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[My Food Experiences]

Let Me Tell You *how it all started*

About ten years ago, I found myself needing to get out of a very bad relationship. I had work as a birth doula, childbirth educator and doula trainer. I had three very small children, however, and I wasn't able to take on the number of births I needed to make ends meet for all four of us to be able to live on our own. I remember sneaking away into another room, late at night, and calculating all my expenses over and over, trying to figure out just how many childbirth classes I'd have to teach to cover the rent, how many births I'd have to attend to pay for food and gas, how many people would need to register for my trainings in order for me to afford clothes and medical expenses and a car payment but I just couldn't make the numbers work. I needed something more.

I come from a family of entrepreneurs and I always thought my birth work was my way of being an entrepreneur. Now that I needed to add a new source of income, I was at a loss. I had been to so many business trainings and literally grew up in the home of two entrepreneur parents. I kept telling myself over and over that I could figure this out. I knew the formula, the one I'd been taught my whole life:

*work you love + things that you stand up for
+ passion + hard work = financial stability
and a life you love*

So -- I started there. I went over and over what I loved to do. I made a list. Birth, sewing, gardening, reading, and food were at the top of the list. I'd look at each of those and then make sub-lists of possible ways to monetize each one. I thought maybe I could grow flowers and sell them at the farmer's market. I started writing a curriculum for an online childbirth class. I considered teaching sex education classes to newly married couples and then when they were pregnant, they'd come to me for their birth needs! I thought about starting a business where I could somehow read books and make a living at it. I even {almost} roped my friends into starting a lingerie business with me, where the niche was that stay-at-home moms sewed all the products. I even bought some ribbon and lace and tried sewing some pretty panties for that one!

You may have guessed by now that what I kept coming back to was food. It seemed like the only sustainable and real thing I could make a living with. And I was good at it.

I'd grown up at the feet of two women who were rock stars when it came to cooking: my grandma Poole and my mama. Not only were they amazing cooks, they were extremely adept at making everything healthy and real. I remember, very clearly, the smells and the flavors at the little mom and pop health food shop my mama and grandma would take me to regularly. It was called Larsen's

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Health Food Store and they were famous for their Bible Bread Sandwiches.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a49vJkmuqPU>

Needless to say, I had been immersed in cooking and especially health food, my whole life. I finally realized that was what I should do. I started by personal chefing for customers who had very stringent dietary restrictions. I'd make my clients Key Lime Pies and Chocolate Truffles and Chocolate Covered Macaroons and they RAVED about my food. I couldn't make enough of the desserts, especially, and my clients soon started urging me to try selling them at health food stores.

Larsen's Health Food Store had long gone out of business but there was another mom and pop health food store in my area so, with trepidation, I took them some samples of my chocolate truffle pie and crossed my fingers. I quickly got word back that they LOVED my products and wanted to start carrying them as soon as possible. I was thrilled beyond belief.

But I had a problem. I didn't have a commercial kitchen and it was required by law if I was going to wholesale my products to retail stores. I had noticed a kitchen the size of a bathroom in the back of the mom and pop store where I had taken the samples. All it had was a sink and some counter space, but I knew it was approved by the state because they used it to package down bulk items. I

knew I was on to something and I was pretty sure I had found what it was that was going to pay the bills for me and my babies, so I confidently went back into the shop and told them that I needed a commercial kitchen and I'd give them a discount on their products if I could use theirs. They told me I'd have to bring all my own equipment and that I wouldn't be able to store any of it there. I didn't care! I was so excited. We had a deal.

That first week, I loaded up all my gear and took it to the shop. I had my youngest son in tow. He was about five at the time. I drove there, unloaded everything, including the ingredients for one Chocolate Truffle Pie, which I had spent \$30 on, and, while my little boy sat reading books and playing with puzzles and action figures, I whipped up the most beautiful dessert I had ever made in a kitchen that small. I had bought a sleeve of mini-clam-shell packages at a local restaurant supply store (I couldn't afford to buy a whole case!) and after cutting the pie into twelve pieces, placed them into the containers, stuck some home-printed labels on the top and piled them up in the shop's display case. I packed up my supplies and my baby, and went back home with my fingers crossed and a burning hope that this would be the solution to finally getting out of this bad place in my life.

About five or six days later, I received a call from the shop saying that everything was sold out. They had a check for me and asked if I could come and

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make two pies this time. I was astounded. I had finally found a solution. I could finally be safe and free. I picked up my check, which was for \$60, went out and bought the ingredients for two pies, and, the rest, as they say, is history.

Nearly ten years and hundreds of thousands of product sales later, and after a lot of really really late nights in strange kitchens listening to music from the Beatles to The Airborne Toxic Event, I'm proud to say that I've got my own commercial kitchen, my own employees and I've expanded to several stores and now have an online presence with a global reach.

I'll tell you, there is nothing harder than starting and growing your own business, especially as a single mom. There's no other income to fall back on if orders are small one month, if one of your helpers can't show up, you're the one working into the dark night at the kitchen while your babies sleep on blankets in the corner. You don't get sick days, you don't get health insurance, you can't call the boss if there's a problem, and if the stores pay their invoices late, you've gotta suck it up and pay your own bills late.

But I'll tell you something, there is nothing that approaches the freedom of, not just being your own boss, but growing and nurturing and developing something that you believe in, that enlivens you, that helps other people, and that

gives your life purpose every minute that you're alive.

If you're reading this, you're probably one of my customers or one of the people who regularly reads our articles or both. Please let me take this moment to tell you that you have no idea how much your support means to me. You've enabled me to live my dreams. I truly and honestly, wish I could meet every one of you, give you each a hug and tell you thank you.

It's because of you that I am safe, happy, and living a life of joy!

author: melissa chappell

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Chappell
.com