



**Kristen Farmer Hall**  
**The Essential and Bandit Pâtisserie**  
\*\*\*

**Date: May 27, 2020**  
**Location: Remote Interview**  
**Interviewer: Michelle Little**  
**Transcription: Technitype Transcripts**  
**Length: Forty three minutes**  
**Project: COVID-19 and Foodways**

**Michelle Little:** So today is May 27<sup>th</sup> of 2020, and this is Michelle Little interviewing Kristen Hall for the Southern Foodways Alliance Oral History Project on COVID-19, and we're conducting this interview via Zoom and Zencast, so we are remote interviewing today. We're in a new world. Kristen, to get us started, would you introduce yourself, name, age, and your occupation?

[0:00:34.1]

**Kristen Hall:** Sure. Well, my name is Kristen Farmer Hall. I am forty-two. I'm a co-owner of The Essential and Bandit Pâtisserie in Birmingham, Alabama, and I am also a pastry chef at both places.

[0:00:49.3]

**Michelle Little:** Great. And to start with, could you give me an overview of your journey in your business to this point? I know you, years ago, worked at UAB [University of Alabama at Birmingham] and have opened several establishments. Could you kind of give me an overview of that journey in your life?

[0:01:09.3]

**Kristen Hall:** Sure, absolutely. Yes, you know, one of the things that I say is that pastry chose me, I did not choose it. So, yes, I was a fundraiser for medical education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and I just really wanted to start my girls—I have two daughters; one is Eleanor and one is Emma—and I really wanted them to basically be comfortable in the kitchen, and so when they were little, I guess probably seven years

ago—they were three and five—we started baking at home on the weekends. It was just for fun, but, of course, as we worked through recipes and all those kinds of things, there were pastries all over our house, and so we started giving them away to friends and neighbors throughout our little neighborhood. And a friend of mine-- her name is Laura Kate Whitney-- she's a friend who lives in Charleston now, but she received the first package of pastries and she dubbed us "The Baking Bandits" because we left a bag of pastries, sort of a little box of pastries, on her doorstep, and so when she came home, it was this little, like, pastry sort of package. And we started dropping packages and sort of ringing the doorbell and running away as just a little sort of fun adventure. So that was really all that I had intended to do with pastry, was, you know, to bake with my girls and to help them feel comfortable in the kitchen. I really want them to be able to care for themselves well when they leave my home, and that was really just the driving force, honestly, was sort of a mother's love for her daughters and I feel very strongly that women, that girls should be able to care for themselves when they leave their homes as teenagers or young adults, and one of those things is about cooking. It's about being able to care for yourself and cook for yourself. I'm very struck by generations, actually, of people who can't cook, maybe who grew up maybe getting takeaway or fast food or those kinds of things, and so as I sort of reflected on sort of what I had seen in young adults, was that I really wanted my children when they left my home to have had the opportunity to cook and to bake and to be able to care for themselves. So that's really where that started. This was back in the summer of 2013, and we were able to participate in a little pop-up shop that was part of REVIVE. There's an organization in Birmingham called REV Birmingham, and they organize this series of pop-up shops in vacant buildings

throughout downtown. You applied with sort of a concept of what kind of shop you wanted to do and then they approved a whole series of projects, and that is really sort of when Baking Bandits was born as a business. I was working full-time at UAB and I had two daughters, and so this was like a fun little project, but it was not something that I thought was going to be longer than this little sort of pop-up shop. But that's not what happened, and it was a really successful week, and started getting really great feedback about the pastries and sort of my approach to dessert and pastry, which is a less sweet, more seasonally driven sort of approach. It was really well received by the community, and so sort of the next step for me was to participate in our local farmers' market. Pepper Place Saturday Market is, like, a really incredibly large successful market here where there's about ten or twelve thousand visitors each Saturday. So in the spring of 2014, we had our first Baking Bandits, I guess, booth or a little tent at the farmers' market and really just kind of grew from there. That was in 2014, and I was still working full-time, but, you know, the tension between my professional life in terms of fundraising and community relations and my pastry life, which was sort of out of control a little bit [Laughter], you could tell sort of—in the back of my mind, I knew a decision, a fork-in-the-road decision was going to have to be made at some point. Either Baking Bandits was going to become a hobby and we were going to stop going to the farmers' market or I was going to have to choose a path, very unknown and, you know, very scary. I had a very nice, well-paid, well-benefited job at UAB and I had a lot of great colleagues there, but I knew that something was brewing. So in 2014, I left my job at UAB to pursue pastry full-time.

[0:06:39.2]

**Michelle Little:** Wow.

[0:06:39.7]

**Kristen Hall:** Yeah, pretty crazy.

[0:06:41.9]

**Michelle Little:** It really is. [Laughter] It's just amazing what all you've accomplished in such—I mean, a few years, really.

[0:06:48.9]

**Kristen Hall:** Yeah, it really hasn't been very long. And then my partner, my business partner, Victor King, he and I met in the fall of 2014, so right as I was sort of making a decision to pursue pastry, and, truth be told, actually, it was my boss at UAB that kind of forced me to make a decision. He called me into his office that summer and was like, "You have twenty-four hours to make a decision on whether you're going to keep this job or you're going to pursue pastry." And I was like, "But I'm not ready. I'm not ready to make that decision." And he was like, "Well, today's your day." He said, "So I want you to come back in twenty-four hours. You're going to meet me back here tomorrow at the same time with a letter telling me if you're going to stay or if you're going to go."

[0:07:38.1]

**Michelle Little:** Wow.

**Kristen Hall:** So I went. I wasn't ready, but, you know, this journey has certainly taught me that there's very little you can be ready for, and so you just get really good at being malleable and learning and pivoting. I know that's a word that's been very overused at this point, but that's really what it was for me. Victor and I met in 2014, and I had just gotten a contract for a local coffeeshop, and so my volume, like my daily volume, had gotten to a point where I could *not* handle it. So he joined in, I guess, early 2015, and then we started our first café. It opened November 2015 and it was called Feast & Forest, and it was sort of a collaboration, sort of bakery, small café, coffeeshop concept for us that was located in downtown Birmingham.

[0:08:40.4]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah. And so remind me what year The Essential opened after that.

[0:08:47.0]

**Kristen Hall:** Sure. So we operated at Feast & Forest from 2015 to 2017, actually 2018. I don't know what day it is, much less what time it is.

[0:09:00.5]

**Michelle Little:** Totally understand.

[0:09:02.7]

**Kristen Hall:** Yes, we operated from November 2015 to May 2018, and then The Essential opened July of 2018.

[0:09:12.8]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. And then Bandit in Homewood just opened—

[0:09:21.7]

**Kristen Hall:** Just opened in November of 2019, so it was a little more than a year after we opened The Essential.

[0:09:29.8]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. And so what was a typical day or work week like for you pre-COVID? Now that you've got these two locations operating and lots going on, what was a day like for you?

[0:09:47.1]

**Kristen Hall:** A very hectic one. Well, so my girls are with me, and so my day always began early with getting them ready for school. I have one in elementary school and one in middle school now, so I drop one off at elementary school, drive to the middle school, and then I would head over to the bakery. The bakery, Bandit, became my sort of—I guess more of my permanent space in terms of where I spent my days, but I would be over there in production or working sort of with our staff.

[Interruption]

[0:10:34.4]

**Kristen Hall:** So I spent most of my time at Bandit during the days, and so I'd work there until about 3:00 and then I'd go pick up both of the girls, and then I actually would bring them back to the shop and kind of continue with production and those kinds of things until sometimes 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, sort of depending on what was happening. Just like any new restaurant, staffing is very hard and there's a lot of turnover, and so we had just kind of finished getting The Essential settled and then opened Bandit and sort of started that process all over again. But I did that pretty much every day, and then on Friday nights and Saturday nights, I would come over to The Essential and work service. So it was a lot of sort of production and kind of day-to-day maintenance kind of management at Bandit and then I would come to The Essential, and I would try to come to The Essential as often as I could during the week, and Victor and I were pretty much in constant communication, so we'd collaborate on menu things and sort of make sure that quality was there, but it was pretty much a constant challenge.

[0:11:55.9]

**Michelle Little:** Yeah, sure. And do you remember the first time you heard about COVID-19, like your first awareness of this?

[0:12:05.9]

**Kristen Hall:** You know, interestingly enough, it was at, I believe, the Charleston Wine and Food Festival, and Victor and I were participating chefs. We each had a couple of events there. That's at least—I mean, there had been some conversations, I think, about

COVID, but I remember we actually got a message from the festival sort of administration that there had been a positive case of coronavirus in Charleston, and I remember thinking, “Oh, uh-oh. Things are about to change.” But, obviously, we didn’t really know the depth and breadth of what was going to happen. But I remember that’s kind of the first time, because we traveled to Charleston, and, obviously, there were thousands of people there, and then we got that message and I can remember thinking, “Something is about to change. I’m not sure what that is.” But, obviously, we didn’t know.

[0:13:04.6]

**Michelle Little:** Was that festival in early March?

[0:13:09.0]

**Kristen Hall:** It was. I think it was like maybe the first or second weekend in March, because I remember our last day of service here was like March 15<sup>th</sup>, so I think we had just gotten back from the festival.

[0:13:25.3]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. And then when was the moment you realized, “Okay, this is *really* going to have an effect on me here and now”?

[0:13:39.4]

**Kristen Hall:** Yeah, you know, it's interesting it happened so fast. And for me, I think there were two sides, one was personal and one was professional, and it was really when they started talking about cancelling school, which was about, I think, the second week or so of March. And I remember thinking, "Well, what do you mean school's cancelled?" These are not things that we would, before COVID, have had any conversation about, like school being cancelled, and I kept thinking, "Well, how is that going to work?" Because, again, I was still sort of churning from a restaurant perspective and thinking, "Okay, well, how am I going to do this with kids?" But I hadn't really thought yet sort of of the deep impact COVID was going to have on the restaurants too. Again, it all happened so fast. But the schools closed here pretty quickly, and so all in about the same time. And then we have a very active mayor in the city of Birmingham, and so they were already having conversations about shutting the city down and quarantine and curfews and all that stuff. So I remember thinking about the kids first in terms of them and the impact coming home, and then really within twenty-four or forty-eight hours, ordinances were starting to get passed.

[0:15:12.2]

**Michelle Little:** What do you remember about that last day of service?

[0:15:17.6]

**Kristen Hall:** Well, we had been in service at Bandit earlier on that day, and we'd already transitioned to curbside at The Essential, and so it was really hard because I was at Bandit feeling very alone and confused and trying to figure out what to do there, and

Victor was at The Essential also sort of feeling the same things and feeling very overwhelmed in terms of, well, what's going to happen to our people and what happens to our shop? Everything was so hectic, and it's things like to-go boxes and silverware and those kinds of things that you're just not prepared for at volume. I remember wrapping up the day, the last day at Bandit, and just deciding to just close things. Sort of we were all kind of trying to decide how to word that, you know, you're closed for now or you're closed this week. You just didn't really know how to translate that to your guests and to your customers. So I think I updated Instagram and the website and Facebook and all that stuff to just say "Closed for now." Then I came over to The Essential and it was so crazy, and there were boxes everywhere and people were very frustrated, because, again, the systems, you're taking orders over the phone and taking people's credit cards, and there were receipts everywhere. We knew at that point that we would have to pivot in some form, but this was not it. I think we learned, at least at The Essential, that the menu that we had then was not made for boxes, and so we knew that it was too hard to cook out of our kitchen and serve the menu that we did with the people that we had. It was very obvious that the systems were not going to work long term, so we closed down and took a deep breath and sort of spent—we sent our team home and said, "We don't know, but when we do, we'll let you know."

[0:17:44.4]

**Michelle Little:** And was it just you and Victor trying to navigate these decisions or were there other restaurant owners that you were able to kind of check in with about how you're making these huge decisions and, like you said, how to word things?

[0:18:01.9]

**Kristen Hall:** Sure. Well, I mean, I think Victor and I always make our own decisions. We sort of—generally, it’s just the two of us, although we have a really great accounting, sort of bookkeeping, team as well, so we reached out to them, and this is when talk of, like, the PPP [Paycheck Protection Program] programs and the EIDLs [Economic Injury Disaster Loan] and all that stuff was sort of rolling around, and they really stepped up in terms of putting applications together. But, yeah, I mean, I reached out to a few of my friends. Suzanne Evans and I, from Automatic Seafood & Oysters, are friends, and we’ve tried to help them navigate opening a new restaurant, too, and so we’ve become friends over the last year and just sort of talking through, “Hey, what are you guys going to do? What did you tell your team?” And little did we know that Unemployment [Insurance] would play such a huge part in hiring and staffing sort of in the future, and it’s interesting, because for some restaurants that furloughed their staff, then they got Unemployment benefits earlier in the curve, and then for those of us who tried to—we sort of pivoted to a single team at that time. But, yeah, we reached out to a few friends, and Feizal Valli and Rachael Roberts, who own The Atomic, are friends of ours. So we were kind of all messaging in terms of “What are you guys going to do?” And I think we all came to the strange conclusion that it was just over for now.

[0:19:45.1]

**Michelle Little:** And so I know you just said you pivoted to a combined team, but then have you had to furlough or lay off any people?

[0:19:58.3]

**Kristen Hall:** We did. So really our first pivot was, since we had two locations, we knew that we could not operate both of them, but we had members of our teams that really wanted to work, and for us, it was really important to continue to make food. I mean, there were financial reasons for that, too, although when your sales drop by 90 percent, you're not really making much of a financial dent in things. But I think for us, that cooking and baking is what we do, you know. It's who we are, and so in such a time, we really felt like we needed to continue to work to feed our community, to provide comfort, to provide some sort of continuity to people, to our friends, to our regulars, to people we did not know. Just to be a part and present in the form of food is really a beautiful thing. So we combined both of our teams at Bandit, and the kitchen and sort of prep areas are a lot bigger there than The Essential, and so we started baking and cooking as a single team out of there for about three weeks. I think we did three weeks through Easter Sunday, and we pivoted—within about twenty-four hours, had an online site set up, pictures taken of all the things we wanted to sell, and just kind of figured it out from there. So we did that for three weeks, and it was really hard. Like, it was a really, really hard three weeks just because, I mean, it was a good problem to have, but the volume, like, of orders and of individual pieces of pastries and pies and all that kind of stuff was in the thousands, and so it was just every day was twelve or fourteen hours of production. So on the Saturday before Easter, we decided to take a break. So we took a break, I guess maybe for a couple of weeks, and decided that, like, the weather was so nice here in Birmingham that we

actually kind of pivoted back to The Essential. We have a beautiful covered patio here, and so we, for the last five weeks, did a patio pop-up Thursday, Friday, and Saturdays.

[0:22:38.0]

**Michelle Little:** And how is that going, the patio?

[0:22:39.7]

**Kristen Hall:** It was good. It was really good. And at that time when we decided to sort of take a break, I guess after the first three weeks, is when we told our team that they would be furloughed. Up until that point, we actually had a lot of work for people, and there were some people that didn't feel comfortable working, and, of course, we felt just fine with that and honored whatever their concerns were. So we had a lot of our team that self-quarantined, honestly, for months, and then at that three-week point, we furloughed the majority of our team, which was about—I guess combined we had forty-seven or forty-eight people. But we kept a really small team of folks. Our chef de cuisine, our sous chef, our front-of-house manager, and then Victor and I pretty much formed a team of five and have been cooking on the patio I guess for five weeks.

[0:23:36.9]

**Michelle Little:** Wow.

[0:23:37.4]

**Kristen Hall:** So this past weekend was our last one.

[0:23:37.4]

**Michelle Little:** Okay. And so at what point were y'all able to apply for PPP? How did that process go for you guys?

[0:23:49.0]

**Kristen Hall:** Yes, we did apply for PPP. Thanks to our amazing bookkeeping team, we actually applied on the first day, so they were really ready to go. The problem was that—I'm not sure if you know, but, like, the system crashed three separate times, and so they applied, I don't think we even got in on that first round, and then we reapplied for the second round—not round, but, like, the second system that they had, which we also were not successful with. Then our application was sent during that first round, finally, but we didn't get any funding. I've talked to a lot of folks who were in the same position as us, and it was every day you were trying to, like, mentally, emotionally, like, psychologically, physically process-- you know, your options are that it's over and we might have to file for bankruptcy or it really could be over or everything's going to be just fine. And I think it was that, those first six or seven weeks, the pressure of the unknown. And we had some issues with the bank that we chose and all those kinds of things, and so there wasn't a lot of communication. So, like, it was those first seven weeks that, yeah, was like, okay, well, are we going to lose everything or is it going to be okay? So we did get approval. We changed lenders, actually, and got approval the very next day.

[0:25:33.0]

**Michelle Little:** Wow.

[0:25:34.6]

**Kristen Hall:** So I think we got approved May the 1<sup>st</sup>.

[0:25:37.0]

**Michelle Little:** Wow. Okay.

[0:25:39.7]

**Kristen Hall:** And, again, that program is fraught with issues and it makes it, like—that particular program is very hard for restaurants to use the funding, because so much of our expenses are our salaries and our labor, but we don't have any work for them, but I have a whole sack of bills, you know, for vendors that I cannot pay or for other things that we can't take care of. But, nonetheless, it is a huge sigh of relief at that point.

[0:26:11.5]

**Michelle Little:** Of course. I mean, have you been able to pay rent? I mean, how are you navigating bills that have been coming in?

[0:26:22.5]

**Kristen Hall:** Sure. I mean, I think it's interesting, because there's so many bills that fall outside of what is currently approved for funding. So we were able to write checks for

our rent and pay for our utilities, and, honestly, the pop-up sales have enabled us to continue to keep our health insurance premiums paid. I think this whole pandemic and sort of process has highlighted a lot of the areas of risk not just for small business, but for restaurants in particular, and for us, we're owners and chefs and all of our income comes through the restaurant, and our insurance, and so it's like if things had not worked out, we would have lost our companies and our personal income and our health insurance sort of all in one go.

[0:27:19.3]

**Michelle Little:** Wow. So are you halting the patio service at The Essential or what are you thinking of pivoting to at this point?

[0:27:33.4]

**Kristen Hall:** Right. What's the next pivot? We feel like, obviously, things are beginning to open up, and I will say that I'm really happy that the restaurant community in Birmingham has been very conservative in terms of opening up. I don't know really of any dining rooms that are currently open for independent restaurants, and so that's been really nice too. Obviously, we wait for guidance from our governor or our state and local officials. Those come out and then we all start texting each other or calling and saying, "Okay, based off of these new guidelines, what are you guys going to do?" And I will say that I was really, really happy to hear that everyone was taking it very slowly. And I actually didn't talk about this yet, but my graduate degree is in public health.

[0:28:30.5]

**Michelle Little:** Oh, wow.

[0:28:33.0]

**Kristen Hall:** So it's been a really interesting epidemiological journey to sort of understand and kind of know a little bit more about public health and policy and sort of how much data we need to really make decisions and also own a restaurant knowing that if that data does not come back in a positive light, then my restaurant's going to stay closed. But I'm really happy that the community here has stayed very calm and very collected and very much focused on our teams, on our people and our community. So, all that to say things are slowly starting to open back up, and we decided to sort of finish our sales this weekend, and then this week is actually focused on some fundraising missions. So one of our local organizations, Jones Valley Teaching Farm, is a beloved one of restaurants and the community, and, obviously, they've been hit very hard as well, and so we decided to close the restaurant on Saturday and then we did a Memorial Day fundraiser for them. We did a little fiesta on the patio. And then this weekend, I'm hosting the city's first bake sale, which has been super fun, because there's so many bakers and pastry chefs at home, not at full capacity, and, honestly, so many people who work in restaurants are wanting to give back, are wanting to make food. You know, that's where we feel a sense of comfort and sort of community. So there's about thirty of us that have rallied together to do a fundraiser for Jones Valley this weekend. And then we're going to spend the next ten days getting the restaurant back in order. So we are doing some small projects here and there. I guess the restaurant, The Essential, turns two in

July, and so it's giving us all—actually, it's kind of funny, a lot of us who are small independent restaurants are doing some small projects, you know, painting things and plumbing things, because we know that when it opens, we believe the demand will be really, really large, and so we want to make sure that everybody has been trained well and feels good and is ready to really sort of tackle the next challenge for us.

[0:31:15.4]

**Michelle Little:** That makes sense, yeah. So what are your hopes and maybe cautious expectations? I know you just said you think the demand will be large whenever things do really open up, but as we move into the summer, I mean, what do you think the summer holds for you and your business?

[0:31:43.1]

**Kristen Hall:** Sure. Well, one of the decisions that we made, I guess a few weeks ago, was that we have decided to move the bakery, and it's one of those things that was a really hard decision for us to make, but we knew it was the right decision, because with two restaurants and two shops, Victor and I knew that we could not open both of those well together. And we just opened Bandit. I think we operated four and a half months before COVID. So it's certainly a bittersweet moment, but I feel a lot at peace about it because I know it's the right decision. So the restaurant will open back up in about a week and a half, and then Bandit, we are moving our production to another space and sort of pressing pause on a full retail operation for the bakery. Now, again, it's been really nice because there's a community of farmers' markets and online sales actually have

been very strong. That's one thing that we have learned over this time, is that the community pivoted really well in terms of online sales, and so if you bake it, they will buy it, and so we'll be using the rest of the summer for Bandit for retail just in farmers' markets and online sales. But in terms of what things look like moving into the summer, I think it really will be busy. I think we're all very cautious. I think there's obviously a huge divide between those who believe that COVID is a big deal and are really more on the cautious side of things, and then there's obviously a whole community of people who believe that it's time to get the economy going and that there are some risks, but those risks are worth the economic sort of revival that everyone is hoping for. So I think the summer, I think we'll settle in. I think that, obviously, sales will be down, I think, pretty considerably, but I think people will kind of settle into a new groove moving forward. I mean, I think it's interesting. When I think back about projections in terms of conversations we were having as, "When do you think things will open back up?" or, "When do you believe—?" or, "How long do you think this will take?" I think in my mind, July 4<sup>th</sup> was something that I thought about that time, it might have run its course. So I think things will move towards that direction.

[0:34:46.2]

**Michelle Little:** Are there things you've realized—and I know you've mentioned a few things, but are there things you've seen during this time or things you've adapted to that you think you'll continue to do once things open back up and business returns? Like, is there anything good—I almost hesitate to use the word "good," but is there anything helpful about this time?

[0:35:14.3]

**Kristen Hall:** Oh, absolutely. My perspective in this entire sort of situation is there's a lot of good that has come out of it, and I guess I speak from sort of my own personal experiences of the last few years have brought some really hard challenges and surprises and a lot of transition and a lot of pivoting from a personal perspective, and so I'm actually really thankful that I have had that experience really before this, because you look at something that's unknown, that's unpredictable, and it brings fear, and yet once you kind of get through that, you realize that there were a lot of things that needed to just go away, you know, or things that had run its course and that really new, amazing things were on the horizon. And I think that's very true in this situation, too, is a vacuum or a loss has created an incredible amount of opportunity. So there's so many things. I mean, I think it's been a good time for all of us, especially those of us that put in sixty, seventy, eighty hours a week in a restaurant. It has helped give some perspective on how much we want to work. When you have worked at a level of exhaustion that you become normalized to, where the baseline of exhaustion exists, then you just keep doing that, and I think that when that work, the eighty hours or ninety hours or whatever it is, it evaporated, everything got reset. So I've talked to a lot of restaurant owners and chefs who don't want to go back to working eighty or ninety hours. So I think that certainly will be the case for us, and we have already changed our hours for the future for The Essential to accommodate more rest and more time to enjoy the restaurant. Before this, The Essential was open seven days a week, and we won't be open seven days a week in the future. I think it's been good to—and, gosh, it's been such a good time for this very

small sort of group of people on our team to work together so closely. We would have never, ever had the opportunity to work this closely before on a day-to-day basis, and so that has been so fun and so nice and has really given me a lot of hope for the future of the restaurant. And, gosh, there's so many things. I mean, it's been a good time to reflect and to rest. I also have been able to work as a pastry chef and a baker pretty much exclusively, and so it's been a good time to remind myself why I started and how much I love to make pastries.

[0:38:49.1]

**Michelle Little:** I know we're nearing our forty-five minutes and I don't want to keep you, but just one more question on a personal level. I mean, during all this up and down, just how have you personally maintained sanity? And then, of course, having your girls out of school, I mean, just how have you navigated day to day?

[0:39:13.4]

**Kristen Hall:** I'm thankful that the peaks and valleys have subsided a little bit. I think in those first six or seven weeks, you just don't know what the day is going to bring. But, I mean, I will say, obviously, knowing that we're part of a community of people that are experiencing the same thing does give you some thoughtfulness to the situation, and obviously Victor has been helpful to-- when he's having a bad day, I try to, like, balance that out, and when I'm having a bad day, he tries to balance that out to give perspective on, yes, this is a loss, but what do you gain? So I think I've been able to pull from a lot of the things that I've learned in the last five years of life and to know that trauma brings about a lot of pain, but it brings about a lot of, like, healing, too, and so just being

thankful for the everyday and making some logistical changes. My girls have been challenging together. My oldest daughter has autism, and so that has been a very incredibly steep learning curve for all of us, and so we've made some logistical changes that have created some space for everybody. Sort of as a family unit, we have worked together to sort of find a good solution for that. But, I mean, it's been hard. At the end of the day, it's been really hard, but I will say being able to make pastries every day has just given me a lot of peace, and I've been able to sort of make things and share things in a socially distanced fashion, which is really just like it was in 2013, without the distancing part. But it's baking things for people as a way to love them. Owning a restaurant can sometimes be at odds with that creative craftsman sort of like artist side of being a chef, so for me, this has cleared out a lot of the administrative responsibilities because we don't have restaurants to manage right now, and so it's been very clearing of noise for me, and so I feel much more settled and have a lot of clarity about how I want to spend my days. So I actually feel really great. And, obviously, this is hard, and it's hard to make decisions that you don't know the outcome of. Things are fine now. What does winter bring? I certainly have concerns about what happens when it gets cold and viral outbreaks come back. But I think for me, it's been a very clarifying process to be able to just decide how I would like to spend my time.

[0:42:45.4]

**Michelle Little:** Beautiful. All right. Well, I'm going to stop our recording.

[End of interview]