



**Melanie Daniels**  
**Mickey's Pastry Shop**  
**Goldsboro, North Carolina**

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**Kelly Spivey:** This is Kelly Spivey speaking with Melanie Daniels at Mickey’s Pastry Shop in Goldsboro, North Carolina. It’s August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Can you introduce yourself?

**Melanie Daniels:** I’m Melanie Daniels of Mickey’s Pastry Shop and I am a third-generation Certified Master Baker running the family business.

**Kelly S.:** When and where were you were born?

**Melanie D.:** I am from here, I’m from Goldsboro. I’m 50 years old. And I have been back working at the bakery for the last twenty-six years. Originally I went to Guilford College and thought I wanted to be a schoolteacher and I only taught school for a year. And then my grandfather, the original founder of the bakery, my grandfather, Mickey, got sick and I returned home to work with him. And my mother is an only child, so I helped take care of him.

**Kelly S.:** Tell me a little bit about your grandparents.

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**Melanie D.:** My grandfather, Mickey, started the bakery in January of 1946. He put his name on what was the local bakery at that time. He was a pastry cook in the Army Air Force, so he did go overseas, and he fed the troops on the ships. And when he returned he bought the existing bakery. But even let me back up before that. He was the oldest of four children and dropped out of school when he was in the eighth grade, when he was thirteen years old, to feed the family.

His father left the home, and they were in the country. He had a mother and three younger siblings to feed so he went to work for the local candy maker and continued to learn the skill of baking and candy making, and then he went off to the war, came back, started the business in [19]46, and it became Mickey’s Pastry Shop.

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**Kelly S.:** And what was his full name?

**Melanie D.:** Milford Esther McClenny. [Laughter]

**Kelly S.:** Did he want to be a baker or was it more he needed to . . .

**Melanie D.:** Need. I don't know that there was another option. And of course, I think at the time when he was a teenager, there was no other option. And his loyalty to his family was to put food on the table. No one else was old enough to work. So I think with his skill and his training he just did not venture down another path. He did at one point work as a pastry chef at the Washington Duke hotel, which is no longer around, but he did work.

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This was before he went to the war. So he did have letters of recommendation, and I actually have those actual letters of recommendation. And those are some treasures that he saved and have been passed down. So he had the training, he had the skill. He did not have an education. Hands-on education in the baking business was the only education he possessed. So really I

would say no choice in the matter. But he learned to love it or else he would’ve definitely picked a different path. And there is a different path, but I’ll tell you about that in a minute. [Laughter]

**Kelly S.:** How long was he overseas?

**Melanie D.:** He was overseas— I’ll have to double check— three years maybe. I will definitely double check.

**Kelly S.:** And what about your grandmother?

**Melanie D.:** She was from Person County, from Roxboro.

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And they met and married. They obviously didn’t have a wedding. And then he went off to the war. My Granddad Mickey came back in [19]46. Their only child, my mother, Carole, was born in May of 1947 and raised here in Goldsboro.

**Kelly S.:** Do you remember her baking at all?

**Melanie D.:** No. My mom was a schoolteacher. My grandmother did not work. She was a homemaker. My grandmother was a homemaker, and my mother went to Guilford in Greensboro, and she became a teacher. She was a local history teacher. But no, my mom— she would go with my granddad to the bakeries on Saturdays. At that time we had lots of little individual family-owned restaurants and so “we”, the bakery, my mom and my granddad would deliver pies to them for their weekend meals so they could serve at the restaurant.

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So yes, my mother did work as a young child at the bakery, probably more to spend time with her dad than actually work. But do I recall her baking? No. No. [Laughter]

**Kelly S.:** So how did your granddad get into this business?

**Melanie D.:** He bought it in [19]46 and then he was supporting his home. My grandmother was a homemaker. He needed some extra income so on the weekends he would call football games. And he was the first head linesman of the Atlantic Coast Conference. So he traveled and did many big ballgames throughout his twenty-five-year career with the ACC.

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So that was while my mom was in college at Guilford so his money that he earned from officiating helped put her through college. So that’s a neat little unique story that we have on the side, and people know him as a referee as well as the town baker. And we’ve even had folks, even within the past fifteen years, come in, men who officiated games with him at the end of my granddad’s career, and they say, “I never knew he owned a bakery.” So his ACC memorabilia, some of it, is here hanging in the shop, and we have lots of folks come in, his contemporaries, some of whom are still living, will come in and give us ballgame stories, which is great.

**Kelly S.:** That’s so interesting that they didn’t know.

**Melanie D.:** Yeah. I was shocked when a gentleman I was waitin’ on one day said, “I had no idea that your granddad was a referee and we called some of the same games.”

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**Kelly S.:** Wow.

**Melanie D.:** So not only his love of baking, his hands-on education— he never played sports. He didn’t go to high school. He didn’t finish grade school. He didn’t go to high school. So his love of football helped open the door for him to be an official. And from there— the bakery business was a six-day-a-week job, as it still is. We are not open on Sunday. But his six-day-a-week job did not allow for hardly any extra time, certainly very little time to be away. The NFL wanted him when he finished his career with the ACC but that definitely would’ve been too much travel. And when he did turn down that in the late [19]70s, Raycom Sports, the announcers at the time, wanted him.

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But his true love was his bakery, so he stuck with the bakery until the day he died in September of 1999.

**Kelly S.:** So who did he buy the bakery from, do you know?

**Melanie D.:** Nathan Crocker who was a local candymaker in the northwestern part of Wayne County. And that’s who he worked with as a child when he had to feed the family. That’s who

Mickey worked with. And we even have some memorabilia from that. We have a candy stove that’s here that’s been in use since 1923 and it still works. However, we retired it twenty years ago when we moved to this current location. So that’s here on display for everyone to see.

**Kelly S.:** It sounds very community-oriented that he was able to learn a trade and then progress from there.

**Melanie D.:** He did. He learned a trade.

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He made a lot of good friends. My grandfather was a very big supporter of what is now the Boys and Girls Club. Of course, it used to be just the local Boys Club, but he was a tremendous supporter of the local Boys and Girls Club. And he helped put some athletes through school.

**Kelly S.:** Wow. So your mom didn’t bake.

**Melanie D.:** No. No, she was a teacher. [Laughter]

**Kelly S.:** What about your dad?

**Melanie D.:** Okay. My dad married into the business. My parents got married August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1969. So my dad married into the business. Both my parents are from here. They were high school sweethearts. And my dad went to Methodist College and got his associate’s degree, Methodist College in Fayetteville. It’s now Methodist University. But he did get his associate’s degree, was drafted into Vietnam.

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And so he served two years. He was in the Presidential Honor Guard, so he was stationed at the White House at Fort Meyer, my dad was, and came back, married into the family, and obviously got a job. And he just retired in December of 2019.

**Kelly S.:** Oh, so recently.

**Melanie D.:** Fifty years on the same payroll. Fifty. [Laughter]

**Kelly S.:** What are your parents’ names?

**Melanie D.:** My mother’s name is Carole and my dad’s name is Jerry, Carol and Jerry Ray.

**Kelly S.:** So did he know how to bake?

**Melanie D.:** No. No. We’re all on-the-job training. On the job. You just come and you hang out and you learn a skill.

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It’s not easy to learn. We all have learned through trial and error. And I say “we.” That would be my granddad, my dad, my brother, and I. My brother still works here with me. But we certainly all learned through trial and error. Many hours. Much lifting. And we’re in the type of business where you have to do it all. You simply have to do it all. You have to be able to run the business. You have to be able to order and stock inventory. You have to make the product. You have to know how to sell it. And that’s six days a week.

**Kelly S.:** There’s the business side and then there’s the more creative side.

**Melanie D.:** Yes. There are both. There are both. And what we have found in order to be successful is you need to have a really good handle on both sides of the business. If you can’t do both then you may not survive.

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**Kelly S.:** Do you have any other siblings besides your brother?

**Melanie D.:** I just have one brother, my younger brother Jerald, and he works here with me. And he’s been here fifteen years. And he’s had to learn just like I did. And when I came back from my one year of teaching elementary school, my dad said, “Well, you have to learn to make it, you have to learn to sell it, and you have to learn the business side. Otherwise it won’t work.” And it’s like throwing me to the wolves, and he did. And it worked, and I worked hard. It’s a hard job. But the flip side is we see people come in and out all day long and we make ‘em happy. So we know we’ve done a good day’s work.

**Kelly S.:** How old were you when you started working at the bakery?

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**Melanie D.:** I was twenty-four. Twenty-four. I had always worked in the bakery during high school. Now, of course, it was certainly my holiday job, not always my weekend job. Summer job hit and miss but definitely holiday time, all hands on deck. And then, while I was in school at

Guilford I worked at a bakery, and I traveled one summer and worked at a bakery there just because I knew some things. I didn’t know it all. I still don’t know it all. But I knew enough to have a job and earn a paycheck. And so I came back and that’s how it started.

**Kelly S.:** And you said you are a Certified Master Baker. Can you tell me what that means?

**Melanie D.:** The Retail Bakers of America is a national organization, and the Retail Bakers of America has been around a hundred years, give and take.

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And it’s a national organization which businesses can become a part of, and we have always been a member of the RBA. They currently have different certification programs. At one point when the certification program began through the RBA they only had one and it was called the Certified Master Baker, and I’ll get back to the details of that. They have currently branched out and they have a Certified Journey Baker. They have a Certified Decorator. They have different levels. The Certified Master Baker is like the all-inclusive in becoming a Certified Master Baker. And this was nineteen years ago, I’d say.

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You have to apply to become one. The first step of the application is you have to have a minimum of eight years’ experience in an institution.

**Kelly S.:** So not at one place?

**Melanie D.:** Right. It didn’t have to be at one place, but you had to have eight years of verifiable experience. And at that point it had to be a certified business with a business registration. So that was the first part. Or if you didn’t have eight years you needed to go work some more before you could apply. Well, Dad and I did it together so obviously he had eight years. I did have eight years under my belt. So there’s a written test that’s proctored and then there is a practical test.

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And the written test is like an all-inclusive. It’s everything from sanitation to managing the books to making product to handling employees, everything you can think of that would show that you were able to run a business. The practical test was a two-day event, and it still is, as far as I know, and you actually have to go make product. There are eight products you have to make. Once you pass your written portion you are given three products to make. Dad and I applied together, and we went to the same test sites together. You’re given a yellow cake formula, a white bread formula, and maybe a cookie formula.

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So you can practice those all you want and right here in your own shop under your own conditions with your ingredients with no competition for ingredients, no competition for oven space. You can practice those all you want. And there are specific instructions on those three formulas. And on test day at 7:00 a.m. you are given the other five products, and some of which

you may have never seen. [Laughter] So right there on the spot, and all candidates get the same formulas. We call them formulas in bakeries like us. We call them formulas. So eight formulas that you have to produce for a set of judges.

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Testing sites have in the past included culinary institutions, technical colleges, bakeries. So you have to travel and be prepared. And there might be two other candidates, there might be ten other candidates. So here you are in the facility with your eight products, and you might have eight judges, you might have ten judges who are Certified Master Bakers themselves or have similar rankings in the culinary field. It’s not easy. I don’t know of anyone that’s passed on the first time. There’s only X number of pounds of sugar or X number of pounds of butter or milk so if the other candidates or you— if you burn your cake and you go back for more ingredients then somebody might be without sugar when they need it.

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Or somebody might be without pecans or what have you. So it’s about managing your workspace. It’s about managing your ingredients. It’s about managing your time. You have to consider how long your things are gonna be in the oven and you kinda have to take a glance around and hopefully they’re not gonna get to the oven before you do if your bread’s ready to go in the oven. And it’s about working with people, but there is a competition aspect and it’s not

doing any better than the next person but it’s about a competition aspect. Space and ingredients. Space and ingredients and time.

**Kelly S.:** So you’re competitive, but can you kind of coordinate with the other people or is it meant to be . . . ?

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**Melanie D.:** It is meant to be individual, but you can discuss things with other people. When the test finishes on Saturday from seven to four or five in the afternoon, sure, if you feel up to it and if you’re willing you can go discuss your cookie formula with this person who makes it all the time and you’ve never made it. Are you gonna be able to come back the next and perform just like what you’ve discussed, and you’ve taken all kinds of notes? Maybe, maybe not. So I would say it’s competitive, but we’re all trying to reach the same goal. And it’s a good setting for someone who has to manage a business, which can be competitive, managing employees, managing ingredients, all that on a daily basis.

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So the test— you have eight formulas and you’re judged very, very heavily - taste, appearance, crumb structure of your cake, crumb structure of your bread. Does your cookie snap right? Did you use the right ingredients? Judges are there for a reason and they will help tear it up. No question about it. If you fail more than three of your products then you are required, if you choose, to aim for the Certified Master Baker, again, then you’re required to make all eight of

your products, again, at another test site, at another date. So if you fail one or two then you have the ability to join in on another test site and just complete those products that you were not passed off on.

**Kelly S.:** Do you have to pay to do it?

**Melanie D.:** Yes, I’m sure there was a fee. Yes, I’m sure there was a fee and a business registration. Yes. And these are places all over the country, and travel expenses, they don’t pick up any of that so it’s all on you.

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**Kelly S.:** Wow.

**Melanie D.:** And once you’ve obtained your Certified Master Baker certification that’s it. We do not go back for continuing ed. We’ve got it. It’s under our belts. We have a plaque. We have a pin. And Dad and I are probably two out of two hundred and fifty left in the country, Certified Master Bakers. Now, I’m sure there are Certified Decorators, Certified Journey Baker, which means it’s a step below. You may not manage the business, but you may manage the production facility. My grandfather, Mickey, was grandfathered into the Certified Master Baker program because of his years of experience. So in other words, he did not go through the test, but he’d obviously had decades of experience and knowledge that he was awarded it, as well.

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So when I got mine, when I received mine, I was the first third-generation Certified Master Baker in the country.

**Kelly S.:** Wow. How’d that feel?

**Melanie D.:** Well, certainly overwhelming. It was certainly overwhelming. It was amazing. I didn’t ask to be the first third generation. I don’t even think I knew it. And if I had known it would I still have gone for it? Yes. It’s a once in a lifetime. It’s a once in a lifetime. And Dad and I received ours within months of one another. I did have to go take mine more than once. He did, too. And I had to take another portion. But these folks are willing to help you. They certainly don’t want you to fail, but they want you to be very successful and proud of what you do.

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And the RBA stands behind it and they have quality products that they want to be showcased all around the country. So I received mine in 2003 or [20]04. Dad received his the previous year. We were both pinned the same year. And then my son was born the same year I received mine. So the whole experience was quite overwhelming. [Laughter]

**Kelly S.:** I was about to say that sounds like a lot.

**Melanie D.:** And at the same time we built a new facility.

**Kelly S.:** Is this the new one?

**Melanie D.:** This is the new one, and now new is twenty years old. We were located in downtown Goldsboro from 1946 until 2002.

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So we did build this one. The bakery was in what we would now call a strip center. And of course, our portion was built in the late 1800s, our building. Now, we rented it, we never owned it. And for decades we had been witness to our downtown just falling into nothing, as I think all downtowns have come and gone. But ours went and it was in the day when people didn’t walk to work anymore or when they didn’t ride their bike anymore, and downtown became a destination. So, for example, we were one of the few businesses open in our downtown on Saturdays. So it truly was a destination for people to come pick up a birthday cake. So we obviously waived the storm.

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We knew that as long as my granddad was alive we would never leave the original location. In [19]99 or 2000 the opposite end of the strip which we occupied, and it was vacant at the time, the roof fell in on a Saturday afternoon and my dad and mom were at an RBA meeting, a Retail Bakers of America board meeting. My dad was on the national board at the time. And I just left. I closed up shop, left. I had pulled out with a wedding cake and lo and behold the bakery is on the front page of the paper the next mornin’ and half of the opposite end of us had fallen in. So

here I was, and I have to tell my parents. [Laughter] So nothin’ they could do about it, of course. Nothin’ I could do.

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But we were fortunate enough to be able to stay in our location. The building was cleaned up. We were not hurt. We were still functioning and, of course, Dad and I looked for a piece of land to buy and then started working on plans for a bakery.

**Kelly S.:** Do you think you would’ve stayed in that area?

**Melanie D.:** No. This was a good move for us, a very good move for us. Things happen at the right time. I’m just a believer that things do happen at the right time. My granddad was not living at the time. We more than doubled our size. We’re a free-standing building. We have our own parking. We have a drive-through window.

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We have a very large storage area, a production facility which is also our storage area, and our trucks, our deliveries— we order by the pallet so they can come in with the pallet, not one single bag at a time like we used to downtown.

**Kelly S.:** Just hauling in fifty-pound bags? [Laughter]

**Melanie D.:** Uh-huh. That’s all they did, haul in fifty-pound bags one at a time, or two at a time. However many they could carry. So our ease of allowing our vendors to get in is greatly

appreciated. So we are very pleased with our location. And we did out of our other location— we run a wholesale business, as well, from our backdoor so we service grocery stores and convenience stores. We service five counties in Eastern North Carolina five days a week. So a five-day route that runs every week.

**Kelly S.:** Wow.

**Melanie D.:** And we did that when we were downtown, as well, but the wholesale business did pick up when we moved over here.

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**Kelly S.:** So tell me a little bit about what you guys are known for.

**Melanie D.:** Wholesale-wise we sell an awful lot of long johns every week.

**Kelly S.:** What is that?

**Melanie D.:** It’s a long cream-filled donut, a yeast raised donut. And we do several thousand a week right here out of this location and haul them fresh every day. So we’re known for those. We sell an awful lot of cream puffs here in the store. We sell an awful lot of brownies. We sell an awful lot of Washington pie, and this dates back to the very beginning of Mickey’s Pastry Shop. In 1946 when my granddad unlocked the door and put his name on the door, and in the late [19]40s and [19]50s, early [19]60s not everyone could shop everywhere.

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From day one we have always let everyone in our front door. We have always treated everybody the same, and I think that is certainly a lot to be said certainly for right now, in times now, and a lot for the longevity of our business. Everyone is always welcome in our front door, and they always have been. The bakery was one of a handful of local businesses in Goldsboro where folks of color could come in the front door and where folks of color could be served along with everyone else. They weren’t asked to go to the back door. They weren’t asked to not enter. A lot of that— well, it is— my granddad, he was raised as a Quaker, and the Quakers are peacemakers. And although he was a Quaker and a conscientious objector to the war he still went to the war.

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And his Quaker values never waivered so we have always let people in the front door. Washington pie is one of our top sellers. It’s named for a local part of town where the colored folks lived, and it was certainly within walking distance. Nobody had a car back then. Very few people had cars in the [19]40s and [19]50s and maybe even [19]60s. And a nickel was hard to scratch up. So Washington pie, my granddad created it. And we can’t afford to waste— we’ve never been able to afford to waste anything and he certainly never wasted a thing. So he would save all of the leftovers and he would mix ‘em up and we would roll out a piece of pie dough in a pan and the leftovers would be rebaked and cut into squares.

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And it was named for the local colored section of town called Little Washington. And of course they would walk to get it, and I can guarantee he gave away more than he sold. And we still have people— Memorial Day weekend our local chapters come back for homecoming, and I can guarantee you we’re one of the top spots they come. And we have people who will come in here to the bakery and they’ll come in and they’re very thankful for being able to be served. And we’re talking people who are— my parents are seventy-five— their generation and older.

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And they’re very grateful to have been served back in the Jim Crow days. And they haven’t forgotten it. They haven’t forgotten it. So I think that’s the real history of the business right there.

**Kelly S.:** A mutual respect.

**Melanie D.:** Absolutely. Absolutely. It’s a mutual respect within the community, absolutely. Yep.

**Kelly S.:** That is pretty incredible.

**Melanie D.:** It is. It is. [Laughter] I think every time we tell the story I feel like we shed some tears ‘cause it’s true. It is the truth. And we have generations that come back and tell us, “I grew up coming to the bakery with my granddad.” And they’ll tell you, “My parents and grandparents didn’t have anything, but we always knew that we would be served, and we would get somethin’ at Mickey’s.”

**Kelly S.:** It’s pretty unusual to have Quakers in this area, isn’t it?

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**Melanie D.:** It is. It is, yes. We’re not Amish country, but we have a small Quaker community here and my granddad was raised in the country and— Quakers. [Laughter]

**Kelly S.:** North Carolina Quakers.

**Melanie D.:** That’s right. That’s right. North Carolina Quakers. Um-hm.

**Kelly S.:** So can you— what does the Washington pie taste like? I don’t know if you can . . .

**Melanie D.:** It’s a little bit of everything.

**Kelly S.:** Is it a pie?

**Melanie D.:** It’s a square. It’s a square and we ice it real lightly on top and it’s really heavy. And my granddad would always say, “Well, if you get a slice of Washington pie and you drink an R.C. Cola you’re gonna sink to the bottom of the pond.” [Laughter] So it’s heavy. It might have raisins in it. It might have nuts in it, coconut.

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It truly is anything that we have left over. And to this day we still do not waste anything. We still make Washington pie. We always have something for our local soup kitchen. Our local soup kitchen opened in the late [19]50s, early [19]60s and at that time they were located in an

Episcopal church across the street from the bakery, over a block or two, and from the day they opened their door we have always fed the soup kitchen. So local volunteers will come the next morning and pick up anything that we have left over. And to this day we still do that. And that is the only place that we send our stales. The only place. So we have been a community supporter of the soup kitchen since its inception.

**Kelly S.:** I also read that you guys use the same starter.

**Melanie D.:** Oh, yeah, we do. [Laughter] We sure do.

**Kelly S.:** Tell me a little bit about that.

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**Melanie D.:** Okay. So we only make yeast-raised donuts, so we feed the starter every day from any kind of scrap from the dough— we make dough every day all day long. And any kind of scrap that we have we put back in a bucket, so we feed the starter. And of course it has to be refrigerated. When we moved the bakery— now, we may have two or three or four buckets of starter. We may get it down to one, but we feed it every day, and it truly is the same thing, and it’s fed with the same thing every day and it has a lot to do with the flavor of the donuts. When I moved us from the bakery, the first location, I literally put the bucket of starter in the front seat of my car to move it up the street. And we only moved three miles away.

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But there it is, the history of the business that we couldn’t let get away from us. So it truly is the same starter that we feed every day.

**Kelly S.:** Is it from the bakery before you guys bought it or . . . ?

**Melanie D.:** That I don't know. I'd say it's the starter from 1946. We feed it every day and it grows every day. It grows every day, so it's the same old sourdough starter that we have used. And it has only ever been in one other location.

**Kelly S.:** So how has it been-- these last few years have been a little tough. How has it been once the pandemic— how did y'all adapt to that?

**Melanie D.:** When the pandemic hit in March of 2020, of course nobody knew what was going on.

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My dad, Jerry, retired in December of [20]19. Christmas Eve was his last day of work. And I had about a five-year notice, so it was no surprise. He told me, he said, “I’m done. Fifty years on the payroll I’m done.” So I had about a five-year notice, which was fine. We had moved over here, and everything was settled, and things were running great. And two months to the day of his retirement he had a heart attack. So between January 1<sup>st</sup> and March 13<sup>th</sup> of 2020 I had to shoulder a business, my dad had an unexpected heart attack, my kids were home from school doing virtual school, my husband was home doing virtual work, and I had a business to run, and I had to figure it out.

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I do all the business work, so I had a business to run. I had to figure it out and not just figure it out but figure out how to survive. So it didn’t take me long to figure out that I needed to order everything I could order from napkins to boxes to flour to starch, anything that I could fit in the door I ordered and packed it in here. Because I knew that, number one, I might not be able to get it, and number two, if I could get it the price was gonna be sky high. So I was very, very fortunate that I could get my ingredients and packaging at an affordable price, and I had a place to put ‘em.

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So for example, I might’ve had a year and a half’s worth of some size box or somethin’, so good move on that one. And when it has come time to reorder some of these items-- now, of course, we’ve reordered a lot since the pandemic hit. Things have been certainly more expensive or just not there. So how did the bakery adapt in the beginning to COVID? We’re very, very fortunate. We never locked our door. We never slowed down, ever. It was probably one of the best years we’ve ever had. So we really put to use our drive-up window, which a lot of businesses, food businesses, I think, probably had to cut a hole in their wall or somehow figure out how to do curb service or whatnot.

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I knew that when we moved to this location that was first on our wish list, a drive-up window. Not thinking about what’s going on now, we put in the drive-up window because we are a kid-friendly business, and we wanted more kids and it’s much easier for mom to roll through the drive-up window than to unload everybody between your few minutes of after school and your ball practice or music lessons.

**Kelly S.:** Between them seeing everything in the case.

**Melanie D.:** Exactly. [Laughter] And it’s a little bit quicker trip to the bakery, because if you haven’t noticed some people do come and stay a little while. We want ‘em to stay a long time but when you’ve got indecisive children and you’ve got somewhere to be sometimes it presents a problem. So the drive-up window was a huge bonus when COVID first hit.

[0:42:00]

And, of course nobody was real excited about getting out and going anywhere or gettin’ out of the car, so we made the most of our drive-up. And we offered family packages. And we offered weekend party kits. And we offered Mother’s Day gifts. And we offered a gift package for every holiday you could think of and said, order, we have it at the drive-up window. People did not quit eating. And we’ve always known that the bakery is a comfort food destination, always. When we have a hurricane or if we have ice, threat of bad weather, they’re comin’ to the bakery. So the beginning bonus of COVID was that when people were stressed, which I don’t know who wasn’t stressed, they flocked to the bakery.

[0:43:03]

We couldn’t get enough food to our grocery stores. Our wholesale business really picked up. I think some of the online ordering from the grocery stores might’ve helped us. But we couldn’t get enough food to the grocery stores. It was amazing. And there again, I’m lucky that we had the ingredients to even produce it. So we kind of benefitted from the beginning of COVID. We got a ton of new customers. Since we’re located in Eastern North Carolina, summer is not the busiest time for us. All of our locals just tend to leave town. But we found that the summer of 2020 as well as 2021 we had an uptick in business because people were not traveling as much, and we acquired an awful lot of new customers.

[0:44:03]

**Kelly S.:** So you were already kind of anticipating a lull when the summer came.

**Melanie D.:** Yes.

**Kelly S.:** And so it ended up balancing out?

**Melanie D.:** Yes. Yes. We always anticipate a lull when the summer comes. We know it’s comin’ and so we adjust accordingly. But with people just not traveling we benefitted from it. We did a lot of social media at that time. And it didn’t hurt us. It didn’t hurt us. And I worked more during COVID than I’ve ever worked, not that COVID’s over, but I worked more— I was pushing ninety hours a week during COVID, and that would be seven days a week. So a seventy-five-hour week is nothing to me.

**Kelly S.:** Yeah. I was gonna ask what a— this is the worst question.

**Melanie D.:** Ask away.

[0:45:01]

**Kelly S.:** What a normal sort of typical day is.

**Melanie D.:** Um-hm. Okay. A normal day, a typical day in the bakery, in the life of a baker-- and I’m not the first person in. My brother Jerald comes in and he’s here by 4:30 so the oven’s hot. Product is already on the mixers, being pulled out of the oven. I get here between 5:00 and 6:00 depending on production. I always know today what I’m doing tomorrow. I like to know even today what I’m doing next week for the most part. So I definitely get here before the sun comes up. When I walk in the door I usually start mixing cake. I mix a hundred pounds at a time. And on any given day I’ll mix up to four hundred pounds of cake at a time, or throughout the course of the business day.

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And cookies are a quick thing for me to make. We make an awful lot of cookies so I can crank that up and do that simultaneously. I stock the front. All the while we have stuff in and out of the oven. So we open at 7:30 so for the first two hours of my business day I’m in production. And then when the door opens I’m back and forth between selling and production. And I like to have cake going, cookies going, pies going all at the same time. And all the meanwhile we’re servicing customers through the front, the drive-up window, and the phone. And as the

employees come in they are responsible for handling the products that have been baked. So in other words we have a hundred pounds of cake. Well, we have to get it out of the pans, wash the pans, get ‘em ready for the next batch of cake.

[0:47:00]

We’re still filling orders, we’re icing cakes, we’re decorating cakes, and we have a wholesale route to get ready at the same time. So we produce for wholesale, and we produce for retail simultaneously, so some of our staff works in wholesale only. Some of our staff works in retail only. But for the most part retail works in production and a little bit of wholesale, so we cross train. We don’t sit and wait for the phone to ring. We don’t sit and wait for the customers to come in. There’s always somethin’ to do. I don’t mind cuttin’ the oven off when I lock the door at 5:30. I lock the door at 5:30. Sometimes I go to lunch. Now, I don’t necessarily go to lunch. Sometimes I might eat the lunch I bring, sometimes I don’t. A lot of days I’m here from sunup to sundown.

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We lock the door at 5:30. By the time the business is kind of taken care of I’m usually out the door by 6:00. And that’s five days a week. And then on Saturday we are open from 7:30 to 4:00, and we’re pretty much gone right after 4:00 on a Saturday. It’s all sold. It’s all picked up. We do occasionally have those that are late after hours and within reason we want them to have their birthday cake, so we’ll stay. And all the meantime our vendors, our suppliers, we get it all by the

pallet. They’re all fifty-pound bags or sixty-pound buckets. They will put it where I ask them to. But that pallet of flour, you have to get that fifty-pound bag to the mixer several times a day, or you have to get that fifty-pound cube of shortening to the fryers several times a day. So there’s a lot of lifting, there’s a lot of heavy-duty work.

[0:48:58]

We are very, very fortunate to have a lot of equipment. It’s not automated but it is as automated as a small business can have. So along with that goes equipment maintenance. I was workin’ on an oven this mornin’. I’ll be workin’ on an oven tomorrow. [Laughter] So along with that goes equipment upkeep and maintenance.

**Kelly S.:** Roughly how many products do you make?

**Melanie D.:** On a daily basis in the retail area we have about sixty different products that we bake fresh every day, and that’s everything from cupcakes, cookies, pies, donuts, brownies, cheese stars, Danish products, puff pastry products.

**Kelly S.:** Are any of those formulas family formulas or where did . . . ?

**Melanie D.:** Every single one of ‘em.

**Kelly S.:** Oh, really?

**Melanie D.:** Every single one of ‘em, yes.

[0:49:59]

There has not been one formula that we have changed. Ingredients have changed over the years. And with that being said we’ve had to tweak but nothing has been completely changed nor have we ever replaced a formula, which we’re very lucky. So everything that’s made here today was the same formula, much less quantity than what we made and started with in 1946.

**Kelly S.:** Wow. So the people that grew up with it, it’s consistent over . . .

**Melanie D.:** It’s the same. Same taste, same flavor. I was scratchin’ my head a few years ago about some cookies and so I thought, well, I’ll call our shortening company and just see what they have to say and maybe they can send me a formula that would run a little bit better through my cookie machine.

[0:51:03]

And the R&D, the research and development technician said, “Well, let me just send you these formulas real quick and just you try ‘em out and call me back and let me know.” So I got the formulas and lo and behold they’re the same formulas that we have locked up in our safe from the original formulas back in the [19]40s. He said, “Ma’am, I’ve never talked to anyone who has these same formulas.” I said, “Well, I do and I’m lookin’ at ‘em!” So it was very exciting to know that we had somethin’ that dated back that long ago. It was an eye-opener for him. And it’s a formula we still use. We have not changed it. We won’t change it.

**Kelly S.:** I’m assuming that your granddad got that when he was learning.

**Melanie D.:** He did. He did. At that time, and still do, but certainly more in the early years of our business your shortening companies or your egg companies or the raisin company, they’d print formulas and give ‘em out.

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They put ‘em in magazines, publications. And not all of ours have come from publications. We have certainly created them ourselves, but in order for your vendors to sell a product they’re gonna help you come up with a formula and help you make it work to the best that they can. And so shortening companies were really big into creating formulas. And you’d buy some shortening, they’d give you the formula. So shortenings changed about twelve years ago.

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And the federal government wanted all of us to eat healthier and so shortenings became non hydrogenated which means, for example, soybeans, soy shortening, soy oil, soybeans that we grow a ton of here in Eastern North Carolina, during the manufacturing process of a soybean shortening companies by law could hydrogenate, which means they would liquify it. And all the shortenings we get come in fifty-pound cubes. Everything is a cube of shortening. So fifty-pound cubes. Well, the federal government wanted all of us to eat healthier and that’s kind of hard to do in a bakery. Real hard to do. [Laughter] So the federal government took the hydrogen out of shortenings. Well, your shortenings then became almost non pliable, and we’re talkin’ different shortenings. We fry in a different shortening. Margarine is a form of shortening.

[0:54:01]

Cake shortening is different. There’s a shortening for yeast-raised products. There’s an all-purpose shortening for a pie dough or a cookie. So at one point twelve years ago we were using eleven different shortenings in our facility. And butter was another one. So eleven different shortenings and oils and they’re all considered fats. Well, the federal government took the hydrogen out of the shortening. Shortenings became almost non pliable, so they were difficult and very tough to work with, and I mean tough. We’d buy direct from a national— well, it’s an international shortening company, and we had such a great relationship with the national salesperson that we became a test site for these new shortenings that were rolling out of the factory, and it was pretty cool.

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Because they would ask our opinion and we didn’t know that we were worthy of an opinion like that. So we got a lot of shortening to test for several years before it became mandated. And so we kind of thought we had nipped the shortening problem in the bud, and we were sittin’ on top of the world. So when I called my R&D man from the shortening company he was really shocked to know that I had a formula that he had scanned in to me and it was in a little black leather-bound book. And I said, “Well, I’m lookin’ at the same thing.” So that’s how far we go back, and that’s the kind of repertoire we have with our vendors.

**Kelly S.:** I was gonna say it sounds like you have a significant hand in developing ingredients and products.

[0:56:04]

**Melanie D.:** We do. We can. We have been. It’s one of those things that we’re more than happy to try for you and give you our opinion whether you like our opinion or not. And you can take it and run with it, or you can tell us thank you, no thank you. But we are honored to be asked in our little facility to try some.

**Kelly S.:** Wow. I don't think I have any more questions but if there’s anything that you want to add that maybe I haven’t touched on about the business or family or any of that?

**Melanie D.:** We’re seventy-six years old this year in 2022. A lot of our contemporaries across the country never made it past the second generation.

[0:57:02]

Hard work. It is a lot of hard work. A lot of the third generations did not want it. We have seen some go out of business. And it’s a hard thing to watch your contemporaries go out of business. This is certainly not the path for everyone. I didn’t think it was my path. Some days I’m not sure if it’s supposed to be my path. I’ve invested as my family has — we’ve invested a lot of time, a lot of money and equipment, and it’s something that we’re certainly proud of. Is the fourth generation gonna take it over? I don't know. I have two teenagers. They don’t mind working. I’m not sure this is what they want to do. But it’s like my dad told me, here it is if you want it. If not

we’ll have to make other arrangements. So the future is here for a while. [Laughter] We have a long while.

[0:58:01]

But I think we have raised an awful lot of generations of local families and we’re just your quiet little small-town home bakery.

**Kelly S.:** Thank you so much.

**Melanie D.:** Thank you.

[End]