



**Julia, Hadley, and Karen Bledsoe**

**Stuart, VA and Raleigh, NC**

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0:00:00

Danille Christensen: All right. It is August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022. We're in Stuart, Virginia, at the Patrick County Public Library. My name is Danille Christensen, and I am here with Julia and Hadley and Karen Bledsoe. Would y'all like to tell us about yourself; just give us a little bit of background? We'll start with you, Julia.

Julia Bledsoe: Hello. My name is Julia Bledsoe. I'm fifteen years old. I was born in California and moved to Raleigh when I was younger. I've played soccer since I was four years old, and I run cross country. I love to read, and baking is one of my favorite things to do.

Danille Christensen: Excellent. And you are a sophomore this year, right?

Julia Bledsoe: Yes, I am.

Danille Christensen: Okay.

Hadley Bledsoe: My name is Hadley Bledsoe. I am eleven years old. I was born in Hilton Head Island?

Karen Bledsoe: In South Carolina.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah, South Carolina.

0:01:01

I love to write and bake a lot, and I also like to save up for stuff, I guess?

Danille Christensen: So you're a planner?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: Um-hm. And are you saving for anything in particular?

Hadley Bledsoe: A horse.

Danille Christensen: Tell me about your love of horses.

Hadley Bledsoe: I really love horses. My friend owns a Tennessee walking horse and she's been helping me pick out which horse I want, and I picked out two, actually, a palomino and a Morgan.

Danille Christensen: And how much do you think that that would cost?

Julia Bledsoe: I don't know, but for the palomino it will be ten thousand to fifteen? and I'm really close. [Laughter] Not really close.

Danille Christensen: Just to purchase the horse it'll be that much?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: You're really close?

Hadley Bledsoe: Not *really* close. [Laughter] Like, in the hundreds.

Karen Bledsoe: Okay. Well, that's good.

Danille Christensen: And Karen, would you tell us about yourself?

Karen Bledsoe: Sure. My name is Karen Palermo Bledsoe.

0:02:00

I've been a mom to three beautiful daughters. Since I've been twenty-six I've been a mother.

Prior to that I was a reporter--and transitioning from working to being a homemaker was not as

easy as it would seem, like our grandparents did, but I have learned the fine arts of homemaking, baking, cooking, taking care of the house, and that is something I take great pride in now. We homeschooled our children for many years. They all go to public school now. But it is a joy to be at home and to be able to create memories for our family.

Danille Christensen: And you said that you were born in Lancaster . . . ?

Karen Bledsoe: I was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Amish cow pastures and shoofly pie.

Danille Christensen: Excellent. And when is your birthday?

Karen Bledsoe: My birthday is January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1977.

Danille Christensen: All right. Excellent. I'm really excited to talk to you today, and I wondered if we could start by giving just a little bit of introduction to your family.

0:03:00

So, is your family from this area? Do you have grandparents or other relatives who are close by? Are you spread out across the United States? What can you tell me about your family?

Hadley Bledsoe: Me?

Karen Bledsoe: Go ahead, Jules.

Julia Bledsoe: Our dad grew up in Winston-Salem and our mom, as she said, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Our family has always been pretty close to each other. One of our [sets of] grandparents lives back in Wake Forest, and our dad's parents, they still live in Winston-Salem.

I'd say our family has always been very close together and so we've always lived by each other which has been a blessing.

Danille Christensen: Your extended family.

Julia Bledsoe: Yes.

Hadley Bledsoe: What Julia said but also tell them about the . . .

Karen Bledsoe: Oh, we have family in Pennsylvania, as well, cause that's where I grew up. We have aunts and uncles and cousins there, and that's really special to us.

0:04:00

We try to go up and visit once or twice a year.

Danille Christensen: And what brought you all to Stuart?

Karen Bledsoe: That's a hard one. Do you want me to answer that one?

Danille Christensen: [Laughter]

Julia Bledsoe: Yes.

Karen Bledsoe: So my husband and I, we were looking for about five years, a rural piece of property, someplace where we could retire but also really, um, the key word these days is "homesteading." Not so much homesteading, cause he does have a full-time job in Raleigh, but someplace where we can transition to. And we were looking within a day trip from Raleigh, if you had to do it, and we just found the perfect property. The people in Stuart were amazing. Patrick County was beautiful. You were close to the Parkway. It's not so much mountainous

where you have to worry about *snow* in the wintertime, but you do get a little bit of snow. And so it was just-- it was meant to be.

Danille Christensen: And what does your husband do in Raleigh?

Karen Bledsoe: He has an aerospace company.

0:05:00

He's an aerospace engineer.

Danille Christensen: Okay. All right. So this is a labor of *love* for you to move to this area.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: And do you plan to keep both the engineering going as well as this larger homesteading project?

Karen Bledsoe: That's a good question. It's constantly evolving. So yes, we do plan to keep the engineering going, but we fell in love with the people here in Patrick County. They've taken us in with open arms. We have a home church here in Patrick County. Actually, tonight we're hosting a small group at our house. So as much as we're down in Raleigh because the children are finishing up school-- I have a senior who will be graduating soon-- we do see ourselves transitioning up here full time in the near future.

Danille Christensen: And what is your property like here? I know you were telling me that you had a good harvest this year and so you've got some fruit trees. Do you call it the farm or . . .?

Karen Bledsoe: The farm, um-hm.

Julia Bledsoe: Yes, we call it the farm.

Danille Christensen: What's it like?

0:06:00

Hadley Bledsoe: We have a garden and then we have a river or a stream.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Hadley Bledsoe: A river, I guess. Um, we have a lot of woods.

Karen Bledsoe: What was on the property when we first moved there?

Hadley Bledsoe: Buffalo.

Karen Bledsoe: Cattle.

Hadley Bledsoe: Cattle. Sorry. [laughing]

Danille Christensen: Buffalo, I'm sure, were there *long* before.

Karen Bledsoe: Yes.

Danille Christensen: And how much property do you have?

Hadley Bledsoe: One hundred and four [acres].

Danille Christensen: Oh, wow. So plenty of space to ride horses on.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yep.

Danille Christensen: Is there anything else about the property that you'd like to add?

Julia Bledsoe: Um, the pine forest. Me and [older sister] Olivia love going up there and taking hikes. At the top corner of the property after you go up a huge hill, they have a treehouse? Um,

which we like to go up to occasionally. Um, we love going down to the stream--we'll see the occasional crawfish? [laughing] And, then we also, we also love just taking long walks through the property with the family every now and then.

Karen Bledsoe: We see it--As it evolves we definitely would like to have, you know, some head of cattle, cause, you know, you have pastures and they're *meant* to have cattle on them.

[0:07:02] Um, I'd like to have *goats*. When we move up there full time

Hadley Bledsoe: Horses.

Karen Bledsoe: Hadley would like to have a *horse*. We have city chickens that we'll bring up to the farm to make them *country* chickens. [smiling] Um--I've always grown up in Lancaster County, so I've been around animals my whole life. Even though--my grandmother lived in front of an Amish farm---*we* lived more in the suburbs, but going to visit her was always fun, you know, cause there was always something going on in the fields. And I think that really left a lasting impression on me as a kid. There was always something growing, some new life starting. You could walk down and visit the Amish man and he would bring you in and see you, let you see the little baby *piglets* that were just born. Really left an impression.

Danille Christensen: So has food production been part of—like, important to your family in terms of spending time *together*? or having good things to eat? Tell me about how food kind of fits into your family.

0:08:00

Hadley Bledsoe: Me?

Karen Bledsoe: No, you can go ahead.

Hadley Bledsoe: I don't want to go. [Laughter]

Karen Bledsoe: What did you help Mom can in October last year? What did we grow a ton of?

Hadley Bledsoe: Tomatoes.

Karen Bledsoe: Tomatoes. And what did we process the entire day like little old nonnas, little old Italian grandmothers? What did we do?

Hadley Bledsoe: Tomato sauce?

Karen Bledsoe: Tomato sauce. How many jars did we get?

Hadley Bledsoe: I don't know.

Karen Bledsoe: We got about thirty-five jars.

Danille Christensen: Oh, wow. Pints or quarts?

Karen Bledsoe: Quarts of tomatoes.

Danille Christensen: Wow! That's an operation.

Karen Bledsoe: It was amazing. [Laughter]

Danille Christensen: Yeah, for sure. And so how do you use those tomatoes in your family; what do you use them for?

Hadley Bledsoe: Spaghetti sauce, bruschetta. What else?

Karen Bledsoe: Soup.

Hadley Bledsoe: Soup.

Julia Bledsoe: And also our tradition of Friday night pizza nights.

Hadley Bledsoe: Oh, yes.

Danille Christensen: Oh, okay. Tell me about that.

Julia Bledsoe: Every Friday we like to make our homemade pizzas with our homemade dough my mom makes. [0:09:00] Um, sometimes we'll cook them on--we'll either cook them inside or on the pizza oven we have outside.

Danille Christensen: Is that a freestanding, wood-burning oven?

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm, yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: Oh, delicious. A friend of mine has a pizza oven like that and invites people over on Friday nights. How did that tradition get started?

Julia Bledsoe: So we've always loved pizza and . . .

Karen Bledsoe: Friday nights. You need a family night when everything is so busy.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, movie night.

Karen Bledsoe: We try to sit down at least two to three nights a week to have dinner all together but sometimes in soccer season, cross-country season things get busy—so, we made Friday nights-- any friend can come over. We're gonna have pizza. It could be twenty years from now, it could be next Friday, but we're *having* pizza and we're watching a family movie.

Danille Christensen: Oh, that's fun. And so what kind of toppings do you like?

Julia Bledsoe: Personally, I love olives and pineapple.

Hadley Bledsoe: Cheese.

Karen Bledsoe: Mom goes a little bit more eccentric. I like whatever's growing in the garden.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. She adds everything on.

Danille Christensen: [Laughter]

Karen Bledsoe: The pepper, the basil, the oregano, any herb. You know--what else do we put on the pizza? Sissy [Olivia] likes pepperoni.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Hadley Bledsoe: Unless we're in Italy, French bread pizza. [0:10:03]

Danille Christensen: So how do you decide? Everyone gets their own pizza, and you get to do whatever you want?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah, um-hm.

Danille Christensen: So it's kind of a space for your own creativity, as well.

Karen Bledsoe: But I think you guys are leaving out the most important thing—like, what's so special about our pizza? What do we make? We make the what? The dough.

Hadley Bledsoe: The dough. The sauce.

Karen Bledsoe: The sauce. The basil's from where?

Julia Bledsoe: Our garden.

Hadley Bledsoe: The garden.

Karen Bledsoe: The garden. The peppers are from where?

Hadley Bledsoe: The garden.

Karen Bledsoe: The onion is from where?

Hadley Bledsoe: Our garden?

Karen Bledsoe: And I get really tickled and they laugh at me sometimes--I'm, like, "We ate our whole meal, and the majority of it was *just* from our farm!" You know, and that's pretty neat to know, where your food comes from.

Danille Christensen: Why is it important to you to be productive in that kind of way?

Karen Bledsoe: So, we're Italian American and our grandparents--if you look at the way they preserved food, whether it was the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, grandparents or the Italian grandparents, they did it out of *joy*, but they also did it out of *survival*. [0:11:04] And I think we've gotten away from that a little bit, where, if you look at the grandparents, you know, they ate what was in season and that is so important. You know, you don't eat certain foods when it's the fall because they're not being grown. And it's a rhythm, and I think we've lost the rhythm as a society now, where we can have bananas anytime we want. We can have oranges anytime we want. Any type of fruit we just go to the market and get, um--but it's something to be said about vegetables that are grown with little pesticides, vegetables that are grown in season. It's just better for the earth and better for your body.

Danille Christensen: How do y'all feel about eating in season? I know it means that there are things that you can't have at certain times of the year, right?

Julia Bledsoe: Personally, I don't mind that. I enjoy it because you don't get bored with the food. And also, it's important to me knowing where *my* food comes from and what I'm putting into *my* body as an athlete, and I think that's really important to me.

0:12:05

Hadley Bledsoe: Um, Same with Julia but like . . . I don't know how to explain it. [Laughs]

Karen Bledsoe: Well, do you enjoy the food you eat?

Hadley Bledsoe: I enjoy it, and it also helps me with dance?

Danille Christensen: Tell me about that.

Hadley Bledsoe: How long have I been . . . ?

Karen Bledsoe: You take ballet off and on.

Hadley Bledsoe: I take ballet. I started when I was . . . five years?

Karen Bledsoe: Yes.

Hadley Bledsoe: I stopped a little bit? and then I'm keeping going, and I have a hard time deciding now what I want to do.

Danille Christensen: And so do you feel like paying attention to what you eat and how it's grown helps your body be stronger? Or how is it important to your dancing?

Hadley Bledsoe: Um, like--I don't know how to . . . [Laughter]

Karen Bledsoe: There's no wrong answer.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. It's okay. And also , you know, these will be edited and so--

Karen Bledsoe: There'll be little sound clips. [0:13:03]

Danille Christensen: Yeah. So, if you decide that--you changed your *mind* or you don't know exactly what you want to say at the first--it doesn't matter.

Hadley Bledsoe: I guess it helps me be stronger? Like, um,

Karen Bledsoe: How does it make you feel?

Hadley Bledsoe: [Laughs] Happy.

Karen Bledsoe: Yeah. Okay.

Danille Christensen: It seems like it'd give you some confidence too. that you know exactly what you're putting in your body? We talked a little bit about some of the traditions that are associated with the Italian side of your family. Is there anything from the Lancaster County part that are really important parts of the ways that your family works?

Karen Bledsoe: So, my husband's family is from Franklin [in Macon] County, North Carolina, the Appalachians. And growing up you would always hear the stories about their grandmother who would pressure-can *tons* of green beans. [0:14:02] And I can remember--I was new into the family, but after she *died* there was about five cans of green beans *left*, and *those* would come out at special occasions. We'd have *one can* of green beans at Thanksgiving and then at Christmas, and then they would save the last three for a special occasion! And at the time I didn't realize it, but as you mature you're, like, "That *was* very special. Those were the last five cans of pressure-canned green beans that your grandmother made." And I think that was a tradition that my mother-in-law and her sister really enjoyed. They did it a little bit when the kids were younger, but then as they've aged they've gotten away from pressure canning and canning.

I think that's sort of what happens when-- it's young and hip now, like knitting and having chickens. Right? So everybody kind of wants to learn how to can. But we brought you this can [jar] of pickles here, as you can see. [0:14:58] And we learned a lot from this can of pickles because we do a lot of freezing, we do a lot of *preserving*, but as far as pickles go we had not done pickles probably in about, since--

Julia Bledsoe: We were little.

Karen Bledsoe: -- since my children were little. So we went to the farmers' market, cause my cucumbers weren't in season yet and we bought, I don't know, whatever they had left. I think we bought maybe fifteen pounds of pickles [cucumbers]. And we learned a lot of lessons from this, because we got busy. And the garden doesn't wait for anybody. So we let the pickles *sit*, for, two to three days--and then I'm, like, "We have to do something with these pickles." So we got the canner out, we put em in cold water, we sliced them, we filled the jars. We put in-- what did we put in? Oh, dill, and onions, and-- what else did we put in there? Do you remember?

Danille Christensen: Maybe garlic?

Karen Bledsoe: Yes. Garlic. And there's a bay leaf in there.

Hadley Bledsoe: Basil? [laughs]

Karen Bledsoe: No basil, but there's a bay leaf in there. And, I read, to keep em crunchy you should put in a little bit of-- oh, what's the--

Danille Christensen: Alum?

Karen Bledsoe: Yes, a little bit of *alum* in there. [0:16:01] I'm, like, "This *surely* is gonna help the pickles"--that are soft as we're *cutting* them!

Danille Christensen: [Laughs]

Karen Bledsoe: So the vinegar-based dill pickles, we let em sit, we tried em--and it was a good lesson, because we pulled em out and they were [sounding disappointed] floppy pickles. You can't help a floppy pickle. You know, [With a smile] "If they're not crisp when they go in, they're not gonna be crisp when they come out."

Danille Christensen: Right.

Karen Bledsoe: But the taste is good. We'll add more dill next year. But it was a fun learning experience. You can have your grandmother's recipe in front of you, but if you're not using it right away as soon as you pick it out of the garden, it's not going to be what you remember from your grandparents' canned goods.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. There's so much that--we talk about that in some of my classes, about tacit knowledge, the kind of knowledge that you learn by doing, right, that you don't necessarily know to tell people or that's hard to express. And there's a lot of things, those kinds of knowledges that are involved in making food, *especially* if you're trying to recreate a recipe, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

0:16:59

Danille Christensen: I just learned, actually, as I've been doing research on canning, that the advice used to be two hours from the garden to the jar.

Julia Bledsoe: Oh, wow.

Karen Bledsoe: Wow.

Danille Christensen: Right? Which means you do a little bit every day. But it also kind of presupposes that you have a life that allows you to pick it in the garden and put it right in a jar.

Karen Bledsoe: Yes.

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: Right? so it gives you a sense of how people managed their time, and how work was structured, as well.

Karen Bledsoe: And, you know, we think of summer as a vacation, but summer for farmers or people who have gardens, that is the “go time,” they’re in, work from morning to night.

Danille Christensen: How are you two involved in things like harvesting from the garden and processing that food?

Julia Bledsoe: So as Mom said, we spent all that time last year processing the tomatoes to get the sauce. That was an all-day event. We’ll go out and help pick stuff from the garden whenever they need help. [0:18:00] We’ll just do whatever is needed to get done.

Danille Christensen: How big is your garden?

Julia Bledsoe: So we have two different ones? We have a larger one up closer to our house and in there we have the tomatoes, um, we have

Karen Bledsoe: Potatoes.

Julia Bledsoe: *a lot* of potatoes this year. Um, corn?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Hadley Bledsoe: Corn.

Julia Bledsoe: And then a couple other things.

Hadley Bledsoe: Okra.

Julia Bledsoe: Okra.

Karen Bledsoe: No--

Julia Bledsoe: No?

Karen Bledsoe: Maybe just a little bit. Green beans.

Hadley Bledsoe: Oh, we have berries.

Karen Bledsoe: But this is in the garden. Green beans?

Julia Bledsoe: And then, down in a lower pasture, our dad started a new one with also lots of potatoes. Um some,

Hadley Bledsoe: Buckwheat.

Julia Bledsoe: Buckwheat.

Hadley Bledsoe: Pumpkins.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. Some squash, too.

Danille Christensen: And is there a reason why you have two gardens?

Hadley Bledsoe: Um, ours got overgrown.

Karen Bledsoe: But, also--not necessarily overgrown. We'd go on vacation, and it *was* overgrown, of course, but ah, the potato--it's a learning lesson.

Hadley Bledsoe: Bugs.

Karen Bledsoe: The potato beetles.

Danille Christensen: So you're trying some fresh ground?

0:19:01

Julia Bledsoe: Yes.

Karen Bledsoe: Trying some fresh ground, so hopefully that should help squash the potato beetles.

Danille Christensen: [Laughs] Well, there's nothing more satisfying than digging up potatoes at the end of the season, I think.

Karen Bledsoe: I agree.

Danille Christensen: So I hope that works out. Um, is there anything--so we talked a little bit about the ways that you kind of rationed-- this would be your great-grandmother's green beans, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: In my family we rationed canned peaches like that, because we had five kids and we could go through a quart in *one second*, and so everyone got *one* half of a peach, you know?

Karen Bledsoe: Yes. [Laughs]

Danille Christensen: But it made us appreciate it. Are there other things like that that are really special foods to you now, or that you really value--and if so, why do you value them?

Julia Bledsoe: Want to go?

Hadley Bledsoe: I don't want to.

Karen Bledsoe: Well, what's your favorite food that you get from the garden? What do you love?

Julia Bledsoe: I love our potatoes from the garden. That's one of my favorite foods, definitely.

Danille Christensen: Are these--Do you know what kind of potatoes they are?

Julia Bledsoe: Uh, yeah. We have a variety. [0:20:02] I think last year's were the bigger ones.

Karen Bledsoe: Did you like the bigger ones, or did you like the fingerlings?

Julia Bledsoe: Personally, I like the fingerlings a lot.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: Very buttery.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: So you like the taste and the texture?

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. My mom like roasts them in the oven. They get really crispy and nice.

Hadley Bledsoe: I like the fingerlings, too, and I also like the tomatoes? Because they just taste really good.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. We love to use the tomatoes to make bruschetta.

Danille Christensen: Tell me about how you make that.

Julia Bledsoe: So, we make homemade bread, and then on top we'll add in our mixture of tomatoes,

Hadley Bledsoe: Basil.

Julia Bledsoe: -- basil, salt, pepper, olive oil. Yeah. It's one of our small Italian dishes.

Danille Christensen: And how did you learn to make that?

Julia Bledsoe: I'm pretty sure our mom taught us. Don't know when. A long time ago.

Danille Christensen: How did *you* learn?

Karen Bledsoe: We love to travel, and when we *can* we *do* travel. [0:21:01] And we're very fortunate to the fact that we have very close family friends that *live* in Italy, and so bruschetta is something that you bring out like bread and butter in the United States. And it's so simple, but yet *so* incredibly delicious. Um, I can remember the first time I had it, and "Why don't we do this at home more often?" And it just became a staple. So it was just watching family friends of ours create some really basically *peasant* food while we were there visiting them.

Danille Christensen: So that's something that has been sort of introduced into your immediate family because of your travels.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: Did you have, um—in the Italian side of your family were there—I've talked to many students who are from Italian families, and they have big get-togethers where

they can tomatoes and make tomato sauce. Is that something that has been like an extended family tradition or is it . . . ?

Karen Bledsoe: I know *exactly* what you're talking about. We have friends that do that, but with ours not so much. [0:22:01] With ours growing up in Lancaster County, it was really important, and I think I passed this tradition down to my children from my grandparents' side, Pennsylvania Dutch *German* roots, they were always in season. I grew up picking cherries, apples, strawberries, peaches. And wherever we have lived, because my family, we moved around quite a bit for my husband's job, when they lived in California, we would pick cherries and then *wherever* we lived we always picked strawberries. So Julia and I, when we were just walking our farm property, we caught eyes on a bush, and it was an elderberry. And now we see elderberry wherever we go! So, just kind of having foraging eyes? You know, we even pick the walnuts from the tree.

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm. We also have grapes, too, growing right by our house that last year we made into grape juice, and we also made jam out of those.

Danille Christensen: When do you harvest those?

Julia Bledsoe: Pretty close to now.

Karen Bledsoe: Yeah.

Julia Bledsoe: Maybe like a couple more weeks?

0:23:01

Danille Christensen: Okay.

Karen Bledsoe: August. We just harvested some last week but then the ones in Raleigh will be ready probably in two to three weeks.

Danille Christensen: I know there are some around here that are native grapes that are really good after the first frost, cause it makes the sugars get really sweet.

Julia Bledsoe: Oh.

Karen Bledsoe: Interesting. Are those muscadines or scuppernongs?

Danille Christensen: No. These are more like fox grapes?

Karen Bledsoe: Oh, I've not heard of those. That's interesting.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. So keep a lookout for those if you see em.

Karen Bledsoe: One thing we learned from my grandparents in Pennsylvania, everything is big on butter, so we love to make apple butter. And so we'll harvest the apples and we'll put it in a crockpot and get it all spiced up.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. We recently just went to one of our neighbor's properties and they let us pick their apples, um, and blueberries. That was last weekend.

Danille Christensen: Tell me more about how you make apple butter. So you use a crockpot. . .

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: Do you have any special spices that you add? How do you know when it's finished? Walk me through that process.

Karen Bledsoe: What do we do with the apples first?

0:24:01

Julia Bledsoe: We peel them and we're cutting them up, putting them in the pot, and we're adding spice.

Karen Bledsoe: What spices do we like most? We like the cinnamon.

Julia Bledsoe: Yes.

Karen Bledsoe: A little bit of clove.

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Karen Bledsoe: We added a little bit of brown sugar, vanilla and then kind of put it in there to do the magic. And do you remember, you wake up the next morning and you smash--

Julia Bledsoe: It's got that smell, too.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: How do you know when it's done? I have an apple butter tasting with my students every semester.

Karen Bledsoe: Oh, I *love* that.

Danille Christensen: Because apple butters taste so different, right, depending on who makes them, and they have different textures. . . . So, what's your apple butter like, if you had to describe it, like you would a-, um- you know how when people are talking about fancy wines or bread they have all these-- can you describe your apple butter to me?

Hadley Bledsoe: Smooth.

Karen Bledsoe: What are some flavors that you taste in it?

Hadley Bledsoe: I mostly taste the cinnamon and the apple? [0:25:00] It's really good on bread.

Danille Christensen: Do you have special varieties that you use for it, varieties of apple?

Hadley Bledsoe: Not really.

Julia Bledsoe: We like to use whatever's in season.

Karen Bledsoe: Whatever we have off like, a neighbor's tree or our tree, we just kind of throw it all in there. No specific apples. Just put it all in there and let it mingle. [Laughter]

Danille Christensen: So it tastes a little bit different, each batch that you make?

Karen Bledsoe: It really does.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: Do you ever use Red Hots or anything like that?

Karen Bledsoe: That's interesting, to make it really hot cinnamon.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. There's a tradition in some of the areas about using cinnamon candies to kind of enhance the flavor, too.

Julia Bledsoe: Oh, never heard of that.

Karen Bledsoe: That would actually be really good.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. Or using clove oil instead of clove powder, cinnamon oil. This is if you're making like gigantic vats. [Laughter]

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: I like that, though. One interesting thing, my girlfriend, one of my best friends, she just had her muscadines come ripe on her plant. I'm, like, how did your muscadines become so ripe before mine? [0:26:00] But instead of just doing muscadine jelly she did muscadine-jalapeno jelly.

Danille Christensen: Mmm.

Julia Bledsoe: Oh.

Karen Bledsoe: Oh, wow! [DC laughs] That was amazing. All the varieties.

Danille Christensen: I've done elderberry-muscadine-blackberry before, which is quite delicious.

Karen Bledsoe: Wow.

Julia Bledsoe: Ooh.

Karen Bledsoe: What do *you* like to can?

Danille Christensen: Oh, I have mostly done just water bath canning? Just because it's easier than getting out my pressure canner and I'm not actually a huge fan of canned green beans. I like peaches. I did a lot of peach jams, and I did some pickled peaches this year, which are really good in smoothies, which you might not expect, but they give it a little tang. You don't have to add any lemon juice or anything like that. I do a variety of jams and jellies that I like to give to people as gifts. And, I do applesauce. . . .

Karen Bledsoe: Yes, that's what we do every year.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: Apple butter. Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: That's wonderful.

Danille Christensen: So, a lot of fruits right now, and tomatoes. I'll always do tomatoes.

0:27:00

Karen Bledsoe: I find it so much more satisfying to do the fruits, to be honest with you. I love that.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. Its um--the more perishable things, and the things that don't freeze well--I like to can those.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm. Do you ever ferment?

Danille Christensen: I have not.

Karen Bledsoe: That's new to me, as well.

Danille Christensen: When I lived in Hawai'i we would make kimchi in the windowsill, which is, like, cabbage and hot peppers. . .

Karen Bledsoe: Yes.

Julia Bledsoe: Oh!

Karen Bledsoe: Supposed to be really good for your gut.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. Yeah. I like most fermented things, but I feel like I spend all my time reading about these processes! which doesn't leave me as much time as I'd like to actually do them.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: Do you want to tell her the one drink that you really like that's fermented?

Hadley Bledsoe: Kombucha.

Danille Christensen: Ah. Do you make your own?

Hadley Bledsoe: We do.

Julia Bledsoe: We'll make it every now and then.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: So do you keep a SCOBY or . . . ?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. We keep our SCOBY. We let it sit for a couple months.

Karen Bledsoe: A couple weeks on the counter.

Julia Bledsoe: Weeks, yeah.

0:28:00

Danille Christensen: So tell me about that. What's that process like? So we know what a SCOBY is, but other people might not know, so can you describe that?

Hadley Bledsoe: I don't know how to describe it. [Laughter]

Karen Bledsoe: So let's start with the process. When you say, "Mom, can we please have homemade kombucha?" what do we do?

Julia Bledsoe: And that happens often. [Laughter]

Hadley Bledsoe: We take tea--

Karen Bledsoe: What kind of tea?

Hadley Bledsoe: Black tea. We put it in water, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. We let it steep.

Hadley Bledsoe: We steam it, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Steep it.

Julia Bledsoe: Steep it.

Hadley Bledsoe: Steep it. And then we wait, like, a couple weeks.

Karen Bledsoe: Well, then , so we steep the tea and we let it cool down. What do we have to add to the tea? Remember, we add a little bit of sugar.

Hadley Bledsoe: Sugar.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm. And then, what does the SCOBY look like? We get it out of the fridge and you're, like, "Eeww!"

Hadley Bledsoe: It looks kind of like a flat piece of jelly but smooth.

Karen Bledsoe: “A flat piece of white jelly that’s smooth”; that’s a good way to describe it. But it’s a living thing.

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Karen Bledsoe: So after that tea concoction is cooled, you put it in a big jar and then you add the SCOBY and then we let it sit. Do you remember how long? It depends on the temperature but you--

Hadley Bledsoe: Six weeks?

Karen Bledsoe: Not six weeks.

Julia Bledsoe: It also changes the flavor.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

0:29:01

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm. About two weeks, typically, you let it sit. And that’s the first fermentation, and then you could add fruit to it for a flavor fermentation, but we usually just drink it after the first.

Danille Christensen: Oh, okay. I was going to ask if you have any special concoctions that you add to it.

Julia Bledsoe: Um, I don’t think we have any *special* concoctions.

Karen Bledsoe: What’s your favorite flavor?

Julia Bledsoe: Um, I don’t know. I like it when there’s ginger and fruit in it, and I like it when it’s not bitter but not sweet. It’s kind of like . . .

Karen Bledsoe: It still has the vinegar kick?

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, vinegar taste to it.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: And I would say that not every young person likes kombucha. Is there anything specifically that you like about it?

Julia Bledsoe: I don't like tea and that is the only thing with tea in it I will drink and love it.

Hadley Bledsoe: I just like the taste of it and how it's kind of sparkly, kind of like sparkling water.

0:30:01

Karen Bledsoe: My theory is we don't have soft drinks at the house? So it's the closest little thing they have that tastes kind of different.

Danille Christensen: It's a special drink.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm. And then, do you want to tell her if we have a lot of SCOBYs we ask friends if they want em, but what do we have in the yard that loves the SCOBY?

Julia Bledsoe: Oh, we have chickens at home.

Hadley Bledsoe: Chickens, yeah.

Julia Bledsoe: We used to have a lot more but currently we have four and they range from eight years old to . . . what, four?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm. They're all named.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, they're all named and we're planning to get some more, soon.

Hadley Bledsoe: The oldest one is so old.

Danille Christensen: And these are all layers?

Julia Bledsoe: Yes, they're all hens.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yes.

Julia Bledsoe: And so we like to give them the SCOBYS and whatever scraps from our garden that we don't use.

Hadley Bledsoe: We have this one hen that lives outside the lifespan. Remember, that really old one? She's, like, ten.

Julia Bledsoe: Jesamina?

Hadley Bledsoe: Jesamina. How old is she?

Julia Bledsoe: We got her in 2013.

Hadley Bledsoe: So she'd be twelve? Ten?

0:31:00

Danille Christensen: She's up there, in age.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: And does she like the SCOBYS especially?

Hadley Bledsoe: I don't really know. I don't really watch them eat it.

Danille Christensen: Um, so, we could talk a lot about chickens . . . but I'm gonna bring us back to baking.

Karen Bledsoe: Yes. Let's refocus.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: So you've already mentioned that you make your own pizza crust, right? And that you make bread for-- I guess you wouldn't say "pizza crust," you'd say "pizza dough."

Karen Bledsoe: Pizza dough.

Danille Christensen: And you make your own bread that you use for the bruschetta. What else?

Karen Bledsoe: But our favorite thing we love to bake-- what is our favorite cake that we love for family birthdays. Like, if you had to say one cake, what would it be?

Hadley Bledsoe: Chocolate peanut butter.

Danille Christensen: Tell me about that.

Hadley Bledsoe: [Laughs] I don't even know.

Karen Bledsoe: Yes, you do. Describe it. Why do we love it? What does it taste like?

Danille Christensen: Is it a layer cake? Is it a flat cake?

0:31:59

Hadley Bledsoe: It's actually not that layered. Um, it tastes really good with the peanut butter and the flavors just go well together.

Danille Christensen: So is the peanut butter mixed throughout the dough or do you have marbled strips of peanut butter in there?

Julia Bledsoe: So recently I just made this cake-- was it last week?-- for my dad's birthday. It's a recipe I use all the time and I also use when I make Bundt cakes. It was a two-layer cake, um, and I use cocoa powder, other stuff, and it gets very dark and rich and creamy. And then I use the peanut butter for the frosting on it.

Danille Christensen: Okay.

Julia Bledsoe: And then, this time I tried doing chocolate lettering on top.

Danille Christensen: This is the cake that Hadley was just talking about?

Julia Bledsoe: Yes.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yes.

Danille Christensen: How did it work?

Julia Bledsoe: It turned out pretty good. [0:32:59] And then we ended it up eating it down by the creek, after having our awesome meal that we also drank the grape juice out that we made.

Karen Bledsoe: That was pretty cool. That doesn't happen very often, but that was pretty neat.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. So tell me, how did you learn how to bake and what do you like about baking?

Julia Bledsoe: We've always been baking for a long time. We've always been very crafty. And since our mom homeschooled us we were always able to do a lot of hands-on activities, and

baking was one of them? I love baking because I can make anything I want to and, um, I love like--and [laughing] that's the only way math is fun to me, all the fractions and stuff. And I always love trying new things. A while ago ,for the first time I tried making cannolis, Italian dessert.

Hadley Bledsoe: Oh, those were good.

0:33:59

Julia Bledsoe: Since I didn't have like the proper tools to make the cannoli shells, which you normally you put them, you fry them—right?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, fry them, I tried using our Italian pizzelle maker. And the Italian pizzelle maker, it makes these thin cookies that are classically normally lemon flavored, but this time I took it out a little early and I tried to roll it into the shell shape. And then later I used-- I'm just forgetting the main ingredient for the . . .

Karen Bledsoe: Ricotta.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, ricotta cheese. And then I used that to make the filling and added in some chocolate chips and other stuff.

Karen Bledsoe: That was a big surprise to me.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: I never--I'd thought about making them. I always thought, "No, we can't make em!" And I come home and there's a whole pile of cannoli. That was a huge, beautiful surprise.

Danille Christensen: That sounds like creative problem solving, too.

Hadley Bledsoe: The first thing I ever baked was eggs.

Karen Bledsoe: You made eggs, um-hm.

Hadley Bledsoe: I really like baking cookies. [0:34:59] I have this special recipe I always use? And I just like making anything.

Danille Christensen: So both of you had said that you liked kinda the *freedom* that baking gives you, that you can make anything that you want, which is interesting to me because baking is also a very complex kinda chemical process, right?

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm, yeah.

Danille Christensen: You have to make sure you have *some* ingredients in the right ratios in order to make it work.

Julia Bledsoe: Following the steps.

Danille Christensen: So tell me about, how baking gives you this kind of freedom. What is it that you experiment with or that makes you feel like you can make *anything* when you bake?

Hadley Bledsoe: I guess the fact that you don't really, you get to follow the basic things, but you don't always have to add something like chocolate chips. You don't always add something else to make it different.

Danille Christensen: So what's something that you might substitute *instead* of chocolate chips?

0:36:01

Hadley Bledsoe: Um, oatmeal, or, raspberries?

Danille Christensen: Okay. So you like experimenting mainly with the flavors in things like cookies?

Hadley Bledsoe: Um-hm, yeah.

Danille Christensen: Is that one of the things that you bake the most?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yes.

Danille Christensen: How about you, Julia?

Julia Bledsoe: Well, everyone always has a different version of a recipe. That plays a lot into heritage, too, where you've grown up. I think it just gives you the freedom because even though there *is* a recipe you have to follow, like Hadley said, it's open to all these different changes. And even though it's like structured, and there are rules you have to follow, if you make a mistake, sometimes it just brings you to a new recipe or new flavor you haven't tried before--and so it's open to many possibilities.

Danille Christensen: Can you think of an example of one that happened to you? You started out making something and it turned into something else?

Hadley Bledsoe: Oh, I have one.

Julia Bledsoe: Well, we have one for our sister. She was making--this was probably about a year ago.

0:37:00

Danille Christensen: This is your older sister?

Julia Bledsoe: Yes, our older sister who's a senior.

Hadley Bledsoe: A cake for--

Julia Bledsoe: Her best friend.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Julia Bledsoe: And first round, I mean, first round she accidentally added in-- what was it-- too much baking soda or something?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Julia Bledsoe: And it ended up getting very flat, got this weird flavor to it.

Hadley Bledsoe: And it was like, it took an hour to bake.

Julia Bledsoe: [Laughs] And she ended up spending the rest of the night staying up to make second cake. Sometimes it doesn't always work out, but it also teaches you like, a lesson.

Danille Christensen: So in that case she wasn't able to transform it into something else, but she was able to make the next one better.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: I actually did not look at the label on a can of spice in our cupboard once, and I put a half cup of nutmeg instead of taco seasoning into some ground beef--

Julia Bledsoe: Oh! oo

Karen Bledsoe: Oh, my.

Danille Christensen: -- which is definitely a learning experience, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Yes, for sure. [Laughing] That's funny. [0:38:01] The first time, I told my-- I can remember, I think I must've been in fifth or sixth grade, we were baking a cake. We were having family over when we were living in Pennsylvania. And I'm, like, "Mom, I can do it. I can make this cake." And I remember I made this cake and we got to salt. "Surely you don't just add a half teaspoon of salt! That's just so little." I added a half cup of salt into the cake.

Hadley Bledsoe: Ooh!

Karen Bledsoe: I'll never forget that moment. [Laughing] You really verify what the ingredients can do!

Danille Christensen: I know. Yeah. I was trying to be a "good cook" and not taste as I went along.

Karen Bledsoe: Yes!

Danille Christensen: You know? Like, I was in Home Ec. at the time--and so I didn't realize until after that I'd made such a mistake. But it's also a good chance to see how members of your family will react. [laughs]

Karen Bledsoe: That's right. Growing up Thanksgivings were always really special to me. I had my great-grandmother, my grandmother, my mom-- my dad loves to cook, too-- all in the kitchen, Lancaster County. Small kitchens, right. You do not--everybody thinks these days that you need a humongous kitchen to cook. [0:38:59] I mean, I have the smallest little [19]70s kitchen and I make the best stuff in that little kitchen. But everybody gathered around, whether

you're making stuffing to put in the bird, or you're making your cranberry sauce, or you're making creamed corn, everybody had a job to do. And that was always special to me as a little girl growing up. So I can remember my aunt who was one of my best friends, we'd talk every day when I was making dinner and then she was making dinner, we'd just have it on speaker, and Hadley wanted to help, and Julia wanted to help crack the eggs. And the *milk* spilled, and the *egg* didn't get in the bowl. And I was, like, "They cannot cook with me!" And my aunt just said, "Karen, they're never gonna learn to cook unless you teach em now. Allow them to cook and make a mess. That's what kids are for." And so, we have lots of messes, but it gets cleaned up.

Danille Christensen: So, it sounds like cooking is a process in your family that doesn't require perfection, and yet---I have had the baked goods that you have made at the Rise and Shine Market, and they were *delicious*. [0:40:01] So, tell me what do you think are some of the most surprising things that you've learned as you have been baking, that have helped you create these really quality products?

Hadley Bledsoe: Probably the difference between baking powder and soda.

Danille Christensen: Okay.

Hadley Bledsoe: Because I made cookies one time and I put in baking powder instead of baking soda, and they were totally flat, and then--but they tasted really good? So for me it's kind of like the difference between what different things can do when you bake.

Danille Christensen: So like do you experiment with shortening versus butter, for instance, to see how that changes your cookies?

Hadley Bledsoe: I've actually never used shortening.

Karen Bledsoe: We use a lot of butter.

Hadley Bledsoe: Probably using different-- I don't know.

Karen Bledsoe: I know one. [0:41:00] Ok, so, you make your special cookies. You and Daddy have that secret recipe that I'm not allowed to see. If you refrigerate the dough before you put it in the oven, what's the difference?

Hadley Bledsoe: Well, I've never done that.

Karen Bledsoe: Yes, you have.

Hadley Bledsoe: I've done it, but I've never done it to *those* type of cookies. I think, I added too much butter one time, and they were huge.

Danille Christensen: They were really flat, um-hm.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Julia Bledsoe: Spread out.

Karen Bledsoe: But there is something to be said about following a recipe. [Laughing]

Danille Christensen: I'm betting that if you refrigerate the dough before you cook it, that it retains more of its shape.

Julia Bledsoe: Compact.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: Is that right? So, Julia, what's something that you've learned as you have grown more experienced as a baker?

Julia Bledsoe: I've learned there's always a level of patience you have to have. Like for the chocolate lettering I used I didn't temper it right that time because I was too impatient and sort of rushed through the process. [0:42:00] So that leaves--

Danille Christensen: In terms of gradually heating it, um-hm.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, in terms of gradually heating it for, like, thirty seconds and letting it sit for a little bit, then going back and forth between that. Um, and in that sense, since the chocolate didn't temper, it got messy, and I had to work around that. So as you said earlier it's a bunch of problem solving. And then, patience also has to play into like, how long I'm cooking it for. And there's always a high quality for when you're serving, or selling food at a public venue. You always want it to be perfect.

Danille Christensen: It sounds like you have identified what kinds of processes you can experiment with, and which ones are really kind of fundamental to getting the kind of product that you want, like with the tempering, right? So you can add flavors to the chocolate but not mess so much with the process of tempering it.

0:43:01

Karen Bledsoe: Mmhmm. As far as *deciding* what to make for the Rise and Shine Market, I really appreciate the way Julia's thought process worked, where she wanted to make something that was like a cake, but, cupcakes are overdone. And a lot of people do cookies. And she's, like, "I need to do something traditional that people would appreciate," so she came up with mini-Bundt cakes. And everybody's, like, "Oh, mini-Bundt cakes! I've never seen these."

Danille Christensen: Which are about three inches wide, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Three inches with the hole in the middle.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: And everybody just kind of falls in love with the mini-Bundt cake, cause they remember their grandmother or great-grandmother making a large Bundt cake for a church function. And so that was really fun. And then, do you want to talk to her about how you decided on the flavors between the lemon and the chocolate; what was your thought process?

Julia Bledsoe: So the first time I ever sold at the market I did a chocolate Bundt cake and a lemon Bundt cake, and so based on how that sold for the first time I changed it up a little bit. [0:44:01] And it also depends on how much time I have to bake it.

Danille Christensen: And how did you change it up?

Julia Bledsoe: So the second time around I think I just did chocolate that time really, and um, because I didn't have as much time. And then, that chocolate is also always popular. And then, I'd also like to try new flavors in the future to see how that works out.

Danille Christensen: I've had your lemon Bundt cake and it was quite delicious. Let's say--just for the recording, let's talk a little bit about what the Rise and Shine Market *is* and how you got involved in it, and then we can come back to kind of some of the things that you sell there and how you made those decisions. So, tell me a little bit about the market and how you got involved.

Hadley Bledsoe: umm....

Karen Bledsoe: Do you want me to preface this first?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Julia Bledsoe: Sure.

Karen Bledsoe: That's why Patrick County is so special. Through 4-H they created this Rise and Shine Market, so if kids have crafts--

Julia Bledsoe: Young entrepreneurs.

0:45:00

Karen Bledsoe: -- to be entrepreneurs, crafts or baked goods or jewelry they can make it and sell, and how great is that to learn to not only be there and speak with people you don't know, but also to learn to be a salesperson and to get some money for the goods that you make. So it's a great partnership between Patrick County 4-H and the farmers' market. It's a beautiful thing because it doesn't happen at many places.

Danille Christensen: And did you have to apply to be part of the program? What was that process like?

Julia Bledsoe: It was very simple to apply. We just had to talk to the woman who ran it. We talked for a while. We had to fill out some forms.

Karen Bledsoe: But what was on the form? What type of . . . ?

Julia Bledsoe: And the form was about business planning, and it had questions about like, how you're gonna sell it, financially how are you going to make more money than what you're paying to get the goods.

Danille Christensen: So, how were you going to make a profit based on your expenses of actually producing the food. [0:46:02] And this is Leigh Ann Hazelwood that you were talking to?

Karen Bledsoe: Yes.

Julia Bledsoe: Yes.

Danille Christensen: Okay. Do you remember anything about the process, Hadley?

Hadley Bledsoe: I remember the website that we had to go onto. Wait . . . Oh, the process? . . . I don't know.

Danille Christensen: It's okay.

Karen Bledsoe: Well, so the process talked about how are you going to market your product.

Hadley Bledsoe: Oh, I would set it at a low price, so then more people would buy it? But if you set it at a high price less people would buy it, but you would kind of still make more money.

Danille Christensen: So tell me, what are the things that you have sold at the Rise and Shine Market?

Hadley Bledsoe: Mostly lemonade.

Danille Christensen: Okay. Lemonade. And why did you decide on lemonade?

Hadley Bledsoe: Mostly because it's just refreshing. After you--like, it's hot out, it just tastes good.

0:47:01

Danille Christensen: So you really had the experience of your customer in mind when you decided on that?

Hadley Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: And is this lemonade that you make yourself or is it--

Hadley Bledsoe: Yes.

Karen Bledsoe: What's special about your lemonade? It was not just plain lemonade.

Hadley Bledsoe: The first time I added different flavors. I had lime-lemonade and raspberry and normal. And I really like doing that because it just, just like, you have more options to choose from.

Danille Christensen: And I bet your customers appreciate it, as well.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah, um-hm.

Danille Christensen: And I know that you also were selling some bookmarks--

Julia Bledsoe: Candles.

Hadley Bledsoe: Candles.

Danille Christensen: -- and candles.

Julia Bledsoe: And then, we also had cookies.

Hadley Bledsoe: Oh, yeah, cookies.

Danille Christensen: So [to Hadley] you're the cookie part of this team. Julia, what kinds of things have you sold at the market?

Julia Bledsoe: So we both sold the cookies together before, too, and then I do the Bundt cakes.

Hadley Bledsoe: We split--

Julia Bledsoe: And then, we split the profits from the bookmarks and--

Hadley Bledsoe: The candles.

Julia Bledsoe: -- the candles.

0:48:00

Danille Christensen: And are you using the profits to save for anything in particular?

Julia Bledsoe: I have nothing in mind particularly I'm saving for right now? I'm just saving in general for the future. Um, I don't know. It's almost important to me just to be able to save and have my own money so I don't have to depend on my parents as much.

Danille Christensen: Is there a goal that you set for each market about how much you'd like to make? Or is it worth your while in terms of the profit or is it more important in terms of the experience?

Julia Bledsoe: I think both are valuable to have, because for me, when I was younger, I wasn't as comfortable speaking to people and speaking publicly? So I think the Rise and Shine Market has also helped with my confidence and when I communicate with customers? And then, the profit has always been good, too, and everyone's really nice. And it's good to see like familiar faces there.

Danille Christensen: So it's kind of a social event for you, as well?

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm, yeah.

0:49:02

Danille Christensen: In addition to the Bundt cakes, do you make anything else?

Julia Bledsoe: Not too much else besides the cookies. I'd like to try other things in the future. I'm just not sure yet what. I want to again do something different that's not as common.

Danille Christensen: Walk me through the process of getting ready for the market. How far in advance do you have to actually make the-- how long does it take you to make a batch? What other kinds of things do you have to do in terms of packaging?

Karen Bledsoe: I would just like to say, if I could not bake tomorrow? The family would be good in Julia's hands.

Danille Christensen: [Laughs]

Karen Bledsoe: Her cookies are the most beautiful cookies, perfect shape. I mean, I've been baking for a long time here. She totally has the cookie medal in our house.

Danille Christensen: How do you ensure that kind of aesthetic regularity?

Julia Bledsoe: I just do what feels right. I don't try to be like perfect. I don't know. Thankfully for me it just happens to turn out right most of the time.

0:50:01

Danille Christensen: So you don't use a special-- like a cookie scoop or anything else to make sure that they're--

Julia Bledsoe: I'll use a cookie scoop occasionally but then sometimes I also just use a spoon.

Danille Christensen: Um-hm. So you just eyeball it?

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. Just go through what feels right. Thankfully. And hopefully it turns out.

Hadley Bledsoe: I normally just do what it says, but then if it needs more of something, like more sugar, I would add more sugar to get the taste good.

Danille Christensen: I see. So you're both using a lot of your body and kind of sensing what feels right to you for your particular products?

Hadley Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: How far in advance do you have to start getting ready for the market?

Julia Bledsoe: It's about the whole day before we spend, um, cause we go out and get the ingredients.

Hadley Bledsoe: Sometimes you have to order them a week before, cause sometimes it takes a long time to get them.

0:50:59

Julia Bledsoe: And for presentation the boxing, the packaging we use, we'll have to order that, and we order that earlier and then when that comes--

Hadley Bledsoe: We bake everything the day before, so then we don't have to get bugs on it?

Danille Christensen: [Laughing] Tell me more about that? How do bugs come into the picture?

Hadley Bledsoe: Not really but like--

Karen Bledsoe: You just want it super fresh.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah, fresh.

Danille Christensen: I see. Okay.

Julia Bledsoe: So I think I start most of the time making the Bundt cakes, and I let that bake, cause it takes longer to make. And then when that's cooking, when that batch is done I'll start on the cookies, and I'll put that in the oven afterwards. And then, I think once before, too, I have made-- not a frosting but . . .

Karen Bledsoe: Oh, an icing.

Julia Bledsoe: An icing for it, too. And I did that once and that turned out good. But most of the time I just do powdered sugar on top. Um, and then, it takes a while to package it, cause we have to fold the boxes into the shape, get the labels on.

Danille Christensen: These are square cardboard boxes with the cellophane top that you can see through to the product--

0:52:04

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm, yeah. And then, we have the stickers that will say the product and what's in it, because that also really matters for allergies and other things.

Danille Christensen: Um-hm.

Karen Bledsoe: I think the first time we ever did the market, um, she baked all day, but then you have to let it cool--but you still want to keep it fresh, so you can't put it in the box right away, cause then it's all moist and sticky in there.

Danille Christensen: Um-hm.

Karen Bledsoe: So just having shelf space in your refrigerator if things need to be refrigerated and kind of thinking ahead about how just to keep it the freshest possible.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. What's your strategy for that?

Julia Bledsoe: The molds I use it's very easy to pop them out, um, so I'll just normally let them sit on a tray with maybe like a cloth over them, and I'll just let them cool down. And while I'm doing that I'll make like the boxes, and then when they cool I'll put them in it. And then, Hadley also has to make her lemonade, which that also takes time, and so--

0:53:02

Karen Bledsoe: You want to talk about the difference between the first time you made Hadley's Lush Lemonade to the second time? Remember the packaging versus what you went with the second time?

Hadley Bledsoe: The first time I had these like bottles? and they were, like, that tall, I guess? And I sold them for three dollars because it costed a lot to get the tops, and then the bottle and everything I need for it? And then, the second time and the third time I just used these like--

Julia Bledsoe: Plastic cups.

Hadley Bledsoe: Well, kind of. But I put them in these containers that had a little spout where you could just see how much you want with it.

Danille Christensen: So you served it "on tap" instead of packing separately in bottles.

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah, um-hm.

Danille Christensen: And was that a financial decision for you, mostly?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: Yes. I also had some of the lemonade. Very good. [Laughing] I feel really privileged that I was able to test out all of these things before.

0:54:00

Karen Bledsoe: That's pretty neat, yes. The bookmarks were a new thing for us.

Julia Bledsoe: And that was a big hit. We sold a bunch of them. And so the bookmarks, they were flowers from our garden and all over on our property. And then, we have a freeze-dryer. Did we dry them in there?

Hadley Bledsoe: No.

Julia Bledsoe: No, no. We pressed them and dehydrated them.

Karen Bledsoe: Dehydrated them in the oven.

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm. And then, we were packaging that and that took a pretty long time, because we were trying to get it in there and make sure the sides were all sealed up. And then, the candles, that was a new thing for us, too, and that was also very enjoyable. Um, it was organic beeswax that we melted down, and we also had lavender we put on top of it.

Danille Christensen: And do you see yourselves expanding your operation in the future?

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. I can see us redoing those same things, maybe adding more in the future. Not sure yet but I'm open to anything.

Karen Bledsoe: What would you like to add?

0:54:59

Hadley Bledsoe: Um, I would like to add different types like I did the first time.

Danille Christensen: Different types of lemonade?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: So let me get this straight, you want to do your lemonade again, but go ahead and tell what you would like to do with the lemonade.

Hadley Bledsoe: I would like to get them how I had it the third time, with the containers-- not in the containers. Where you just--

Julia Bledsoe: On tap?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah, on tap. But I would like to have different varieties so people could try different types of it.

Danille Christensen: So you have several different containers that they can all try. And do you imagine after Julia graduates and is moving on to other things, do you think you'll keep going with the market?

Hadley Bledsoe: Um-hm, yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: Do you think since the oven would be open, do you think you'll bake anything?

Hadley Bledsoe: Yes.

Karen Bledsoe: What would you like to bake? Tell us.

Hadley Bledsoe: Cookies.

Karen Bledsoe: What kind?

0:56:00

Hadley Bledsoe: Chocolate chip and maybe cannolis? Kind of like what Julia made.

Karen Bledsoe: Cannolis. That's a new one. That's a surprise.

Hadley Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: So Julia talked a little bit about the appeal of the Bundt cakes, that they're different, that they're miniature, they might call up some kinds of memories that people have.

Why do you think people like cookies so much?

Hadley Bledsoe: Because I guess they just taste good. And it's not like too much like a cupcake with icing. It's just you have one thing that you can add different things *on* it? So you get to pick I guess what things you want to have with it, like milk and cookies?

Danille Christensen: So there's a variety with a cookie.

Hadley Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: It also seems helpful at a farmers' market just to be able to carry a cookie around and chew.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. In the beginning cookies-- they weren't actually our idea. They were our older sister's idea.

0:57:01

Hadley Bledsoe: Yeah.

Julia Bledsoe: Because one of the days we were coming back from soccer, and she was up there, she made the cookies for the market and those turned out to be a really big success and so we continued doing that because of her. Um, and I think they're just popular because they're just a classic dessert, snack, and they're the perfect size, and it's like easy to share them.

Danille Christensen: Um-hm. It seems like you have a good mix of a very familiar item at your stand then also something a little bit more unusual with the Bundt cakes.

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: We have been going for almost an hour, so I know everyone gets a little antsy after that so there's just a couple of big questions that I wanted to ask to wrap up. So this is kind of a *really* big question that I found people have interesting answers to. Do you think there are kinds of people who like to bake and kinds of people who like to—like, do you see a difference between baking and cooking? [0:58:03] If so, what is that difference?

Hadley Bledsoe: Cooking is like meals, like dinner, lunch, breakfast? But baking is like desserts and stuff that you would normally, like, I guess use for a show? or something. Something that would just taste good, but it's not like a full meal.

Danille Christensen: Okay.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. I've always seen baking as more of like a confectionary, sweet desserts and then I've seen cooking as like, the meals you eat as a family and more of that like, savory meal with vegetables and all the other stuff.

Danille Christensen: So would you call making pizza dough baking or making bruschetta baking?

0:59:01

Hadley Bledsoe: Cooking.

Julia Bledsoe: I would call that cooking.

Hadley Bledsoe: Same.

Danille Christensen: Yeah?

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: Are either of you-- do you make bread?

Hadley Bledsoe: Not really.

Julia Bledsoe: We mainly leave that to our mom, but we have helped out with the pizza dough a bunch and I've made that a handful of times.

Danille Christensen: Would *you* say that the dough is baking or cooking?

Karen Bledsoe: That's a hard one.

Hadley Bledsoe: Both maybe.

Karen Bledsoe: I would say the dough would be baking. I enjoy baking I think more than cooking. Um, little differences. I know what you're going with the confectionary side, for sure, because I think of baking as making the yummy stuff.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. Like these special things that are in addition.

Karen Bledsoe: But bread to me is like the yummy stuff, too, right? And you can eat it with your hands. Anything you're kneading or stirring I feel like that's more baking. Our family has had a sourdough starter going for about three years and we've really enjoyed making sourdough bread.

Danille Christensen: Oh, wow.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. We call it her fourth child because it's also a living thing.

Danille Christensen: [Laughing] Yeah. You got your SCOBY going on, you've got your sourdough.

1:00:00

Karen Bledsoe: That's right. But I should tell you, when I first got married I could not cook at all. I would watch my mom and my aunts. I would help out on the side, but it was *really* just kind of teaching myself and realizing [laughing] I needed to do it out of necessity. So it's important for me before my children leave the house to teach them how to cook and bake.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: My mom tried. I was just busy. [Laughing]

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, I'm definitely a lot better of a baker than I am a cooker. One of the nights when our parents were out we had some of our friends over, and it was my job to cook the spaghetti and make the sauce. Well, I was, like, "Okay, how much seasoning should I add?" And my sister's, like, "Not that much. You know how much. It's easy. It's simplistic."

Hadley Bledsoe: She adds almost the whole thing!

Julia Bledsoe: So I took the Italian seasoning and I put it in. And I'm, like, "That can't possibly be enough!" I ended up putting so much in that even our friend who loves spicy things could not eat it.

1:01:00

Danille Christensen: [Laughing]

Julia Bledsoe: And everyone was, like, "no, thank you. We don't need it."

Hadley Bledsoe: I tried one bite, and it was burning my mouth.

Danille Christensen: So you put some hot pepper in there.

Julia Bledsoe: Italian seasoning, yeah.

Danille Christensen: Yeah, yeah. So what do you think the difference between cooking and baking is for you, since you're such an accomplished baker, right? Is there something about that skillset that doesn't translate to the cooking side, or is it just a lack of experience?

Julia Bledsoe: I think it's more of a lack of experience. I'm definitely not as comfortable cooking as I am baking. Um, and even though it's like the simplistic things I'm still very unsure and like, I don't know, I find it just a lot harder.

Danille Christensen: Karen, you said that it's important to you that your kids know how to do *both* baking and cooking before they-- what's your plan for making that happen? Are there regular things that your family *does* that kind of help to build those skills?

1:02:01

Karen Bledsoe: Good question, because I've had a lot of years [laughing] and we haven't really started yet! But no, just simple things, like, if we want eggs in the morning I'll say, "Hadley, can you make the eggs?" She's an amazing cooker of eggs, scrambled eggs, over easy eggs. . . .

Danille Christensen: You were just born knowing how to cook eggs or did you learn from people?

Hadley Bledsoe: Well, I kind of learned myself, but also I got a little help.

Karen Bledsoe: But basically it's having the kids take time, because they always have homework or something to do, bring them into the kitchen, and just, you know, get them comfortable with using a knife to cut the carrots, or using a knife to cut up the peppers, and learning how much oil needs to go in the pan to sauté things. It's all basic, but unless you do it you're kind of afraid to do it. So I'd like everybody to leave the house knowing how to cook eggs and waffles, of course, all the good breakfast food. But then, for lunch you want them to learn how to do simple stuff, like make a quick soup, or make homemade macaroni and cheese.

1:03:01

You know, just basic, basic things.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. Um I think too, I feel like when it comes to cooking like, the simplistic things that there's not a recipe, cause it's just well-known? And I think that also feeds into me not being as comfortable with it, because I like how structured the recipe is and I know what I'm going to do next, and I know when to do it.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm, I see that. It makes sense.

Danille Christensen: So learning to be a little bit more flexible with these other kinds of processes.

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Hadley Bledsoe: I like both. I actually like baking more than cooking, but if--I like cooking eggs, pancakes, macaroni and cheese. I normally just bake like the simple stuff, not the really hard stuff.

Danille Christensen: I should stop doing these interviews before lunch because it's making me hungry. [Laughter]

Karen Bledsoe: I know.

Julia Bledsoe: Yes.

1:04:00

Danille Christensen: Okay. So let's finish up with just some broad-- are there any favorite moments or memories either from the market or just from baking generally that you want to share? Any stories? You shared a couple of them already. Is there anything else that comes to mind?

Julia Bledsoe: Want to talk about the saving up for the horse at the market?

Hadley Bledsoe: Sure. So I put up a sign that says, "Saving up for a horse," and then, when I was selling my lemonade, people would give me tips. And they said, "What kind of horse are you getting?" And I told them a palomino and then like, they just would I guess help out for me to get the horse.

Danille Christensen: So that, your customers were really invested in your goal. Well, that's great to hear.

Hadley Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: How about you Julia? Is there any . . . ?

1:05:01

Julia Bledsoe: Um, I don't know. I really always liked the communication between the customer, um, I think, I don't know, I really enjoy it when I serve whatever dessert it is to my family and they try it and I see how they react to it. And I like surprising, like I said, with the dessert, the cannolis, surprising my family with new things.

Danille Christensen: So the social aspect or the audience aspect is important for you, too?

Julia Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: Is there any moment that you can remember when something was really well received or when it was not so well received?

Julia Bledsoe: I don't know. I'm trying to think of a time.

Karen Bledsoe: We usually are very positive with any of the cooking mistakes.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: But most recently I think for Daddy's birthday cake, wow, I could not have done any better.

Danille Christensen: The chocolate and peanut butter one?

Karen Bledsoe: The chocolate and peanut butter. It was amazing.

Danille Christensen: What was so good about it?

Karen Bledsoe: It was just *so* flavorful and so *moist*. [1:05:59] And the icing was just so *smooth*. Sometimes it's really *hard* to make a peanut butter frosting that's smooth like that, that's not over-peanut-buttery and that's not over sugary. It was just perfect.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah. When it came to the frosting I actually didn't make enough to frost the whole cake, so I had to go back and since I was kind of rushing so I could get it done in time I was sort of just estimating, guessing how much to add in about that, comparing it to like my original icing I made for that frosting.

Danille Christensen: And it sounds like you made a pretty good match.

Julia Bledsoe: [Laughs] Yeah, thankfully.

Karen Bledsoe: And in the house we should tell you that we have lots of cookbooks and we have cookbooks on different regions like from Appalachia or Italian cookbooks or you know, "How to Preserve" cookbooks. So a lot of the times the children will just pull a cookbook out and try to find a new recipe, and that's kind of always fun to see.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. So now that you are kind of putting down roots in Patrick County is there any particular food or foods that you feel like really embody Patrick County or Southwest Virginia?

1:07:01

Karen Bledsoe: That's a good question.

Hadley Bledsoe: I don't know.

Karen Bledsoe: That is a really good question because I feel like sometimes it's all intermingled in my mind between like my Pennsylvania Dutch roots and Appalachia.

Danille Christensen: And there's huge continuities there, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: Because a lot of people who settled in Appalachia came from Pennsylvania down The Great Wagon Road, right?

Karen Bledsoe: Yes, that's right.

Danille Christensen: So, traditions of sauerkraut and stack cake and things like that are related.

Karen Bledsoe: I know you're thinking more of North Carolina when you think of barbecue, but barbecue and then the green beans that are my husband's family's specialty that are cooked until they're *limp*. That is a big one.

Danille Christensen: Um-hm.

Karen Bledsoe: That's what I really--

Hadley Bledsoe: Potatoes.

Karen Bledsoe: Potatoes that are softer than normal, that are cooked and boiled for a long time.

Hadley Bledsoe: Corn.

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm, a lot of corn.

Danille Christensen: How do you make the green beans, your dad's style?

1:07:59

Hadley Bledsoe: I have no clue. [Laughs]

Karen Bledsoe: The ones that were pressure cooked?

Danille Christensen: Um-hm.

Karen Bledsoe: They add bouillon and-- I really don't know, cause I like mine better that can stand up.

Julia Bledsoe: Crisp.

Karen Bledsoe: Crisp.

Danille Christensen: [Laughing] You like them crispy. So no fatback or bacon or anything like that?

Karen Bledsoe: They definitely used-- yes. She actually had a jar of fatback [bacon grease?] and that's what she used.

Danille Christensen: Yeah.

Karen Bledsoe: And the fatback was used with the green beans. Yes, yes. That's right. I remember now. On top of the oven was this little tin jar of all the bacon grease and everything and that's what they used.

Danille Christensen: Yeah. Classic. [Laughs]

Karen Bledsoe: Um-hm.

Danille Christensen: All right. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to add about the role of food in your life or in the role of your family or in the role of this community, as we wrap up?

Karen Bledsoe: Well, tonight we're having a function at our house, and everybody's bringing something. It's always fun to see what people are bringing as a side dish. [1:09:01] Um, desserts are always popular in the South and Appalachia. But I think just food in general brings people together and it creates a community, whether it's a church function or a farmers' market function. And just knowing where it comes from is really quite important, because here in Patrick County there are not a ton of supermarkets. You have one mainstream store, and you have one smaller supermarket where people go, but besides that, you know, we try to seek out the local farmers who have the stands on the side of the road. That's really important, to support your local farmer.

Julia Bledsoe: Yeah, I think that's about it.

Danille Christensen: All right. Well, thank you very much for spending this time. It's going to seem like a very long time, but I need to let the recorder run for thirty seconds without us saying anything or moving so we can catch the sound in the room so they can take out any weird background sounds. So let's go ahead and I'll just be quiet for thirty seconds.

[End]