



**Monica Chatterton**

**Flake Baby Pastry - Little Rock, AR**

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Interviewer: Jordan P. Hickey

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Jordan Hickey: Today is June 19. We're here in Little Rock, Arkansas, at the Arkitchen Commercial Kitchen. I'm Jordan Hickey. I'm speaking with Monica Chatterton. Monica, could you introduce yourself for the recording?

Monica Chatterton: Yep. I'm Monica Chatterton, aka Flake Baby. That's what some people call me.

Jordan Hickey: Who are you? What do you do? Why are we talking today?

Monica Chatterton: I am a previous cottage baker. I guess you could say I'm currently a—I don't know what my role is particularly. I'm the Pastry Lead at The Bagel Shop, which was previously a pop-up shop that will be opening a full-service restaurant, an actual brick and mortar location in July of this year.

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I'm running a pastry program there now, on the heels of a pretty successful cottage bakery here in Little Rock. I think that's it.

Jordan Hickey: We are in Arkansas. Are you from Arkansas?

Monica Chatterton: No, I'm from Louisiana. I grew up there until I was 18. Went to Hendrix College in Conway, which is what brought me to Arkansas. That's about 35 minutes from Little Rock, from where I am now. I moved here, went to college, graduated with a history degree, and then didn't do anything with the degree.

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: Just ended up working in restaurants and falling into cottage baking, and the rest is history.

Jordan Hickey: How did you get to baking? What drew you to it? Did you see people baking when you were younger?

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This is a philosophical—why are you here? Why baking?

Monica Chatterton: That's a good question. My mom was a really good cook growing up. She wasn't really a baker, per se. But I do remember enjoying baking as a kid. I got a cookbook—I think it was my grandma gave it to me—and it was recipes for kids. I think the first thing I ever made was lemon bars, and I was obsessed with them. Because I would literally—I would—I was kind of a disgusting child—like I would eat butter—I would sneak butter and sugar bites. I would just dump—like dunk sticks of butter in sugar and eat it when no one was watching. I would do the same with lemon slices. So, yeah, lemon bars were my favorite thing, and I loved to make them. But, yeah, I didn't really have a baker mentor person I looked up to. I think—it's funny—I don't know, the question is kind of like—I think a lot of times, women in the industry get pushed toward baking and pastry.

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And I think that might have been partially what got me to that point. But I also enjoy it, so I'm not [Laughter]—but I like to cook and stuff, too, not just baking. But I think it is a path that a lot of women end up on, in food in particular. But I like it. I ended up—the first restaurant that I was cooking in, I was making breakfast, and doing breakfast and brunch, and that kind of was the segue into just baking. Because I did a lot of it for that, making biscuits, and different—like

muffins, and evolved into cakes and things. And then, that was when I started my homemade pop tarts, which I was calling flake babies. That's kind of when I started doing the cottage thing, because I realized baking is an easy kind of way into the cottage industry.

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Because a lot of baked goods are shelf stable, and so you don't have to worry about as many of the laws, and getting a commercial license and stuff like that. So, yeah, I think that all fell together.

Jordan Hickey: You had mentioned you did your history degree. Were you working in restaurants with an eye toward—like as a long-term career? At what point did you decide, “Yeah, this could be what I'm doing”?

Monica Chatterton: I didn't have a long-term plan to be in the industry at all, and I didn't—I did not want to, actively; like [Laughter] didn't enjoy it. I worked at ZAZA, a local pizza spot, in Conway, all through college, my sophomore year until a year after graduating.

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But when I was there, I was making salads, and working as a bartender, so I didn't really—I wasn't even making the pizzas at all. I wasn't doing the actual baking and stuff. When I was in college, I wanted to be a teacher, a history teacher. I also minored in education. But it was funny—the classes that I took, and the more that I learned about the education system, the more kind of dire and hopeless it felt. And it really pushed me away from wanting to actually teach. So it was probably my senior year when I realized, “I don't know if I actually want to do it. But I'm kind of already in too deep.” I considered, at that point, just I could either continue grad school and continue my education and figure out what I want to do—and I didn't want to get into any

more debt, especially not knowing, really, “What do I actually want to do with this?” So then I just kind of ended up working.

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I did a seasonal bartending job in Alaska, in like 2014, and then moved back to Little Rock, and that’s when I started working at The Root Café. After a few months in, I ended up in the kitchen, and it just kind of happened after that.

Jordan Hickey:       What did you imagine that a career in kitchens, baking, would be like, when you first started, versus how did that change the longer that you were in it?

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Monica Chatterton:   I’m trying to remember, because it really was like—because at the time when—that was probably when I was 23, 24—which looking back, it’s like—I feel like a completely different person [Laughter] than I was, then. I was very much just kind of like, I don’t know, living without many goals or plans, when I first started out in a kitchen. But the more I learned—because I’m just self-taught; obviously; I never ended up going back to school for anything culinary. But I got more into it because I realized—I don’t know, I’ve always kind of been a perfectionist, and it was one of those things that like, if I’m going to do it, then I at least want to be like, good. [Laughter] So then I started reading a bunch of recipes, and buying cookbooks, and that’s kind of when I found a passion for it, more, and it wasn’t just like, “Okay, well, I’ve stumbled into this.” Because a lot of times, it’s people who can’t do anything just end up in a restaurant.

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Which I think is a—can be true. And that’s what makes it so special when people truly care [Laughter]. Because it’s looked down upon, unfortunately. Even though everybody likes to go out to eat. It’s not considered a career. But I started thinking about it more in that way when I started liking to cook, and liking to bake. That’s when I was working on a breakfast line, and I would get really excited about running specials and stuff, and using the knowledge, the things that I was reading in like cookbooks. Once it started to feel like more of my thing, like “Yeah, I read this recipe but I’m going to change it, and I’m going to take inspiration from different places,” that’s when I felt more like it was a feasible—a thing that I wanted to do. It was still really amorphous, at that point, like I had no plan of like, “I’ll have a bakery” or whatever. It was just kind of like, “Okay, well, at least I’m learning, and getting my chops now, and then I’ll figure everything else out later.”

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It wasn’t until I was making the flake babies, the homemade pop tarts, and they were selling out every weekend during brunch, and a friend of mine was like, “Oh, you can just like—you could sell those—you could make those at home and sell em via the cottage food law.” And that kind of opened up the opportunity. That’s when I really started thinking about it in terms of like, “Oh, okay, so I could do—I *could* have a career in this, and it doesn’t have to be under someone else’s terms.” Or at somebody else’s business. Because I felt like I was pouring a lot of myself into it, and not getting—I don’t know—the recognition or the validation, I feel like, that I was seeking. Just like, “Oh, I’m just working *a lot*, and it doesn’t seem to be being noticed.”

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So, there was [Laughter]—very much definitely I was like, “Screw this. I’m just gonna go do something else.” But even still, that was years before I finally went out on my own.

Jordan Hickey: So, you have this conversation. This friend of yours says, “Oh, do you know that you could do this on your own?” Was this like a lightbulb moment? What was this moment like? I’m thinking you immediately go, “I’m going to go start making stuff on my own”? Or did it take a little while?

Monica Chatterton: It really was a lightbulb moment because I had never even heard of the cottage food law. I knew nothing about it at all. It was completely new to me. Getting that information and already knowing—feeling really confident in what I was making at the time—because I knew they were good, and people were buying them at—I can’t remember what we were charging for em, but in that moment, it was kind of more of like, “Oh, I could be making money off of this.”

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Because I was not getting paid very well. So yeah, that definitely—that was a lightbulb moment of like, “Oh, so, this is like a financial security thing, of like I can”—so I started doing that, and I would bake them at home for—one of the first big bakes, I baked them for Thanksgiving, and sold them just to some friends, and I brought some to my partner’s family Thanksgiving thing, and people were raving about them. Then it kind of slowly snowballed after there. Then I made some for Christmas, and was selling them to people who had tried them and really liked em. So, it started small, like friends and family. And then it wasn’t until—when was that?—because I started in 2016, baking out of my home kitchen, on a pretty small scale, and it wasn’t until 2018

that I started doing a farmers market for the first time. And that's when—because I had just been selling via like Instagram, just to people who I kind of knew.

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And the thought of selling to strangers was really scary, because it was just like the unknown of—and people can just be really heinous, and the fear of not—of it not being good, or somebody having something bad to say, or making someone sick, god forbid, which—even though I wasn't making anything that was like capable of that. Yeah, it was 2018, I did the Bernice Garden Farmers' Market for the first time, and that was in Little Rock. I was giving out samples, because I was worried that people weren't going to buy anything without tasting it. It's just so funny to think back now, of how much I was giving away. But it really I think is a big factor in how I got off—kind of took off a little bit, because people would just be walking by, and they're like, "Oh, it's free," and they would taste it, and then they would buy several.

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That definitely was a confidence boost, for sure. Just having that extra income was really nice. Because famously, people in the industry a lot of times are underpaid, so that was a really big factor in continuing to do it. Because it was really hard work, on top of already working full time.

Jordan Hickey: That's actually what I was going to ask. So, 2018, you start selling at the Market.

Monica Chatterton: Mmhmm.

Jordan Hickey: But were you working full-time at another restaurant in town? What were you doing?

Monica Chatterton: Yeah, I was working—actually, I was still at The Root. I was working there full time, at least 40 hours. But 2018 was when—because I had been where I was for like four years, and I was really over it, and so I finally—I can’t remember the timing of it all, of when I left, but once I realized the farmers market was something I can do, but I was still being tied to working Sunday mornings at the job that I was at. I was like, “I could just quit [Laughter] and do this, and work somewhere different, where I have a little bit more flexibility.”

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I still was having to work on Sundays, but Sunday evenings. So that’s when it truly became a little wild. I was working full time, working still on weekends. Like Saturday—when I was at Lost Forty, working in the kitchen there, I’d be working either the morning or the night, and then going home, and baking for the farmers market. And then on Sunday I would go to the [Laughter] farmers market, early in the morning, and then I would have to go back to work after, and close, and be there until like nine or ten [Laughter] which was really intense. But I normally had Mondays off, so it was just like very much the hustle—I had that mentality of just like, “I’m girl bossing. I’m just hustling. I’m doing it all.” And it was great, because I was making money.

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But then fast forward, obviously two years later, then COVID happened, and that kind of changed everything.

Jordan Hickey: When you were doin that stuff, did you have this vision of only doing Flake Baby, or were you just kind of like—like what was your goal at the time? Were you just

kind of thinking you could do this like nose to the grindstone, full time job, plus cottage baking forever, or—?

Monica Chatterton: [Laughter] Yeah. Really honestly, it is kind of crazy to think back on like I didn't have that as a goal until the pandemic. I didn't think about it in terms of that I could *just* do that.

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It was always supplemental. Like, the side hustle. Yeah, I really didn't think about it as being a feasible long-term—as my only source of income. Even though I was making decent money, it really didn't occur to me until I was faced with the option of, okay, I could continue to work at this job that—at that point, I had been at Lost Forty for a few years, and I was just like, “I'm unhappy.” So, “The worst case scenario, I can quit, try to only do Flake Baby, and if that doesn't work, then I could get another job.” Which, yeah, once I realized, it was like, “Oh [Laughter], I don't actually need to be here.” But it was not a long-term goal. That was another lightbulb moment. It was literally my therapist, like [Laughter]—she's like, “Have you considered just—why don't you just do this full time? You could just make it work.”

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And then, yeah, I was like, “Oh. Hmm. I guess I could.” We had talked before—there was a woman in my hometown who made everybody's birthday cakes in town. I didn't ever think about it growing up, that she was operating within the cottage law, but that's what she was doing. She was making custom cakes all the time. Once I remembered that, I'm like, “Oh yeah, there *are* people that do this. It's not just a side hustle thing.” [Laughter] It doesn't have to be, at least.

That's when I realized, "Oh, I can spread my wings and fly, and hopefully fly and not flop." And yeah, it worked out.

Jordan Hickey:       Where did you grow up in Louisiana?

Monica Chatterton:   About 40 minutes from Baton Rouge. Saint Francisville is the name of the town. It's a tiny little, tiny town. I lived there my whole life.

Jordan Hickey:       I'm just kind of curious, when you were growing up, did you see this woman baking full time and think, "Oh, this is like how someone can make a living"?

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Or was this more of like, "Oh"—like this is just this complete anomaly of like, "Oh, yeah, this is the only person in the world who could ever do this."

Monica Chatterton:   I didn't think about it much. She was actually a friend of mine's mom. So I thought of her in those terms, of like, "Oh, she's a mom. She's a stay at home mom that makes cakes on the side." [Laughter] Because it was a household of—they had the father, breadwinner or whatever, even though—which is such a, you know, messed up mindset, because she was obviously making money as well. But in my mind, it was like, "Oh, she's at home, makin cakes." Really, looking back, it's really impressive what she was doing, because she made really, really good cakes, and she seemed to constantly be selling them, and people would just—we would go to her house and pick it up for, like, every birthday.

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Yeah, I wasn't thinking about it as a career at that point. It was just like, "Oh, she's just a—she's just a mom." Which is horrible. [Laughter] Horrible to say, but that's how it felt.

Jordan Hickey: Part of the reason I ask is because I wonder about—you said this lightbulb moment of realizing, “Oh, I *could* do this full time”—I was wondering if there was like—you had seen that woman in your hometown, but I wonder if you had any other examples of people who were doing this, like on social media, or anybody in town who was? Like “I could do this,” basically.

Monica Chatterton: I can’t remember if there was anyone—because obviously the farmers market was a really nice way to connect with people in the community, and to connect with other people who were doing cottage stuff.

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But there weren’t that many other people who were doing it, when I started out at least, it seemed like. Or bakers, at least. It seemed like a lot of the people who *were* doing it had other gigs throughout the week. There was a big—I can’t remember the timing of it all—there definitely, in 2020, at the start of the pandemic, when a lot of—because I was already following a lot of different bakers and pastry chefs and whatever on Instagram. I definitely saw a lot of them who were losing their jobs, because of the pandemic, who were pivoting in that way, of doing what I had already been doing. So I think that probably was also a factor, just seeing, “Okay, so these other people are doing this.” It seemed like there really was a big movement, particularly in the pastry community, of just people who—because that was the first thing to go, at a restaurant, would be the pastry program, because it's not seen as essential.

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Yeah, that probably also played a factor. But a lot of it was that I was really unhappy where I was, and just getting really frustrated with the schedule that I was working, like trying to do it

all. I was definitely getting burnt out [Laughter]. Very tired. And it was this weird thing of like, where I was still having to go to work full time, and I was still getting paid, which was nice, but we didn't have—like we were so slow—this was at Lost Forty—because that was still the beginning, and people didn't understand fully how COVID was being transferred, and so people thought they could get it from food.

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Everyone was just scared, so despite what we were doing, it was just really slow, but we were still working those hours. So it was kind of maddening to be sort of trapped in a restaurant where there's no customers. [Laughter] It just felt like insanity. Like, "What are we doing?" [Laughter] Prepping this food that no one will buy. It was just—yeah, it was crazy. And the whole time, I'm just thinking, "I could be—I have so much that I *could* be doing at home, to sell stuff at the"—because there was a different farmers market that was still doing, through the pandemic, that was just all like outdoor, really, really distanced.

Jordan Hickey: Which one was that?

Monica Chatterton: That was the White Water Market, which is in the parking lot at White Water Tavern. That started during the pandemic, as a—because Larnie Hughes, who is great—she ran the Bernice Garden Market previously, and she has connections with the people at White Water, and she kind of saw the farmers, and the makers, and bakers, and people who didn't have anywhere to sell, and kind of gave us that space, which was great.

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So yeah, I was doing that on top of the weird working [Laughter] at the ghost restaurant, where the customers only want fried chicken sandwiches that we didn't even have on the menu; then

we put them on the menu. It was a weird, weird time. But it was realizing how much I dreaded going to work every day. I'm like, "Something has got to change." [Laughter] A lot of people at the time were unemployed, so I'm like, "Worst case scenario, I could do that." [Laughter] But yeah, that was the—I guess it was a slower lightbulb moment of just realizing, "I'm miserable. I need to try—at least try something different."

Jordan Hickey: I think just to clarify, the conversation that you had with your therapist, when did that come about, and finally—were you working in the ghost restaurant, had the conversation with your therapist, and then you decided to do it?

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Monica Chatterton: Yeah. Because I went fully self-employed in June of 2020. So it was that March through May, I think, I had been talking to her, just venting [Laughter] pretty much, about everything. So she was hearing the unfiltered, just how much I hated what I was doing, and hated going to work, and so that was like—yeah, she was the one who offered the solution. She said, "Well, what if you didn't do it? What if you tried to do this on your own?" It was kind of like, "Oh. Okay. Yeah, I *guess* I could. Instead of just complaining about it in therapy every single week, I could try [Laughter] something different."

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: That was the push that I needed. So talking to her, that then reminded me of—I think her name was Michelle Weller; I can't remember—in Saint Francisville, who made everyone's cakes.

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But she—it was weird—she wasn't branded in a certain way. She didn't have a name of the bakery. It was just her. So I think that's maybe why it felt less like a career thing, because it was just—it was like, "Oh, it's just Michelle. It's not a separate brand." Which is very much the—having a brand is a weird, a very strange thing for an identity. So I understand, not wanting it.

Jordan Hickey:       What was it like to make that decision, like to put in your two weeks, and then know that, "Well, from here on out, it's me. It's not the restaurant that I'm baking for; it's me that I'm baking for." What was that decision like?

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Monica Chatterton:   It was really scary, at first, but it was really exciting. I think it was more exciting than it was scary. Once I realized that I really had nothing to lose, because at that point, I was like, "I have enough experience. If I need to go work at a different restaurant, then I can." I knew that I was hireable, at least. [Laughter] Once I recognized that I had that safety net—not that I wanted to do it; I had no desire to immediately jump in, especially at that time, when things were just still so crazy—but once I kind of realized that I had nothing to lose, it was just really exciting. And it was really empowering. And there was [Laughter] kind of a mass—not walkout, but a lot of us were quitting around the same time. There were probably literally 12 people. So I knew, "I have to get out of here now [Laughter] because things are about to be even crazier."

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And just with a bunch of new people coming in, there was so much chaos factor. So it felt really good to just have a clean start. At that point, I already had a really awesome following of customers. My Instagram was—not blowing up, but it was doing really well. And it was comforting to know. I think I made a post—I can't remember when it was—at sort of the

beginning of the pandemic, of just like, “I don’t know what any of this is going to look like, and I’m kind of scared. Do people want to buy things from a stranger and pick them up off of my porch like during a global pandemic?” I don’t know. But I had a lot of really supportive customers at the time, and people’s response was very much like, “Yes! We will!” [Laughter] That made me feel better, too. Yeah, it was crazy, because it was like, oh, everyone’s like, at home.

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A lot of people are either working at home or unemployed now. So I was like, “Nobody’s gonna want to spend money on like specialty [Laughter] pastries.” But that’s all they were wanting to do!

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: Because there was so little to do, that it was actually—so many people told me, it was funny, they were like, “Oh, we look forward to this all week, coming to pick up, because there’s just nothing [Laughter] going on.” So that was also an encouragement, of just having that immediate—the fear that I had, people on social media were very much just like, “No. Don’t stop. We’ll support you.” So, yeah, it was a good feeling.

Jordan Hickey: So you've taken this step. At this point were you only doing Flake Babies, or were you starting to do other stuff? I wonder, especially coming from restaurants where you were—I don’t know how much oversight you have—were telling you, it’s like, “Oh, you have to bake, this, this, and this.”

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But what that freedom was like? To know that you could really bake any combination of flavors. I think at one point—I think there was like a cookie butter grapefruit—

Monica Chatterton: Oh, yeah.

Jordan Hickey: —Flake, and I wonder what that was like. Did it require any sort of confidence to be like, “Yeah, I can bake whatever I want”? Or did it take a little while to decide that you wanted to venture out into this kind of uncertain flavor, non-Flake baking territory?

Monica Chatterton: I had been pretty much the whole time that I—since 2018, when I started doing the markets, I had been doing more than just the Flakes, already. A lot of it was cookies, or whatever. I think my problem actually for the first few years of running my business was that I was getting so ahead of myself, and getting—because I was really excited about just having that venue, that way of just expressing myself creatively. And I love just different flavor combinations. Actually I feel like I got a little—I lost the plot a little bit at certain points [Laughter], because the flake babies were like, that was my thing that was very consistent, and they were getting better and better as I made them more, every single week. Yeah, I think I was actually making *too many* other things, even just throughout the entire thing. So honestly, once I got to the point of 2020 when I was going out on my own, I had kind of learned those hard lessons already, of just like, “I don’t need to reinvent the wheel every week.” Even though it’s very tempting to do. Because I was also just stressing myself out. [Laughter] I was making work a lot harder for myself by not just focusing in on what was really good.

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And I would get stressed out, because the perfectionist in me was like, if I felt like something wasn’t as good as I wanted it to be but I still sold it, then I would—it would haunt me. It would

literally—I would lay awake and think about like, “Oh, those cookies, they weren’t—people ate those, and they’re going to think that I suck,” because they had a cookie that wasn’t perfect, or whatever. So I definitely had to like, over the course of doing those markets, figure out how to self-edit more, which is honestly what I consider a really—one of the best skills to have, just as someone, as a cook or baker or anything, is just knowing what to focus on. And that’s my advice to cottage bakers, people who have reached out to me on Instagram, which is always really fun. They’re like, “Do you have any advice for a new baker?” I’m like, “Focus on something. Do it really well. Get really good at it. And then slowly introduce other things that you feel equally as confident in.”

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So it was like the Flakes, that was my first thing that—literally the name of the company, the thing that people kept coming back for. And then I started making like chocolate chip cookies, and making them over and over again, and making them exactly how I wanted them to be, to the point where I felt very confident in those, every time I made them. Then it was oatmeal cream pies. I was still making a variety of things, but that was the biggest lesson for me, was really just focusing on a few things, and doing them really, really well. It’s funny, because I see bakers who are first starting out, and they’re doing so much, and I’m like, “Bless you.” Because I know that you’re not sleeping at night. The night before the markets, I know you’re staying up all night. You’re driving yourself insane. You have all this different stuff prepped in your [Laughter] fridge. I know that it’s chaos.

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But, everyone's got to learn from their own experience. But yeah, that was the [Laughter] biggest thing for me, was just being scattered, scattered in too many different directions.

Jordan Hickey: At what point do you decide that you could make that work?

Monica Chatterton: The—? Which part of it?

Jordan Hickey: Doing it all yourself. Any time you venture out and do your own thing, like you said, it's kind of scary. I don't know if this was actually the case, but at what point did it stop being scary? At what point did you figure, "Yeah, I can do this"? Or, *was* there?

Monica Chatterton: I'm trying to think. There definitely was a point when it wasn't so scary, and I think a lot of the confidence that I got came from when I realized that I had loyal customers who trusted me, to just like—because I used to, when I would do—I would do like variety boxes, and that's kind of when—that's what I would use as my way of like, if I wanted to make something more weird and out there, and introduce a new thing, I would start to do it in the variety boxes.

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Jordan Hickey: Like what?

Monica Chatterton: Like—I started to do—I did brunch boxes, I think starting in 2020. Because, you know, people love brunch. A lot of restaurants were closed. That was still when people couldn't go and get brunch. So I think it was a fun thing. People would get them, and it would be a variety of like seven things. It would be like a crazy biscuit, and some—and Flakes that were kind of like breakfast-themed. And it would always be like different cakes or whatever. Yeah, usually it had seven or eight things in each box. And people could preorder them for

Sunday. I would sometimes offer small or a large, depending on how many people you're trying to share it with. They would come pick it up, and then go have a picnic, or just hang out with their friends in the backyard, which was fun.

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But when I first started doing those, I thought, okay, I need to have my menu for these things at the beginning of the week. Like when they go on sale, I want to have people get really excited and know exactly what's going to be in these variety boxes. And that [Laughter], I realized was actually really stressful, because I would have already promised people a certain thing, and then if something—like if it didn't work out, or if I later in the week realized something that would be better, that would work better, I was kind of tied to that menu that I had already created. I stopped doing that. I tested it out. I think I called it like “a mystery box” and I was using a lot of terms of like, “It's a surprise! It's really fun! It's great!”

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: It was just like, “You're going to get however many items.”

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So people kind of had an idea of what they were getting, but I wasn't promising anything. It was just like, “There will be Flakes. There will be cookies. There will be something else.” But not telling them what it was going to be, because I wouldn't even know at the time. I was worried that people weren't going to buy it, because I'm like, that's kind of—I don't know—just a complete tossup. You don't know what you're going to get. But people were so stoked about it. I think that was when I realized, okay, this was going to—I have people who like what I'm making enough to just blindly buy like a 40-something-dollar box of pastries and not know what

they're going to get. So that was [Laughter] a very big confidence boost. And it made it a lot easier on me, mentally, and just having throughout the week the freedom to go with the flow, more than having this set thing. Yeah, it's a really good feeling to know that people have tried my stuff enough times to just kind of say, "Yeah. Do your thing."

0:38:04

So yeah, that was the best part of it, probably. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: I'm just curious, just to have a sense of scale, if you were doing like that brunch box, how many boxes would you be doing?

Monica Chatterton: It would depend. When I first started out, I was selling a lot of them. I would do like 25ish. Which it doesn't sound like that much, but when you're considering this is in my home kitchen, which is actually pretty small—and so I would have to make—and depending on what it was—some of things, it would come with like two of whatever. So it would be at least 25 of each item, and there were usually seven things. So all in all, it was actually a lot of moving pieces. When I first started out—and that's kind of the theme of my entire experience with Flake Baby, my entire career, is like starting out really big, and taking on too much, and then being miserable, and then ever so slowly realizing, "I'm doing this to myself. I have no one to blame now. I don't have a boss that I can pin this on. It's all me."

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So I kind of started scaling back and doing smaller amounts and just charging a little bit more. Because it was a lot of work. And yeah, I made it a lot of work. [Laughter] And things that people probably wouldn't think about, like folding the boxes, even. Beyond the baking of them, the time that it would take to fold those boxes, and to do just the packaging aspect of it all—it

was a lot of work. So yeah, I was making probably 25 to 30 starting out, and then I scaled back to between like—not that much less, but it was like 16 or 18. [Laughter] Depending on the day.

Jordan Hickey: That actually gets at something that I wanted to ask you about. You had mentioned folding boxes.

0:40:00

It's not just folding boxes. It's not just baking. You're doing *everything*.

Monica Chatterton: [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: Your social media. You're taking orders. You're doing—

Monica Chatterton: The dishes.

Jordan Hickey: —the dishes. [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: The dishes are—the worst.

Jordan Hickey: What was it like to basically have to do everything? Did this fit into—were you imagining doing dishes when you set out to do this?

Monica Chatterton: No. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: What was this like, knowing that you had to do everything?

Monica Chatterton: Yeah, it was these slow realizations, of realizing what all I was taking on. It didn't happen all at once. You mentioned earlier, before the interview, the honeymoon period of being a cottage baker, and doing the markets and all of this. I definitely felt that for the first at least two years, even beyond that.

0:41:00

Because once I started doing it on my own, it was a new invigoration, so it was easy to forget how much time I was really in it. Because I would never clock in, even though [Laughter]—that was another thing; my therapist was like, “You should log your hours of when you're doing—even when you're checking your email, when you're on your social media. You should log these hours.” I never once did that. Because it was just so constant that it felt like it never really ended? So yeah, it was very overwhelming once I truly—it was the analogy of being in a pot of water that's slowly [Laughter] coming to a boil.

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: I'm like, “Oh god, I'm dying! What have I done?” Because yeah, it really was just everything piling on, realizing, “Oh my god, I never don't have dishes. I'm always going to the grocery store.” I always had people—because at one point—I used to have people like, they would place custom orders by DM'ing me on Instagram.

0:42:10

Then when it got to the point where I was getting too many requests, and then it was like, “No DMs please. Send everything through email.” But then it was like I had so many emails coming. And there's only so much that I could do, and so many hours in the day. So people would be sending me emails about custom orders, and then they would send me a DM that was like, “Hey, did you get my email?” I'm like, “I am gonna—scream.” Like, “I can't—I can't do all of this.” Yeah, it was really overwhelming. Especially toward the end, before I—I think it was a big factor in me taking the job that I'm at now, and deciding to no longer be self-employed, even though that was a really scary thing. But just realizing, “It's okay for me to not do everything.” It

was very gratifying to experience being self-employed, and I really am—I don't know who I would be if I hadn't done that.

0:43:00

Yeah, it was a lot. I couldn't even tell you how many hours of every week I spent doing Flake Baby related stuff, because it just kind of was like all-encompassing. And being at your house, you can't really escape, ever. The work is all around.

Jordan Hickey: You had mentioned a little bit ago—you had mentioned identity. It almost kind of sounds like you had ceased to be Monica—

Monica Chatterton: Yeah.

Jordan Hickey: —and you were only Flake Baby, because that's all that you were doing.

Monica Chatterton: Yeah. For sure. And it's funny—I still—like I'll see people, just at the grocery store or something, or anywhere, and they're like, "Oh, it's Flake Baby!" I'm like, "Yes...it's Flake Baby. It's me. It's my human name." Which is a good feeling obviously, to be recognized. And Little Rock is such a small city that it's not hard to be a big fish in a small pond. Not that I'm a big fish, but [Laughter]—it is funny; yeah, my identity very much became wrapped up *in* Flake Baby.

0:44:05

And so that's why the idea of giving that up was so scary. Because it was just like, "Well, if I'm not *that*, then who am I? What am I? Am I giving up by not doing this and seeing it to the end, and opening—"? Because it seems to a lot of people, I think, the natural progression—and I would always have people ask me, "When are you going to open a shop? When are you going to

open a shop?” And as much as I love the idea—I have this very romanticized vision, a fantasy of just having a little café—but the reality of it is, it’s so much work. Especially to do it on my own. My partner is very supportive, and has always said, “If you ever want to do anything”—but he doesn’t have [Laughter] experience in a restaurant at all, so he wouldn’t be able to help in a lot of the ways that I would probably need him to.

0:45:02

And just the idea of taking that on is so scary. So it felt very intangible, and like I couldn’t actually see myself doing it. But then the alternative was like, okay, but I also can’t see myself sustaining what I was doing for much longer, cause I was, like I was saying, doing so much of the work, and it was taking a lot out of me. Like [Laughter] all of my—all of my time, basically. So, yeah, it’s very much—I don’t know, the branding, the everything, just becomes very all-encompassing. And I still—I’ve worked now with The Bagel Shop since March, I think, is when I started? And I still kind of have this weird identity thing, like tied up in—and I changed my Instagram name. [Laughter]

0:46:00

Because it used to be @flakebabypastry, but then I changed it to just @flakebaby, which is what people were calling me anyway. So now it’s more of like, I still—I embrace that as part of my identity, but I’m definitely trying to—not distance myself, but have a distinction of Flake Baby is my food persona, or whatever, my Instagram thing, but I am like Monica Chatterton, the pastry person [Laughter] at The Bagel Shop. It’s hard to explain, I guess. It’s a weird thing. Because I know that it’s always going to be a part of my identity. Somebody at the market—I had my last farmer’s market yesterday, and somebody—and I brought—I hadn’t made like actual Flake

Babies in a long time, because it's not going to be something that we'll have at the shop, aside from like specials, if I want, if I have time and energy and the desire to actually make them.

0:47:03

But I had a few—I brought a few to the market yesterday because it was the last one, and somebody was like, “You know you have to keep making these or you can't call yourself Flake Baby anymore.” I'm like, “*You* don't get to decide.” [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: Like, “Girl, I'm tired. I will not be making these all the time.” But when I do, I hope it's an exciting thing, and that it kind of is like a callback to how I got my foot in the door, and my start. But I don't have to *make* those in order to be the baker that I am. Despite what some people might think.

Jordan Hickey: You say it was your last market. Was that Flake Baby's last market, or the Bagel Shop's last—whose last market?

Monica Chatterton: Both, pretty much.

Jordan Hickey: Oh, really?

Monica Chatterton: I'm sure that there will be a pop-up eventually in the future, but yeah, we—because they—The Bagel Shop, which started last year around June, had just operated as a pop-up shop doing like markets, and they were doing pop-ups at like Stone's Throw.

0:48:10

And then, since I joined them, we have been doing like the Bernice Market almost every Sunday. But now, we're actually trying to have the shop open by July, by mid-July. So, we're now—

yesterday was our last one, so that we can now focus our next few weeks on really getting everything ready to open. We're hiring. We're going to start training. So that's why it's—we're not going to have any pop-ups until the shop opens. So that's just the final—yeah. It feels really good. On multiple levels. Because it is like the Flake Baby thing. Like yesterday, it was like The Bagel Shop's last pop-up. But like for me, it was like, "I don't have to do this anymore."

[Laughter] Because it is—and that's another thing that is—it's very tiring.

0:49:03

I did a lot of stuff where it was just people would come to my house and pick up, because I realized how much energy I was using to package everything, and bring it to a market, and you're setting up a tent, and a table, and talking to people. It takes up a lot of *types* of energy. And just traveling across the city with like [Laughter] all of your product, and not having as much control over the quality of it. So, yeah, it was a very—it was a big day for us all, but for me, as—you know, as Flake Baby—it was just like, okay, this is the end of *that* era. And I was very ready for it. Because having done the pop-ups since 2018, it's just like, it's time [Laughter] to stop loading up my car with baked goods, and just have like a home, like the kitchen that we'll be out of. It's just very much like, to be able to bake there, and to put it out, and to have—people will be able to eat my baked goods five days a week, versus it just used to be one or two pop-ups, so it's really exciting.

0:50:06

Jordan Hickey: Is there a sense of relief in being in this kind of a situation, where you're not having to do every last thing? I don't know if you're having to do the dishes, but it's—

Monica Chatterton: A little bit, still. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Monica Chatterton: Yeah. Sharing the load at least. Yeah, it is a relief. I went through a wide—the full array of human emotion, pretty much, in making the decision to kind of hang up the Flake Baby thing, and take on this new role. It's also weird, because it's not a traditional kind of like—what I'm used to was having a clear, “Okay, I'm working for this restaurant, and these are the owners, and this is the thing.” But Trevor and Myles from The Bagel Shop have very much like taken me in as a third partner.

0:51:05

So the dynamic is like—I'm still getting used to it, because I very much still have these weird moments of like, “Am I letting them down? Am I [Laughter]—?” It presents different challenges. But it is a relief to know that I am working with people who—and I've been with them now since March, and so far everything's been great—it's nice to have people who can hold me accountable. It's still going to be a lot of work, but we're kind of all doing everything, instead of it just falling on one person. But it's also a completely different entity, and that's something that has been scary and exciting, is realizing that we're in this—the program, the pastry program that I'm developing for this place is very much like, “This is a certain concept. This is not—”

0:52:05

And that's why I'm like, I'm not doing Flake Babies there. Its its own thing. The Bagel Shop is becoming its own separate—I'm still the one making the pastries and creating this program, but it's exciting to kind of like—it's like I'm making this particular thing *for* The Bagel Shop. It's not me and my business, my brand, my ego and everything. It's we're together creating

something different. So it has been kind of fun. So I'm making things that I wasn't really before. Like I've started doing these like cream cheese Danishes, with jam and stuff. I developed it from my Flake Baby recipe, and changed the dough, and added—so it was a yeasted dough, and I added milk and eggs, and changing—so it's an adjacent kind of thing. But I feel like I'm finally actually growing as a baker, and challenging myself in the ways that I want to, and I'm not challenging myself in having to answer emails on time [Laughter], or—which, I'll still be answering emails.

0:53:13

We'll still be doing catering and custom stuff. But I've been able to focus on the actual baking aspect of it, which has been really fun. And just really honing in—like I was talking about the biscuit earlier—I've always wanted to perfect *my* ideal biscuit. It's a very particular thing. And I've had the space and the time to finally really explore that and make batch after batch, until it's exactly how I want it to be. So, it is really exciting to finally share that with everyone, too. Because we've been showing bits and pieces, and like a sliver of it, at a market, but it's not the full vision, obviously. So it's exciting to finally share that with everyone.

0:54:02

Jordan Hickey: I'm wondering, especially when you think back on the past few years, going to the markets, going full time cottage baking, doing everything—and the thing is, we didn't even—there's still so much here. There's COVID. We really didn't even touch on COVID. There's the way in which prices of butter and sugar and—

Monica Chatterton: Oh, yeah!

Jordan Hickey: —flour skyrocketed. And here you are, you're baking out of your house, which is a home kitchen that is not an industrial kitchen, and all this stuff. I wonder, what is it like to look back on all of this? Does this feel like this was like 20 years of self-employment, working cottage baking? What is it like to think back on all this?

Monica Chatterton: It really is sort of a fever dream in a lot of ways.

0:55:03

It makes me really proud, to look back, and to realize what I was capable of, and what I am capable of. [Laughter] It's like, whatever happens, if I ever need to do that again—I feel confident now in like, I *could*, if I needed to. I don't want to at this point, but I *could* do it. Yeah, it is interesting to look back. Even just doing this interview, it is reminding me how much I've learned along the way, and how different my goals and kind of ideal situation is now, versus when I first started. But that was still me, and I was still a person, and I don't look back in anger or anything. But yeah, I learned a lot, and I'm now finally in a place where I'm hopefully building a program, a thing, a place, that can help me be more financially stable, and get to a place where I don't have to work all the time.

0:56:15

Because that definitely was my—it became my personality. And everyone was like, “Oh, you're such a Capricorn. You're always working.” I'm like, “I don't know if it's because I'm a Capricorn. It's because I am crazy, and I can't stop.” [Laughter] It's not a good thing. Very much, looking back, I see the progression of how I kind of learned to be less hard on myself and make things less difficult for myself, in terms of just how much I was taking on, and just slowly

carved out a little bit more of a self-care mentality. Even though it probably doesn't seem like it, based off of how much I was doing.

0:57:01

But yeah, I think looking back, it was one of the best things I could have done for my own confidence, and just figuring out that I—I don't know, it's not that I hate the food industry; it's just like I'm not—I hadn't been treated with the respect that I felt like I deserved, before that. But I do think that, I don't know, it's exciting to think of creating a new type of place, where hopefully I can inspire people. People can work for me, and want to do their own thing, and that's—I don't want to be like [Laughter]—I'm definitely not trying to have people come work for me and never do anything on their own and just be under my thumb the entire time. Yeah, it feels like a very natural progression that has happened over the last few years, and it makes me really excited for the future, just seeing how far I've come.

0:58:03

Jordan Hickey: You had mentioned a time or two about people reaching out, young bakers, wanting to follow in your footsteps. I do wonder, looking back over this grand arc of this fever dream [Laughter], of the past couple years, what do you tell people? Do you say, like, “It was a fever dream”?

Monica Chatterton: [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: “Reconsider”? Or what do you tell them?

Monica Chatterton: Oh, I try to be really supportive, honestly. Because I do look back on it fondly, ultimately. So I try to tell people, when they reach out and ask me, things that I learned

the hard way. Which I know it's a lot easier to learn from experience than somebody telling you something.

0:59:00

I had somebody just recently, who I think actually—I think he applied to work at The Bagel Shop [Laughter] so I hope it works out—but he reached out, and was saying, “I’ve been thinking about selling things at a market, and I’m just wondering if you have any advice,” or whatever. I’m always just like, “Go for it.” What’s the worst case scenario? Not saying like, “Quit your job now, and whatever,” but you can kind of like dip your feet in the water, and see if it seems like something that’s doable. I think you have to have a certain level of motivation and drive, to do it successfully, I think. Yeah, I think everyone should experience being self-employed if they can. [Laughter] It’s very empowering, and it teaches you a lot.

1:00:00

Jordan Hickey:       The last question I have—you had mentioned that woman who you had seen growing up in your hometown. I wonder, how do you think cottage baking has changed since she was doing it? You've talked about branding. We've talked about perceptions of—it was like, “Well, she was just like a woman at home.” Instead of now, it’s like, “No, you can do it. You can be anybody; you can be a cottage baker.” But there’s also so much more. You have email. You have social media. You have all this other stuff. I guess the question is, how do you think cottage baking has changed, and what does cottage baking look like going forward?

Monica Chatterton:   I think—and it’s hard to know, because I was so unaware of what even it was, at the time—but I think it has changed a lot.

1:01:05

It seems like farmers markets are more of a thing. I notice a lot of pop-up markets and things like that. There's a lot more venues for people who are doing cottage baking to get their foot in the door. I think Instagram is a huge factor, and just social media in general, but especially Instagram is just like—you can completely brand yourself in whatever way that you want, and connect with customers by just showing them, “This is my portfolio. This is what I've done. This is what I *can* do.” And then having that element of being able to communicate on it, too. Yeah, I think it has definitely become a lot more accessible to people? And more people—I still meet people all the time that have no idea what the cottage law is, and they don't know what that means, but it seems like more and more people are becoming aware of it.

1:02:04

And the Arkansas law, actually, a couple years ago—I think it was 2021, maybe, yeah—the cottage law actually changed and became more lax. [Laughter] Which was crazy. So I feel like I was surprised—I heard that the law changed, and I was scared that it was going to somehow make life harder for me, but it didn't. It actually opened things up a little bit more, which was surprising. I think that definitely will help people who want to get into it, because it's less daunting; it seems a little less scary. It is still very confusing. But yeah, I think it has very much more become—people are, individuals are creating these brands, and going to a market, and having the interactions face-to-face.

1:03:00

I think a lot of the custom cake bakers, it's kind of a whole different—and I was doing some of that. That's a different vibe than what most of the cottage stuff that I was doing, which was like markets and whatever. It seems like cake bakers can be a little more behind the scenes, in the

background, kind of. But I follow a lot of people on Instagram who all they do is bake cakes, custom cakes, and it seems like it's really poppin off. Hopefully. And it's encouraging, just the amount of young bakers I've had reach out to me. It seems like more and more—there's like the Daisy Bake Shoppe [sp]—or Daisy Pastry Shoppe. It's a mother-daughter combo, and they're super sweet. They started—they reached out to me a few years ago. I forgot about it, and then I saw them at the market, and I was like, “Oh my god, y'all are killin it. Your branding is great.” Yeah, it's exciting.

1:04:01

I've noticed more people at the market now, more cottage bakers, than when I first started at Bernice, so I think it is becoming more popular. Or known, at least.

Jordan Hickey: I think that just about covers it. One thing I am wondering—we didn't talk a lot about COVID, but I wondered, could you have done this had COVID not happened, do you think? Thinking about how it sort of forced you—or not even forced you, but the restaurant where you are at, weren't a lot of people there. I don't know, I kind of wondered about this.

Monica Chatterton: Yeah, I wonder, too, because it definitely was a big push, in pushing me in the direction of just being self-employed. I don't know.

1:05:00

Obviously I could have gotten to the point of like, “Okay, I could just do this on my own,” but I don't know if I would have. It really is hard to say. [Laughter] But I'm glad—I mean, I'm not glad COVID happened, obviously, but the one good—the silver lining in it, for me at least, was changing the trajectory, in a positive way, and putting me on this path that now I think is ultimately—like I was saying earlier, I had no goal, no plan really, to be in the industry forever.

But now, I have more [Laughter]—I’m more at peace, accepting my fate, and realizing, this is actually, it’s what I’m good at, and I enjoy doing it, so I don’t need to feel bad about not using my degree or whatever. I have no regrets about—I got a lot out of college, but I have no regrets ending up what I’m doing now. I feel like this is what I’m supposed to be doing. Which sounds whatever, but—it was fate.

1:06:07

Jordan Hickey: I think that about covers everything that I had for you. Is there anything we haven't touched on, especially thinking about the arc of your cottage baking career, or cottage baking as a whole?

Monica Chatterton: I don’t know. I don’t think so. Something I was thinking earlier that I would say, in terms of where is cottage going—and I think a big part of what’s happening, and what I’m seeing on social media and whatever, and even just how well received Flake Baby was, and how many people I have still reaching out, and they're like, “I want a custom cake,” and all this stuff—I think that it’s encouraging to see there is kind of this shift, I think, toward people want to support small businesses. And it’s encouraging to see like these bigger restaurants kind of going un...I mean, I’m not trying to [Laughter] cast shade, but I would much rather see a local place pop up than a Chili’s or whatever.

1:07:09

But I think that people are very—they're looking for that boutique experience, and that’s kind of what cottage baking is. It’s—you're getting a cake that was handmade, completely start to finish, and it’s its own—it’s a work of art, kind of. I think there’s more of that mentality now, of like, it’s the boutiqueness of it all. You're getting something that you couldn't just go and get at like a

standard—you're not going to go to Sam's Club and get a cake that [Laughter] looks like what any of the cakes look like that a local baker would make. I think that people like that, and they're kind of embracing it. Hopefully. I like to think so.

1:08:00

Jordan Hickey: Thank you so much. I think that I need to leave about 30 seconds at the end of the tape for editing, so I'll just let it run here for just 30 seconds. But thank you so much for everything today. This was—

Monica Chatterton: Yeah. Thanks for coming to the weird kitchen. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

[pause]

1:09:00

[End]