think that people like it.

[00:30:16] **David Crabill:** So you're still buying individual boxes. You haven't liked going bulk with Duncan Hines.

[00:30:23] **Rachel Laukala:** I've tried I've tried the bulk Pillsbury there's another couple different types of bulk cake mixes you can get in like 25 pounds but I've tried them and I've tried to doctor them up to make them taste the same, but they never taste the same and it's never the exact same texture.

[00:30:40] And like I said, for how many cake pops we're selling a week, it's probably upwards of a thousand cake pops a week right now. I don't feel comfortable changing it up, cause I love the taste of what we have and it's working just fine. So, until it doesn't work anymore or the price doesn't make sense.

[00:30:57] I'm just gonna keep rolling with it.

[00:31:00] **David Crabill:** So you mentioned wholesale, and In Washington state, you had to go the commercial route for that. So can you tell me a little bit about that process?

[00:31:10] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah, this was part of my, like I said, when I was in my feeling like I'm gonna burn out, need to do something different phase, there was not a lot of places that made cake pops In my area I was like not even having to go out to businesses and ask if they wanted to sell my cake pops.

[00:31:26] I was having a lot of people reach out to me and ask can we sell your cake pops? I had no clue about how that worked. I had no clue if I needed a different license and I am a. big time, my husband, I think sometimes it drives him crazy, but I'm a big time rule follower and it's like, I get very stressed if I'm doing things and I'm not following the rules.

[00:31:44] And Kyle's like, you need to, you're going to lose your mind, but I really, I like to do everything by the book as much as I can, you know? And so I was like, I don't know how this is gonna work with selling to other companies, other businesses, and I live in Washington State, and we do have a reputation for having coffee on every corner, and we do, it's very true, and I know that, because I've gone other places, and I'm like, where's everybody's coffee stands?

[00:32:09] There's no coffee stands, and so, That actually worked to my benefit because all these coffee stands in my area were like, we would love to sell cake pops. You're the only person we know that makes cake pops. We want to sell yours. So again, it was a great problem to have, but I was like, how do I do this and do this legally?

[00:32:27] When I looked up through the Washington State cottage food lot. I saw that you can't resell to other Businesses, which makes me crazy because I know there's other states that allow it and I really wish Washington would get on board with that. I Tried to look around. This was me just Googling and searching everywhere.

[00:32:46] It was so unclear. It was so hard to find what exactly I needed to get So I finally figured out that I needed to get a food processor license in Washington State. So having that license means that I needed to rent out a commercial kitchen, which was another overhead cost and make all of my wholesale cake pops from there.

[00:33:05] So I had to find a kitchen to rent a commercial kitchen in my area was really challenging and expensive. I got really, really lucky with who I rented my kitchen from. She's amazingly supportive of my business, and sells my cake pops in her shop. She's a bakery owner. so I left out and you know, and she's not trying to rob me with how much she charges me.

[00:33:27] I lucked out, but I know it's a lot harder for people, so they just don't even, they don't even look into it. So once I found my kitchen, getting my food processor license wasn't really that hard to do because I'd already done the cottage food and it was really similar.

[00:33:40] I just had to add an aspect of getting this new kitchen inspected.

[00:33:44] **David Crabill:** I'll just add that the reason why it was similar is because Washington's cottage food laws are so complicated. I mean, most of the time it's much harder to get a food processor license, but I have honestly told people. In Washington, there's not that big of a difference. Like the only reason I'd really recommend going cottage food is if you need to be at home, like in your case.

[00:34:05] But otherwise, like you're just accepting a ton of limitations for this extremely complicated thing.

[00:34:12] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah, it's very, very frustrating. I could go on and on with my frustrations with this state in that regard because they make it so hard and then it's just really hard to find what you have to do and all these people it's like We want people to follow the laws. We want them to do it legit, but we're making it so hard to get the information.

[00:34:29] And that's why I really do love you, your website is like a godsend when I found it, because I was like, Oh my goodness, everybody needs to see this because this is what. I wish I would have had when I was researching how to get a cottage food license, but I just had to kind of tweak some things and then getting it really didn't take that long I just had to like update my labels and a few other things but Once I got it, then I could be up and rolling and selling for other people for resale.

[00:34:57] **David Crabill:** So before you went wholesale, were you just mainly doing custom orders? Were you doing porch pickups? Were you doing markets?

[00:35:07] **Rachel Laukala:** I was doing mainly just custom orders and like porch pick up where I would meet people. And actually the place where I have my kitchen. She reached out to me and was like, listen, I make cupcakes and cakes, wedding cakes. I don't want to make cake pops, but I'd love to have yours in the shop. And that's where I got my foot in the door with reselling.

[00:35:28] And I was like, okay, I got to try to figure this out. And she was like, you know what? In the meantime, while you're figuring it out, if you want me. Shop my storefront to be your pickup location. I will do that for you and she was a new business at the time So it was like a win-win for both of us. I didn't have to try to be at home and organize pickups. I could just say hey come to this business in town During her open hours and come get them when you can. That was such a game changer for me and I always encourage my students to find a local business that you can partner up with like that because Pickups are one of the biggest headaches of being a cottage baker.

[00:36:02] I feel like I mean, I don't know if that's just me but It's sort of a nightmare to organize,

[00:36:07] **David Crabill:** Now you said that you're for your wholesale, you sell wholesale at like \$2.40 cents a cake pop, but you sell retail at like \$4 and up. So, um,

[00:36:18] **Rachel Laukala:** Well, my most basic cake pops are more like \$3.50.

[00:36:23] **David Crabill:** Okay. But I mean, it sounded like you just had business coming to you a lot, so why did you choose to focus on the wholesale side of it? If you could potentially make more money from custom orders?

[00:36:38] **Rachel Laukala:** Well, when I decided to start selling for resale, it really wasn't making more money. I just was like, Oh, my stuff's getting out there and we're selling. Because I wasn't selling, I didn't understand that I really needed to up the quantity. I didn't. That's why people are like, Oh, they reach out to me and like, a shop wants to sell my cake pops and I'm like, that's awesome, but don't do what I did and just jump two feet into that because someone wants to sell your stuff.

[00:37:06] you need to be selling the right amount. And when I started out, obviously I wasn't, but now where we're at. We sell so many. I could not do this quantity of custom orders. There's no way I could make thousands of cake pops a week. With custom orders.

[00:37:22] There's just no way possible. The employees I have are amazing, but doing what I do, I'm one person. If that makes sense. And so I can hire people to make these, we can make so many more quantity wise that it made up for the difference in what I was charging. And I still do custom.

[00:37:38] I took a break for a little bit. Cause I just needed to kind of step back and figure out how I wanted to run my business. Now that all my kids are in school, I'm stepping back in and being able to. Alongside these wholesale orders also get back into the custom cake pop game and really get back out there that way too So we can do both.

[00:37:57] **David Crabill:** So how many employees do you have at this point?

[00:38:00] **Rachel Laukala:** I have four part time Employees

[00:38:04] **David Crabill:** and how involved are you in the wholesale orders?

[00:38:08] **Rachel Laukala:** I oversee everything and I make sure everything behind the scenes is like, here are the numbers for this week, these are the orders that came in, and then really they do, I mean, I step in and help when things are like, actually these next two weeks are going to be really crazy with Valentine's Day coming up.

[00:38:28] This is like. One of our busiest weeks of the year. So I'll step in and help. Cause we'll sell a lot more these next two weeks. But mostly I'm fairly hands off as far as the physical making of the cake pops for resale.

[00:38:42] **David Crabill:** and when do you feel like you made that transition to, like, really being able to remove yourself from the labor intensive part of the business?

[00:38:53] **Rachel Laukala:** It was not like a pretty smooth transition. It was rocky and I felt like a baby giraffe with like, new legs like stumbling about trying to find my place and how this worked, but it was really when I had couple of well trained employees that I could trust to make high quality work and when I figured out how to make cake pops that were still cute still tasted great still had the same quality but weren't labor intensive so we could whip them out really quickly and once I realized like, okay, I can step back and they're making these so much faster than when they started that I could see, I would gradually like, see, okay, well, if I don't do this today, let me give it to them to see if they can handle it.

[00:39:39] They would get it done and then some and then I'm like, oh, man, okay, I could use this time to start up school a cake pop. I could use this time to make some digital products. I could. Use this time to do some of the stuff online that I hadn't got to do, or just create content on the internet for fun, not because I was making it for an order.

[00:39:56] So, it was gradual, and it was messy, and like I said, I still step in when it's crazy, or if I have people sick, or I have people, leave and I gotta train somebody new, but, for the most part, it's I'm pretty kind of doing my own thing.

[00:40:11] **David Crabill:** Well, I know that now, ironically, you know, this has brought you back to teaching and a lot of what you do is content, and you have over a hundred and fifteen thousand followers on your main Instagram account. Like, share that process with me, because, you know, almost everyone listening to this Podcast would dream of having over a hundred thousand followers on Instagram.

[00:40:35] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah, that is a whole other beast. And I want to preface it to say that I am no expert at all in that realm of being like, this is the formula for what you do to get this. But what I think I did most of all, and it really ramped up as far as the Instagram quote unquote influencers, school of

cake pop, like all that side of it really has been amped up in the last two years, two, three years.

[00:41:09] And I think I just, I stayed really consistent and I stayed up to date on like. What people want to see. And I was like, listening, my following shifted from people looking at my photos to being like, Oh, I want to buy those cake pops. I'm a local person. Once more people saw my work and saw what I was doing. My following shifted to being people that wanted to learn from me not necessarily buy my cake pops But they also had all these people that were asking questions and like how did you do that? What did you use? What supplies do you use? Where do you get that? And it was unintentional but I am like I said at the beginning I'm a teacher at heart and I genuinely do enjoy it and I was like, well, I'll just share what I'm using.

[00:41:54] And I wasn't getting paid or like, I wasn't an influencer. Wasn't even a word. And I just was sharing because I'm like, this will help somebody. I wish I had somebody to teach me this. And I was just showing up as my true self, like messiness and all, all the time. And when I'm like, Oh, people are doing reels now.

[00:42:15] What's a reel? I'm going to learn how to make that. This is fun. And I just started showing people more behind the scenes and just being on there consistently and like listening and paying attention to what people wanted to see from me. Obviously it changed the demographic of my following. And I took a break from selling locally, like custom orders, because it was like, the people that were seeing my content were from all over the world.

[00:42:37] And so that's who I was giving all my time to. And, there were a few reels that went quite viral, which escalated my following. Like, a crazy amount, and actually, I think one that took me over the 100, 000 mark was this one where I linked every single product in the video, and was like, it was like 50 vanilla cake pops, and I'm like, here's everything I used to make these cake pops, and just putting that information out there for, free, people were like, whoa, and that reel just took off, and it's my most played reel, and I think that that got me. And I was like, wow, people just really need, want help. They want support. They want to know how to do this. so that's just kind of what I started gearing all my content towards and really wasn't just sharing photos of my work, but like how to and tips and tricks and that sort of thing. So it was just really getting to know my audience that changed the game for me.

[00:43:31] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I'd say like every single person who's been on the podcast that has gone really big with their content and their social media,

they all started by just Helping people like they never started by going. I'm gonna be an influence I'm gonna try to make money online,

[00:43:49] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah, I think people can see a genuine want to share versus here I, yeah, I want to share this so I can make some money off of it. I think people can tell the difference.

[00:44:00] **David Crabill:** But you do make money off of it now. Could you share a little bit about that?

[00:44:07] **Rachel Laukala:** So what I mainly make money off of online is my community called, School of Cake Pop. I do have a couple companies that I share their affiliate codes Where I get a little kickback from people purchasing some of their products. But really I don't have a whole lot of those.

[00:44:29] I'm not like a typical influencer, I guess, or I'm happy to share the codes. I love, you know, it's really great that these companies give a little bit of a kickback or share my stuff too. It's awesome. They give products, whether it's products or money.

[00:44:42] For me, that's just not my main source of income. You see the 115, 000 followers, it's awesome, but those 115, 000 followers, it is, at the end of the day, just a number. But it definitely does help when I have something like my online community, a lot more people see it and hear about it.

[00:45:00] So I guess it helps in that regard. But yeah, school of cake pop is a monthly membership that people pay for. And so, I have some digital products as well, like business card templates, cake, pop care cards, those sorts of things that people can purchase. which was a whole new thing. world for me as well, but a really, really fun one and one that I'm super thankful for and definitely wouldn't be possible if I didn't have the social media following.

[00:45:25] **David Crabill:** So when did you start school of cake pop?

[00:45:29] **Rachel Laukala:** School of Cake Pops started, geez, I think it was 2023, I think I officially launched it. I think I've been doing it for about two full years now. It started out first as just an Instagram um, like when Instagram first launched subscriptions. And I was just doing it through there. I had launched a cake pop making course. It was just a single product.

[00:45:55] And I launched it right before that. and I got some good feedback, but it definitely didn't do what I thought it was going to do. And I also was like,

man, I was so excited to launch this course. And I had the best mentor Danira. She was. So helpful and incredible in the whole process of making the course.

[00:46:14] But I put it out into the world, and people bought it. And then I was like, now what? I just feel like I just, I sold this. And now I'm like, I'm not, I don't really feel like I'm teaching because they were all pre recorded classes, which is good. But I got done. And I just was like, I'm not, I'm missing the teaching aspect.

[00:46:29] I'm missing the interaction aspect with students. And so I had someone reach out to me that was like, You have a talent for teaching, you have a following, you do something unique, you need to make this into, like, a membership. And she had told me, like, get off Instagram and do your own thing, like, don't do the Instagram membership, You have enough to be able to make this your own website, like do this on your own.

[00:46:56] And I was like, what are you sure? You think people would pay for this. And she's like a hundred percent. Yes. I, and this was Chef Amanda Schonberg from the baking for business podcast. And I was just so flattered, but her words definitely. One of the main reasons why uh, school cakepop is even a thing on its own, and I'm so thankful for her believing in me and seeing what I really couldn't see.

[00:47:21] **David Crabill:** Yeah, Chef Amanda Schonberg was on episode 80 of the podcast. So if people want to check out that episode, I still remember her episode as one of the very best. I mean, she's such a good speaker and she just like that episode was just riddled with advice. So I am not surprised that she inspired you.

[00:47:42] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah, and I, I didn't even really like, I don't remember how she even found me, but she reached out to me and was like, girl, you're crazy for charging \$299 for that Instagram membership. And I was like, what? She's like, yeah, this is crazy. She's like, you are worth more than that. I laughed because she was just so upfront and it was so refreshing to be she's just so honest with me and like she noticed something in me and I felt so like proud because I respect her so much for her to just take a leap and just be like no I'm gonna reach out to you and let you know that you could be doing so much more.

[00:48:16] I mean it, it just sounds dramatic to say life changing, but it really is life changing.

[00:48:24] **David Crabill:** I just wanted to pause for a quick moment to talk about Amanda a bit more. As you're hearing, she literally changed Rachel's life and I truly believe that she could change yours too. I can't think of a better business coach than Amanda. And she has a course that will help you make extra money by adding digital products to your business, just like Rachel has done I have reviewed her course portal and I must say, it is the real deal It's community, plus content, plus coaching, and in my opinion, it's worth far more than what she's charging. More and more bakers are finding ways to earn additional revenue outside of the kitchen, so what's stopping you? Let this be the year that you start to earn extra income and have success the digital way. To learn more about Amanda's course, go to forager. com slash digital.

[00:49:14] so I noticed on School of Cake Pop, you have like a membership, but you also have classes. So what is the difference between the two?

[00:49:24] **Rachel Laukala:** So, I originally only sold the membership, the classes were just included, because every month in School of Cake Pop, we do Um, but then I actually was talking to chef Amanda and was like, what do you think if I just started offering the classes, just the replay outside of like my membership and she's like, do it.

[00:49:49] and make it a price so that your students know that I'm definitely getting a deal by being a member of this community. And so, you I was like, well, if, because I did have some people who weren't necessarily members or maybe it was part of the window when my school wasn't open and they're like, Oh, I'd really love to be able to take this class.

[00:50:06] It's almost Christmas, but your school of cake pop isn't going to open until January. And I was like, Oh, why not? Like there's no harm in just opening this for replay. So they don't, they didn't get to see it live, but they could get the replay. Oh, actually, maybe I did offer a couple to be able to view live, but I definitely have offered replays for a lot of them.

[00:50:24] And not every single class is listed for sale, but some of the more popular ones I did. So you could either, you know, buy a class for \$30, Or, you know, you could get a whole entire course, and like 50 classes for \$11. 99 a month.

[00:50:40] **David Crabill:** And you mentioned that there's only certain windows when your school is open to join. Why did you decide to do that?

[00:50:50] **Rachel Laukala:** Yeah, I actually put that as a frequently asked question on my website because so many people ask that. And honestly, when I'm trying to get the word out about School of Cake Pop, it's a lot of my time and effort to, get the word out, promote it, send out, you know, promotional emails, and be on socials a lot more, and really focus my content on School of Cake Pop content, so I really work hard to do that.

[00:51:16] And then when I open the window, I'm like, you know, we're celebrating, we're doing all these things, we're getting excited, getting people excited to join, and I'm doing a lot of helping, because when people get in, obviously they want, they have questions about where to find things, or how this works, or they're new, so they have just questions about making cake pops in general.

[00:51:32] It's a lot of my energy for about four weeks from when I'm getting the word out to opening and closing the doors. And then when I have those new students, I want to be able to just focus on being their teacher. I don't want to focus on Instagram marketing. I don't want to be sending out emails to gain new students.

[00:51:52] I didn't want that. I love getting new students, but then when I'm done, I like to close the doors and just be like, alright guys, now we're in here. Let me get to know who's here and kind of get in on a more, like a little bit of a deeper level instead of constantly just trying to get new people to join.

[00:52:08] And plus, and it does create a little bit of a like, I don't want to say FOMO, but it does create a little bit of FOMO. People are like, ah, I miss it. I want to make sure that I get it. When she opens it again, because I really, I usually only open it twice a year. Sometimes, I'll do like a special sneaky Black Friday, open it for 24 hours,

[00:52:27] **David Crabill:** Yeah, it definitely adds an element of scarcity, which is uh, a lever that causes people to make a decision and join. Otherwise, people often will just put off their decision if they can do something any time.

[00:52:40] **Rachel Laukala:** exactly. And so, that's part of it, but honestly, I feel like I'm a better teacher, when I can just focus on a lot of different things going on, just owning a business, and that takes one thing away, so, it helps with that too.

[00:52:56] **David Crabill:** Well, we have to talk about this conference. That you're going to be keynoting at. Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:53:03] **Rachel Laukala:** I'm so excited for this. So, I think Cake pop Con used to be a thing back in the day, it was not ever anything I ever got to go to, I've never been able to go to like SoFlo Expo or anything like that. And so when my friend Amy, the one I talked about, Who is the creator of daisy makes and daisy pops when she came to a few of us With the idea of this what's popping con?

[00:53:30] We all were so excited and like 100 percent in and she's like I'll figure out the logistics you guys tell me you know if this timing is gonna work and we'll start getting the ball rolling and She's amazing. I do not know how she does all that she does, but she just is a genuine lover of all things cake pops and really wants just everybody to love cake pops and be successful and So she put all this together And I can't believe it's actually coming to life because like I said it's been so long since there's been like a convention for cake poppers and It's gonna be so fun.

[00:54:07] There's gonna be lots of There's going to be a panel, there's going to be speakers, there's going to be a cake pop competition, they're going to do like a brunch you can come to. obviously all the awesome, the amazing vendors that, you know, people get cake pop supplies for. Will be there too so people can walk around like a little vendor row and shop. It's gonna be really fun.

[00:54:31] **David Crabill:** Well, you, you sound pretty busy. I mean, you've obviously got a business with multiple employees. You have the school of cake pop and now I guess speaking gigs and yet you somehow found time to start another business. A sourdough bakery,

[00:54:47] **Rachel Laukala:** Yes, I have been called crazy multiple times. In an affectionate way, but I have a problem with being unable to have a hobby. I can't just have a hobby. I must turn it into a business.

[00:55:04] And I don't know what it is about that, but I was just like, what? People want this. I already have a food processor license. Literally, it was so easy for me to add. Sourdough bread to my food processor license. It was nothing. I just had to add two new recipes and get it all approved and okayed. So that wasn't a hurdle.

[00:55:24] And I'm like, people are buying it. Why wouldn't I just make a little business out of it? And I did take a break in January from it because I needed to prepare for the craziness that is February Cake Pops. So I did take a little break, but I was just, I'm like, man, why not sell it? People are buying it.

[00:55:42] My neighbors were so excited that they could just get it right off my porch.

[00:55:46] **David Crabill:** You make it sound so simple, but I mean, you created a business name for it, 3 Pine Sourdough, and you made an entire brand and website for it.

[00:55:57] **Rachel Laukala:** Yes, I know. My husband was one of the people who thought I was a little crazy for this one too. But I just, it came to me and I felt like it came so easily. Like the business name, I secretly love logo design. And so I designed the logo. And, I was like, I'm gonna make my own stickers, I have a thermal printer already.

[00:56:18] And, like the little, the three pines, you know, it's my three boys, my, I am one of three siblings. I live in the Pacific Northwest. I just like it, it just came together and then Sourdough was just something so new and refreshing and different from what I'd ever done. I don't want it to be anything huge. I'm gonna keep it just what it is.

[00:56:40] It's fun. I don't want to ruin it. I just send out a little pre order every once in a while so people know when I'm baking and then they can pick it up on Thursdays And I just limit myself. I just set the amount of loaves that I want to make in a week and they sell out and then I'm done. And if I don't want to make it next week, then I don't.

[00:57:01] **David Crabill:** Well, it is pretty incredible all that you've achieved. So what are your plans for the future?

[00:57:08] **Rachel Laukala:** Oh man. I mean, As any business owner does, I am constantly always kind of thinking about what's next. But, I am very happy with where I'm at. What's going on right now with the wholesale aspect, the custom order aspects, being able to come back, being able to run my school Cake Pop, I am so happy where I'm at and I'm going to keep going on this. Until it just doesn't make sense, you know, like something isn't working out or I'm not enjoying something, you know, then we'll re evaluate, but I'm currently trying, I'm working hard to grow back my local following because I had focused so much time in, getting students and people to join School of Cake Pop.

[00:57:48] I kind of lost some of that local following because I stopped doing the custom orders, you know? So I'm kind of trying to grow myself in that right now and the sourdough thing I'm just, I'm doing for fun and I, I'm going to continue doing that. For fun and kind of have that as part of my little side

business. But yeah, I just want to keep teaching and keep making cake pops that people like and that make people happy. That's all I want.

[00:58:15] **David Crabill:** Well Rachel, thank you so much for coming on. Now, if somebody would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:24] **Rachel Laukala:** So you can find me on Cake Pops by Rachel on Instagram and Facebook. uh, So it's all cake pops by Rachel. School of cake pop is schoolofcakepop.com. And while it's not open all the time, I always have a wait list open so you can sign up for my wait list on my website.

[00:58:44] If the doors are not open. And I'll send all updates through that. You can email me at contact. at cake pops by rachel. com. And yeah, I think that's it.

[00:58:58] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:02] **Rachel Laukala:** I really appreciate you having me. This was so much fun.

[00:59:08] That wraps up another episode of the Forager podcast.

[00:59:11] **David Crabill:** Remember to check out the new Cake Pop conference at whatspoppingcon.com. And Amanda's digital products course at forrager.com/digital.

[00:59:21] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/135.

[00:59:28] And if you're 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 the show and will help others like you find this podcast.

[00:59:39] And finally, if you're 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. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.