



Joye B. Moore
Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pies
Richmond, VA

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[00:00:38.04]

Sarah A.: All right. This is Sarah Adams with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Wednesday, July 22, 2020, and I am interviewing Joye Moore. Joye, can I ask you to introduce yourself, please?

[00:00:52.12]

Joye M.: Hi. My name is Joye B. Moore, owner of Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pies.

[00:00:58.29]

Sarah A.: Thank you so much. And just for the record, could I ask you to give us your birth day?

[00:01:03.16]

Joye M.: My birthday is January 4, 1965.

[00:01:08.19]

Sarah A.: Okay, great. Thanks so much. All right. Joye Bell's Sweet Potato Pies—why don't we start with sweet potato pie. Tell us about sweet potato pie. What is a sweet potato pie? Where is it from and why is it important?

[00:01:23.28]

Joye M.: Well, I don't claim to be the end and all on the expertise of where sweet potato pies come from, but I know they're been around since the eighteenth century. They're a

Southern comfort food. For me, sweet potato pie means love. It means being together in the kitchen. It means family coming together in sad times for homegoings, Thanksgiving, just because, the weekend. It doesn't matter. In our culture, sweet potato pie is 365 pie.

[Laughter]

[00:01:55.13]

Sarah A.: That's great. So, how about we start at the beginning in terms of moving up to how you ended up making sweet potato pies for your business. Tell us about your upbringing, where you're from, young life.

[00:02:09.01]

Joye M.: I'd have to say my earliest memories of food would be in Goldsboro, North Carolina. My second great-grandmother, Nannie Mae Milton, she was one of the mothers that passed down the Joyebell Sweet Potato Pie recipe. But my earliest food memories are with her, in the kitchen. She had a garden. The most of the backyard was a garden. She grew everything, all of her vegetables. She even grew some greens. She had chickens, cows, a hog pen, a vegetable garden. So, we went out in the morning times with her and we'd pick vegetables out of the garden. We'd come back in, or at lunchtime, we'd sit down up under this big pecan tree. Pecans would fall; she'd pick those up, crack those open in her apron—she always had an apron on, right—and in her apron pockets, she had a salt and pepper shaker, and we would eat tomatoes that we picked out of the garden. So, we would eat tomatoes with salt and pepper for lunch, and then we'd have the pecans that fell out of the tree for dessert. So, those are one of my earliest memories.

[00:03:30.28]

Sarah A.: How old were you then?

[00:03:33.17]

Joye M.: I was, like, five. Five, six, because I moved to Dallas, Texas when I was five, so it was around about five. But even before, I can remember far, far, back, but for sure, that was about four, five years of age. She even . . . like the meats that we ate at dinner came from her farm, so we witnessed the whole process of that. We were her designated chicken herders. [Laughter]

[00:04:04.22]

Sarah A.: I love it.

[00:04:06.16]

Joye M.: She would have my sister, myself, my little brother—we'd be running around in the backyard. Cluck, cluck, cluck, ran around the backyard chasing them. And all we had to do was corner them into a space and get them to run past her, and she would swoop down. She seemed so mighty. She would swoop down with one arm, snatch a chicken up, ring it over her head, with the axe, one smooth motion. We were amazed. She'd hang them up, dry, and then we'd use those for dinner. Those are my earliest memories. But one of my favorite memories, because she made her own buttermilk, she made her own cheese. They were self-sufficient. I remember she's making dough in the kitchen and we'd

be sitting together. She's—"Here, Joye Bell. Slice the potatoes." Or, "Pop beans."
Whatever's going on. But the best times are when she would make sweet potato pies, but she wouldn't let us help; she'd just let us watch. She'd sit us to the side with her homemade biscuits, molasses, and her homemade butter. So, we mixed the molasses and the butter together, and so we're just watching, watching as she cuts in and makes her sweet potato pies. They would be so good. Most of the sweet potato pies and things like that went out to the neighborhood, to the church bazaar, that type of thing. We'd get one for the house, but she would take the leftover sweet potato mix, and take those, and make sweet potato jacks for breakfast the next morning. So, sweet potatoes, sweet potatoes. It was just a good time that I remember there. So, I didn't even realize that we were preparing ourselves to start a sweet potato pie business simply by just paying attention in the kitchen and enjoying it. Those were some of the happiest times that I can remember, when the women in my family was in the kitchen. And who would have known? Just paying attention and remembering what was taught to you was preparing us to start Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pies. I mean, it had never crossed my mind. Yeah. So—were you getting ready to ask me something?

[00:06:23.17]

Sarah A.: I was thinking about when you would sit and watch your grandmother baking pies and you would have your molasses and your biscuits, were you thinking, like, "Well, what I want to be doing too is, I want to be making those pies." Was it something, did you have to wait till you were older?

[00:06:35.18]

Joye M: Just a little bit older. She used to take reused bottles, fill them with water, and she'd use those as her rolling pins. Or cans. But most of the time, they were filled water containers. It just looked so fun with the water, I wanted to be rolling out dough. [Laughter] You know? But we were always tasting and taking a bite of this. So, she said, "I can't watch y'all. Y'all sit down over here. Get you some biscuits and molasses and be still!" [Laughter] But I wanted to be rolling in dough and sticking my finger in the mixture when she wasn't looking and that type of thing. But as we got older, I have to admit, I didn't get to make—physically make—a pie with her. She passed before we moved to Dallas, Texas when I was five years old. So, by the time we came back, the few times we came back before she passed, I didn't get the time to spend in the kitchen to have my hands on the pie. But my grandmother, my mother's mother, and my mother, they let us in the kitchen. And back then, they would just have us—of course you'd wash your hands and all that, but she would let us squish the potatoes with our hands once she finished roasting. So, for us, it was just like squish, squish. We'd look at—I'm looking at my sister, I'm like, "You squishing yours?" "I'm squishing mine!" It was so magical. Like I said, we moved to Dallas when I was five. My mother had untreated mental illness, so she was gone in and out a lot, so my grandmother—my second great-grandmother basically raised us. We went between her house and my grandmother's house before my mom moved us to Dallas, Texas. So, once we moved to Dallas and my mom continued—her illness continued to grow, it was untreated—I ended up running away from home because of all the abuse that was happening in the house. It was physical, sexual, mental. So, I just thought, remembered thinking—what I didn't know what happening out there,

first, is what I didn't know at home. But I was able to feed myself just because of the things I learned from my grandmother. I could go and see something growing somewhere and take it and—oh, yeah, you can eat that; this tastes good with this. It's okay, it doesn't have to be cooked. I knew how to eat raw foods. So, that was helpful, even though at that time I lived in abandoned houses and ate out of dumpsters and things like that, I still kinda had the strength . . . I always heard my grandmother, because she'd say, "You special, girl. Don't you let nobody tell you nothing." Because my mother was always saying something different, so she was always swooping in, "Don't you let anybody tell you different. Believe! I'm telling you. Believe! Your grandmama love you, baby." Grandmamas, I love grandmas. I'm a grandmother now, too, so I hope my grandkids think I rock. [Laughter] I'm all over the place. But back to just saying, on my journey to here, I feel like being homeless, learning how to be resilient, how to keep moving forward no matter what things look like or how they feel, just to look for the . . . always to remain, hopefully, beautiful on the inside, hopeful and beautiful. And to not let life and things around you that happen remove that. Keep your inner joy. So, I think all of that has been very helpful as I learned on the job, my way through everything. I graduated high school on time. I had one year of community college and just kind of fought my way through there and worked for the state, went to nonprofits. Did United Way, loved working there. Next up, RVA—go ahead—

[00:10:57.23]

Sarah A.: Can I ask, were you still in Dallas at this point, or were you . . . ?

[00:11:02.11]

Joye M.: You know, you have to help me. Help me, girl! I, at this point, I'm here in Richmond, Virginia. I came here. I've been in Richmond thirty-two years now.

[00:11:13.23]

Sarah A.: What brought you up to Richmond?

[00:11:17.22]

Joye M.: Following my husband. His brother had moved here and had a job with the post office and promised him a job, but you know he didn't have any control over who was going to get hired at the post office, right? But we came anyway, which was a great thing. It was the best thing ever. Best move ever, coming to Richmond. Was kind of where I found myself, learned myself, have grown into myself and continued to grow. So . . . so, since I've been here, like I said, I've been through those training processes and those jobs opportunities where I didn't even realize that I was learning the things that I need to learn to be able to start Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pies. Because right now, I mean, it's a one-man kind of administration thing happening, and it's been an . . . interesting journey, but it's been great.

[00:12:17.04]

Sarah A.: What year did you move to Richmond? I'm sorry, you said it was thirty . . .

[00:12:21.02]

Joye M.: Thirty-two years.

[00:12:22.04]

Sarah A.: Thirty-two years ago?

[00:12:22.13]

Joye M.: Thirty-three now, this being a year. [Laughter]

[00:12:26.21]

Sarah A.: Oh, yeah. So, that's late [19]80s, then?

[00:12:27.19]

Joye M.: Yeah.

[00:12:29.02]

Sarah A.: So, can I ask what Richmond was like then, and what the food scene was then?

[00:12:35.21]

Joye M.: Oh. [Laughter] I remember coming in off of [Interstate] 95, might've been about 7 a.m.

in the morning. I don't remember what day of the week. They had not built up Shockoe Bottom yet. Everything was still just the red brick warehouse-looking area. I remember thinking, "Oh, my God. Where has Eric brought *me*?" I mean, I was stunned. because it seemed so much smaller than what I thought it was going to be. Then, it didn't have a

skyline then, right? [Laughter] It was interesting. But, it turned out to be—again—the best move we made. It's not a slow town. It's just fast enough, to me. Richmond is just fast enough to be keeping up on the pace of what's going on, yet still slow enough to be home, to be comfortable, to raise your children. So, best move ever. I'm loving Richmond, and their support. Especially with Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pies. In May of last year, the nonprofit I worked for restructured and my position was eliminated. At first, I was devastated. I still stayed on through June, I stayed on three days to help them transition, because I *love* them and what they do. Because they take care of what I call little Joyebells out there with expanded learning after school and making sure that they're spending their time positively, eating, all of the things that would have been of great support for me when I was homeless or just out on the streets. So, I stayed with them through June. At first, I was devastated. I'm like, "Oh, God. I gotta start over!" You know. Well, since you've already got my age recorded down on record, I'm like, "I'm about to be fifty-six, gonna have to start over?!" Then I said, "Okay. What you gonna do, girl? Either you gonna start over and prove your worth to whomever, or you're gonna know your worth and you're gonna do something about it." So I was like, "I think I'm going to climb with the ladder." [Laughter] Plus, I have an adult son who has mental illness, or mental health challenges, and that makes now more flexible—even in the middle of today's schedule and production, I squeezed in, getting him to his doctor's appointments for his injections. For anyone out there listening, please know that there are medicines now that you can—if you're having troubles with any of your children, loved ones that are not taking their prescribed pills or you're having issues with that, please know that R.B.H.A. and many other organizations now have medicines in injection form,

thirty days, sixty days, ninety-day formats, and that just alleviates so much of the pressure of a parent having to try to monitor a child, whether or not they're doing what they need to do. Okay! Sorry. Back on track.

[00:15:55.14]

Sarah A.: No, that's important, because it sounds like you're very committed to using your platform as a successful small business owner, as a local small business owner, and especially working in food service where you're coming into all kinds of people all the time, and you're really using that to advocate for issues beyond just food and helping people to eat well, but actually bigger issues.

[00:16:14.27]

Joye M.: Um-hm. Yes. I just know—ran into several people who are struggling with trying to figure out how to get their teens, because once they start the medication and they start to feel better, they're going, "I don't need this." And then they're not-- "Did you take your medicine?" "Yeah, I took it." But then you don't find out until the break happens. So, yes, please know that there are injections now for most medications that people are prescribed for mental health supports in thirty-, sixty-, and ninety-day injectables.

[00:16:49.19]

Sarah A.: I have a question. Before you phased out of your position last year with your nonprofit, but as you've said, you were doing a lot of different things over the years—different jobs; of course, raising your family. What kind of cooking were you doing

during that? Before you were doing it professionally, what kind of foods were you making? Were you repeating your own experiences in North Carolina?

[00:17:13.19]

Joye M.: Definitely repeating the experiences of the foods that grandparents, mothers, prepared on a daily basis. Child, it was not helping. It was some good, old, Southern seasoned—say what? I just gained five pounds from dinner kind of meals. Some kind of good. I'm a little more plant-based these days, dragging and pulling my husband with me. He's like, "Really? No. This is not what I'm used to." But yeah, pork chops smothered, fried, collard greens and all of the traditional ways that they were made. So, I still make most of the Southern foods, but instead of fat back and my greens, I do smoked turkey wings. You know, that type of thing. So, I still do the throwdown types of foods. Far as the sweet potato pies, I only made those for family and friends. I made sweet potato pies once a year. Once a year. I couldn't handle it. And all my family and friends, nobody wanted gifts. They didn't want shoes, clothes, money, gift certificates: "We want a pie." "We need two pies." "We need three pies." You know?

[00:18:31.28]

Sarah A.: What time of year was that?

[00:18:32.29]

Joye M.: Thanksgiving. Right at Thanksgiving. I maybe baked about a hundred pies or so every year around Thanksgiving, and then I made extras that are—because they're very

freezable, whether you bake them or not, they store fantastically. So, I'd bake extras for the house and stick them in the freezer, then pull them out as the year passed. The year went along. No, it was just too much. But that's what they wanted: sweet potato pie. "We want the sweet potato pie!" Or I'm coming to an event. "Bring the sweet potato pie!"

[Laughter]

[00:19:09.00]

Sarah A.: When you were making those pies, making a hundred pies, were you doing all of that yourself? Did you conscript the children to help you?

[00:19:15.09]

Joye M.: My daughter helps. My daughter likes being in the kitchen with us. My daughter and my sister—so, my sister's a sixth-generation pie baker. She works with us as well. My daughter does, and so she's seventh-generation. But my daughter can make them. She can cook anything that we can bake or cook, my daughter can make. As a matter of fact, she did cook Thanksgiving dinner for us this past Thanksgiving, because it was our first, we had just launched in October this past year at the Market at 25th Street, and we were selling—we sold about three hundred and fifty pies in a two-week, the week before Thanksgiving and the week of. It was amazing. We'd come in, we couldn't even—we were in the kitchen and we couldn't get the pies in the oven and out and packed and over to the market fast enough. I'm coming in, I'm dragging my cooler behind me because I'm still a small business, I'm dragging coolers. I come around the corner and I heard a guy say, "There she is!" I looked and he was pointing and people were turning around and

coming over, and this older lady was fussing at me, "Do you know how long I've been standing here waiting for you? I can't believe you'd have me standing and waiting this long!" She picked up the pie, she looked at it, and you could see some of the steam still coming. "These still hot!" She reached over and grabbed five pies. Picks them up and says, "Thank you!" And turned around and walked off. It was hilarious. I have never experienced anything like what's currently happening in my life. The support, I get a little choked up trying . . . it's like I've been working hard— haven't been on pies, it's been on life, just like everybody else—and it's like the roots or the antennas, I'm wiggling my fingers out there for anyone listening, I have my hands open and they spread wide and I'm wiggling my fingers, because those represent my roots just growing up and up. I'm doing this and I'm doing that, and you're like, "Why'd you do this? You didn't even complete that." "Well, you finished that, and what happened with that? Nothing came of that, you're just wasting your time." When you look at it and then you get to that spot where it's your time and all of your things line up, and then your top covering comes on, and then all of those little webs from this amazing network of you, the people you bring with you, the people that helped you, and it just filters all out. It's just amazing. That's how it feels here in RVA right now. I'm sitting here talking to you. Come on, now. You see what I'm saying? It's just amazing. It's so much bigger than me, so much bigger than me. I'm just hoping my grandmamas and my mama and everybody's looking down and proud, especially my Mom, because she's, "You ain't gonna do nothing." How you like me now, Mommy? You know you proud, girl. Go on and say it. [Laughter] So, it's just been amazing. We've done *Virginia This Morning* and *The Today Show*. Southern Foodways Alliance interviews. Come on!

[00:22:39.03]

Sarah A.: I'm curious about what brought you to the point where you realized, "This is something I can do." So, you phased out of one job. You're not really sure that you want to start a whole new one, but you know that you can bake and you know that, every year, you have everybody clamoring for your pies. Can you walk us through the moment where you thought, "Well, wait a minute"

[00:22:58.12]

Joye M.: Right. So . . . I was feeling sorry for myself, of course, because I'd lost my job. So, I tend to bake sweets. I like to—let's be transparent. Hi, everybody. My name is Joye, and I eat sweets when I stress. Okay? I tend to bake a lot of sweets so I can eat them. Okay? [Laughter] So, I made my pies, as usual. One of-- my neighbors were out, they were like, "Girl, that smells so good." Type of thing. I'm like, "Yeah, I'm making sweet potato pies." She's like, "Oh!" I said, "Would you like a piece?" You know, being neighborly, gave her a piece of pie. She's like, "Girl! Mm!" She was smacking her lips. "Mm!" She said, "Girl, I would *pay* for this." I said, "Hmm." I was trying to figure out a stay-at-home position somehow or another so that I could be more flexible for my son. Still hadn't even made it to the pies yet, so this is not in my mind. When she said that, I was like, "Hmm." And I had already talked to the Dairy Bar owners, Bill and Patricia, owners of the Dairy Bar in Scotts Addition, and told them I was leaving. They were like, "If there's ever anything you need—" Because I was leaving— "Just let us know."

[00:24:22.13]

Sarah A.: Had you been working there at that point?"

[00:24:24.08]

Joye M.: I was working with my nonprofit, Next Step RVA. I don't mind you mentioning them, because that's a good shout out for them. We had just moved. We were a part of the community foundation, so we had just moved to Scotts Addition last year. So, remember the announcement, the big move. So, I'm right across from the Dairy Bar and, you know, Stella's, right at that corner. I remember them saying, if there's anything we can do while you're trying to figure out what you're doing next, let us know. So, when she said that, I'm like, "Hmm. Maybe I can sell some—" At the time, I said tarts. "—sweet potato tarts, little grab-and-go's." Bill and Patricia told me they were called grab-and-go's, give credit where it's needed. So, I was like, "Hey." I brought them up there for them, took them samples. I'm like, "Hey, I'm thinking while I'm trying to figure it out, is it okay if I try to see if I can sell sweet potato tarts for some income?" Just some. And it—phew! People were loving it, and Bill was like, "Yeah, come on. We'll put you in the store." I mean, they have their own desserts, so they were really trying to support me and help me figure out if this was something I could do. They let me in and, from there, I went and when they said yes, I knew it was real. I don't know. I knew it was real before then, because I made the damn tarts and took them there, can't get any realer than that, right? But it was something empowering about the fact that they said yes, and that people were buying them.

[00:26:06.11]

Sarah A.: Very validating.

[00:26:07.20]

Joye M.: That's the word! You go, girl. Yes, validating. I felt validated and it made me feel strong. And I'm like, "I'm going to do this." Right?

[00:26:20.13]

Sarah A.: What were the next steps then? So, you realize, "This is something I can really do."

[00:26:23.02]

Joye M.: So, then I went and I really figured out what I wanted my logo to look like, which I call Anime Joyebell. She don't age, she don't wrinkle, she don't get fat. She's just popping all the time, right? So, I'm like, "We're gonna let her be the face of the company. That way, we don't have to worry about none of this other stuff." Right? Because I'm . . . no. I got with an illustrator, described what I wanted her to look like and all of this, the energy that she needed to give out when people met her online. The first girl he sent back, she was so skinny, I was like, "Hm-mm. This is not realistic." [Laughter] "I'm like, no, no, no, no. She is too skinny. I need her to be just a little more realistic. She can be fit, fit is good, but I want her to be just a little—give her some hips. Give her some you know." Most of you don't see my hair; I have a white streak right here, a silver streak. Well, it's more than that now, but at the time, I had just a prominent silver streak, so Anime Joye Bell has that too. We went from that, and I took this—my mind just, I don't know how. Even though I

worked operations, development, and communications at my nonprofit, I had those working skill sets to go in and putting the business together, but I'm so spastic. I'd take little sticky notes, Post-It notes, and if thoughts cross and flash, I write them, stick them on the wall. Stick it on the wall. Then my wall looks covered. Then I go back and I take those and turn it into those working spreadsheet with different quarters for the year.

That's how I did it; I put all my thoughts out on sticky notes on the wall, pulled those and organized them in my Excel spreadsheet, and started moving and worked each section as I needed to. Thought about how things cross-sected, and, "once this happens in the third quarter, what happens if you do this in the first quarter?" type of thing. So, I just went through the whole process of becoming an LLC, which was a lot of work, getting that done. But I had great people that I could draw on to get advice from, what was the best way to do this. Even my experience at the nonprofit that I left, I just felt like, didn't even realize how much it had prepared me to be able to start a business, hit the ground running, and to make it seem—well, I don't want to say make it seem like—but to present in a fashion that . . . most businesses would have taken a few years to have established.

Yeah, I think that's the way to say that. [Laughter]

[00:29:26.11]

Sarah A.: It just sounds like you had every part covered in terms of marketing and the business end and everything else. You had a real sense of just how to bring it all together. So, where were you cooking out of at this point?

[00:29:40.01]

Joye M.: The last statement you said, about seeming like you just seem to have it all together, to pull it all together, I would like to acknowledge that I feel like I've been working on the communications part for the past ten years in the music side, when I was presenting as an artist, Joye B. Moore, inspirational and jazz. Done the Richmond Jazz Festivals, Fridays at Sunset, Hippodrome, B.E.T., TV One. We were doing pretty good as an independent artist. So, I learned a whole lot that I think also—because I don't want to make it seem like, "Oh, she just decided she was gonna do it and then poof, there you go." [Laughter] I say that to say for anyone out there listening: you are where you're supposed to be right now in your life, in your journey. Don't sweat it. Keep working, keep moving, so you'll be prepared. When everything falls together, you go, "Oop! I didn't know I was getting ready for that." So, I'm just saying all that to say, please keep moving. Okay, now, what was your question? I'm so sorry. [Laughter]

[00:30:59.00]

Sarah A.: So, for the cooking end of it—since, as you say, you've had a lifetime and a career and just your adulthood and everything else of all of these pieces coming together, which ended up being perfect for the business. But you also have the practical end, the cooking end. So, what did that look like in the early days, and how has that evolved in the time now that you've been running, from the moment you were first asking the couple at the Dairy Bar if you could sell through them, and then to now? How has the kitchen changed?

[00:31:31.18]

Joye M.: Oh, wow. Kitchen has changed drastically. From my tarts at the Dairy Bar, we're talking in my small apartment in the kitchen with my regular convention oven—two racks, not even three. [Laughter] Two racks and working it out. I worked it out all the way up until we moved into, started renting space at Hatch Kitchen RVA, which has been a great experience. Well, let me back up—I started out at Kitchen Time. I went from my house or my apartment, where it took eight hours to bake ten pies—

[00:32:18.16]

Sarah A.: And then you just have pies on every surface cooling.

[00:32:19.05]

Joye M.: Right, and not having enough raised cooling racks and all of that type of thing, to moving into Kitchen Time, which used to be out on Broad Street before they closed. We were there from October to December.

[00:32:37.07]

Sarah A.: What year is this? I'm sorry. Is this 2018?

[00:32:38.11]

Joye M.: [20]19. We just started last year, we just launched in October at the Market last year. So, we were at Kitchen Time there, which was great learning how to, getting comfortable with messing with ovens that don't look like the ones at the house. Had access to more ovens so I could cook more pies but still, it was an even better move going to Hatch,

because they have the big industrial baker rotating ovens. I was like, "Ooh, this is pretty." I had to put a video of it on my Instagram. I put everything on Instagram. But then, they also cultivate with their clients and help them grow and figure some things out, especially for me new to the industry, I'm coming from state and nonprofit work onto a whole culinary industry. You know, it's one thing to bake at home—which I find out, it's one thing to be in your kitchen and move how you want to than to go through your Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services certifications, inspections, licensing, zoning, you still have to get a zoning occupancy permit. I mean, just all of those things. So, it was an interesting learning experience that I didn't feel the pressure of because I didn't know enough to know that I was supposed to be stressing. [Laughter] If that makes sense. Even as I move in the industry, people will say, "That's not how you do that." Or, "That's not what you're supposed to do." I'm like, "Well, that's all I know how to do at the moment." So, I didn't know that it wasn't not supposed to work, so it worked. You know what I mean? Because I expected it to work. I say that to people, too. Just do it. Just do it.

[00:34:35.03]

Sarah A.: And what does it look like now? How many pies are you making in a week and where are you distributing?

[00:34:42.15]

Joye M.: Ooh, child. God is so good. [Snaps] [Sings] He is so good! Is all I can say. We started out at the Dairy Bar, the pandemic hit and restaurants shut down. Thank goodness we had one client, the Market at 25th Street, which is a grocery store, a new store in Church Hill.

So, I was able—with lots of marketing and pushing and pushing the product in front of RVA—able to sustain safe operations through the pandemic, just through sales at the Market at 25th Street. That's how great RVA has been. That's how great they have been, supportive. Then, just recently, we just got into Good Foods Groceries—I know, I keep moving. She's—girl, I'm gonna make you work your arm to death, I'm so sorry—we just got into Good Food Groceries and Little House Green Grocery. So, now we're in three grocery stores, but let me tell you. Let me—how does it? Let me share the good with you. [Sings] We just got the Food Lion contract. Shut up! Yes ma'am. We just got the Food Lion contract. I'm just . . . I mean, I got the goosebumpies right now as I just say it again out loud. Say it out loud! I got the Food Lion contract. So excited for the support. I'm not sure how they heard of us, because they reached out to us, which is amazing because they don't do local vendors in their deli department because they have a bakery. So, again, that's why I say this is so bigger than me. Can't be any one thing that I'm personally doing. I just, I don't, it's bigger than me; it's people like you who see the value in our pie legacy, six generations, my third-great-grandmother, the connection of family coming together. And then you get to do it with a quality slice or product that everybody's happy with together. So, we're super excited. We will be, October, in Food Lion stores on their shelves. There's going to be a campaign. I know! It blows my mind, too. So, it's just amazing. We're super excited about that. How many pies are we making a week? We do twelve mix-and-mashes a week, and that's enough for eight hundred and seventy-five pies that we do a week. So, we mash and mix eight hundred and seventy-five pies' worth of mix a week, but we bake nine hundred pies a week. So, we have this inventory of mash, and then we bake, we package, and they go so nicely in the freezer as they wait to be

shipped off. People who order, the supporters and family who order online for, like, curbside pickup, where they can come pick up from us at Hatch on Fridays, they can even order it baked or raw, frozen if they want to go home and bake it themselves. So, we're just trying to figure out ways to be accessible as we figure out how to scale. What do they say, "I want to be on every supermarket shelf in America! I want every family and every community to have access to Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pie. Bring love in your house! Let us love you. We'll do the work, you can take the credit. You ain't even got to tell nobody you got it from Joyebell's." [Laughter]

[00:38:30.25]

Sarah A.: Do you put any of the story on the packaging at all? I know it's on your website.

[00:38:35.11]

Joye M.: No, I hadn't thought about that. Now, see? Now, where is my pen? Can I borrow your pen? Because I'm gonna write this. Or your marker? I'm gonna write that down. Add that—you say, six-generation recipe. That's enough to pull it out. Girl, I'm having a meeting with you right now. We're having a strategy session, family. This is what you call networking. This is how we all work together to bring each other up. Let me know this. Can I assist you in helping you hold your microphone? Can I return the favor? Oh.

[00:39:06.24]

Sarah A.: So, you said you're the sixth generation, your daughter's the seventh generation.

[00:39:12.25]

Joye M.: I have a son as well.

[00:39:12.27]

Sarah A.: So, you've got a son and a daughter, your two children?

[00:39:15.10]

Joye M.: Oh, no. I have three children. I raised four. When I was telling you earlier what was going on in my house growing up, it didn't just affect me, it affected my sister and my brother, as well. So, my sister took another route, but she's great now, but she took another route, so I raised her daughter at the time. So, I feel like I have four children. I have three grandbabies. Yeah, my oldest son is thirty-four. My daughter is twenty-seven. And the two, the youngest, my niece and my son are the same—my sister and I were pregnant at the same time. Can you imagine what that was like? Oh, my goodness. So, they are both twenty-four. [Laughter]

[00:40:04.02]

Sarah A.: And how old are your grandchildren?

[00:40:04.28]

Joye M.: Oh. Ooh! Six. Two. One-and-a-half.

[00:40:12.29]

Sarah A.: Do you have the six-year-old working in the kitchen yet?

[00:40:15.05]

Joye M.: Oh, he loves it. Now, he can't come in the commercial kitchen now because they won't allow babies in the space, but before going over to Hatch, he was allowed over in the Kitchen Time's. He would have his big table and all of his arts and crafts and then he'd come around and sweep the floor, or he like his grandmama, he liked the rolling pin. So, he loved rolling them out, so we'd just give him his own dough so it didn't really matter. You know, kinda how it came out. If it worked, we'd use it. Otherwise, we didn't have to worry about any cross-contamination. It's forever engrained in my brain. But we just gave him, he felt like he was working. But he would sweep the floor. He said, "Mom— Grandma—" "Close your mouth while you're eating, baby." "Okay. You make the best sweet potato pie ever!" It's like, "Thank you, baby. Grandma love you, too." [Laughter] But he loves it. Loves it, loves it, loves it.

[00:41:16.02]

Sarah A.: We started this interview by talking about where sweet potato pie and its broader legacy in food, but can you just tell us for the record, what's in a sweet potato pie? And you don't have to give away any trade secrets, but if you want to just walk us through what's in it.

[00:41:29.14]

Joye M.: Sweet potato pie: really nice, ripe sweet potatoes. I am kind of O.C.D about my sweet potatoes. I don't want to see a bunch of craters and holes and stuff, make me feel like critters are in there and all of that. So, you gotta have some pretty sweet potatoes. So I can make pretty sweet potato pies with butter. Again, if you're on a diet, don't eat Joyebell's, because it really is an homage to traditional, old school sweet potato pie. But sweet potatoes, butter, cinnamon, sugar, brown sugar, molasses, and a whole bunch of other goodies that if I tell you, there wouldn't be no more Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pie.

[Laughter]

[00:42:16.22]

Sarah A.: Don't give away any secrets.

[00:42:20.03]

Joye M.: But I will say this, though: family. I told them that on the *Today* show. That was the most animated moment I experienced, or exchange I experienced with Al Roker, was when I told him—he co-signed. "That's right, family! Lord have mercy!" Please de-string your sweet potato pies. There is nothing worse than biting into sweet potato pies, these strings sticking out or you're getting them on your lip, your tooth. So, I will say: take your sweet potatoes, while they're hot, and get your mixing . . . what do you call it?

[00:42:58.27]

Sarah A.: Food mill?

[00:43:00.22]

Joye M.: Just the blender, just the regular old whip that you use, beaters.

[00:43:05.07]

Sarah A.: A whisk?

[00:43:05.07]

Joye M.: Beaters, no, the whisk ain't—I'm talking about the kind you use to mix your cake in the pan. I'm blanking. But they got the two little beater blades that turn round and round.

[00:43:15.03]

Sarah A.: Yeah, yeah, like an electric mixer.

[00:43:16.15]

Joye M.: Thank you, ma'am. Take your hot sweet potatoes, and whatever you're using, however you make your sweet potatoes, whatever your melting element is—for me, it's butter—mix that with your sweet potatoes while it's hot. I mean, super hot. And beat them, beat them, beat them, beat them, and then look at the blades once you finish that, and you'll see all these strings just wrapped around it. Those are the strings that most people leave in their sweet potato pies. They don't beat them out. So, that's the one thing I will say. If you want to know why Joyebell's Sweet Potato—or one of the reasons why—Joyebell's Sweet Potato Pie is so creamy, honey, we beat them strings straight up outta there.

[00:44:01.08]

Sarah A.: Did you learn that one the hard way?

[00:44:05.03]

Joye M.: Well, now, that's something I learned. That's a family trait that was passed down. I

remember the first time that my sister and I tried to make sweet potato pie without supervision, and we forgot to de-string the dadgum sweet potatoes, and my mama let us know.

[00:44:25.13]

Sarah A.: How old were you?

[00:44:25.13]

Joye M.: Like nine, ten. [Laughter] And, yeah. So, we learned the hard way, remember to de-string. Then, of course, your little brother, he want to co-sign, if I had my Mr. Sweet Potato Head and I pulled the lips off on the backside, because he was always cozying up to Mom, he'd yell, "Mom, look at all of the strings!" "Go sit down somewhere." But yeah, we learned the hard way: just de-string the sweet potatoes. [Laughter]

[00:44:57.11]

Sarah A.: Do you make anything else right now?

[00:45:01.09]

Joye M.: Peach cobbler. Joyebell's Peach Cobbler. Right now, it's only available at the Market at 25th Street and Little House. In all honesty, as we have scaled production getting ready for Food Lion, I'm not sure how practical it may be to continue to do the peach cobbler at this time, just until we can grow a little bit more and have extra staff that we can just dedicate to that. I think that'll be part of our growing process. It was a tester that I tested and couldn't take back. [Laughter] I'm like, "Hey, can I test this? Just see if that's something we want to do next?" And that was all she wrote. I'm thankful, appreciative, but I'm like, "I really wasn't planning on . . . putting it out at that time." Again, RVA has been amazing. I'm just—especially in this time of unrest with the civil unrest and everything, I've been blessed to experience the other side, the other beautiful side, of what it feels like to be supported as a new business, and being introduced to the RVA area in these turbulent times. It's been a beautiful, scary process. [Laughter]

[00:46:26.05]

Sarah A.: I know you said earlier when COVID first came, you did not have some of the challenges that a lot of local restaurants had, because a lot of local restaurants had to close, and that did affect where you could sell, but it didn't affect your ability to keep producing, since you were working out of Hatch and since you sold then through Market at 25th. Did you have any of the issues that a lot of people had sourcing ingredients? Flour or anything like that?

[00:46:52.08]

Joye M.: Oh, yeah. It got rough for a minute, right? When everything was selling on the shop. I mean, we worked with . . . Restaurant Depot and P.F.G., so there was some lag time with some of the sources, things in transit, shipping, getting supplies. We lucked out and went out—found a couple of farmers, and I'm blanking on their names. I can send you that if you wanted that, but went out to one local farmer here in the RVA area that helped us keep our supply, sweet potato source going. Then, like you said, my O.C.D. with how nice sweet potatoes need to look, that pandemic hitting, you were getting some weird-looking things as they were trying to force the issue to keep the supply chain open. So, yeah, it was awesome to get the following here in the RVA area and pick it out. It reminded me of my grandmother being out, picking vegetables. So, it was a great experience.

[00:48:01.05]

Sarah A.: So, you could go out and you could actually just see them right at the source of where they were growing and how they were growing?

[00:48:05.02]

Joye M.: Right on. And they were so pretty, and made such pretty pies. Yes.

[00:48:11.25]

Sarah A.: Now, in terms of the future of your business, what do you envision and what is your ideal, your dream, for what Joyebell's looks like in the future?

[00:48:24.19]

Joye M.: I know I seem like I was kidding earlier, but my dream really is to be on every major grocery store shelf. I can settle for the U.S. I'll take the world, but I can settle for the U.S. But that way, I can feel like all families, all economic backgrounds and cultures, if you want some sweet potato pie and you want some good old heavenly North Carolina-style desserts bursting with flavor, then Joyebell's got you. And I would like for them, for anyone who would want that, to have access to it. So, that's my goal. Now, smaller stores, I'm with that, too, because I'm a small business. But definitely on every major chain shelf so that anyone who wants it has access. Nationwide shipping. Once we get acclimated with Food Lion, that's our next thing to tackle is nationwide, because we're getting all these requests from all around, "Do you ship?" "Do you ship?" "Do you ship?" So, that's a milestone that we have marked. Then, Joyebell's Kitchen. I want a cooking show. I am going to have—and I forgot, I don't even do "want" anymore. I am going to have a cooking show, and it's going to be called Joyebell's Kitchen. And I can't tell everybody, the recipe's proprietary, so I can't tell them that, but the in-betweens of things, it'll be all Joyebell's behind the scenes in-between. I will be introducing local chefs, whether they're known like really big and upcoming all the way to someone I think is banging even though maybe only three people might know of them. So, to introduce new chefs and recipes, to have a little segment where we can not talk about the events of the world, but where we can share some valuable information, whatever needs to be shared at the time. Then Kitchen Groove, which is my opportunity to get to sing again. So, for each show, there'll be a live song performance with the band in the kitchen. So, that's what I'm—yeah. Oh, and one more! And to distribute, I seen it, Joyebell's is going to distribute other

local vendors nationwide. Don't know how that's gonna happen, either, with the planet, but I saw it. [Laughter]

[00:51:15.10]

Sarah A.: So, your pies are such a connector for you to so many worlds; I mean, to your advocacy for mental health, to your art, to your music, to business, obviously, of course, to other media. Can you talk a little more about that and just kind of where you see all of these feelings intersecting in your food? I guess if you could share that with people, what you want people to understand about why you make the pies that you make and what they mean for you.

[00:51:56.06]

Joye M.: Ooh, wow! That's deep. [Laughter] I can only say how they make me feel now. I can only talk about the now without telling other long detours to talk about the before. Now, pies—sweet potato pies—represent happiness, freedom, freedom to be yourself, because as you can see, I'm a loud, cackling, which had to be contained every day in the workplace, you know what I'm saying? It had to be contained every day in the workplace. So, I feel free, I feel happy. I feel closer to my family than I ever been before. My daughter seems—I'm definitely not taking credit for her burst of movement and growth, but I feel like the energy is sharing and flowing positively. I know that I won't be . . . that older woman who's doing something she doesn't want to do just because she has to live. You know? I see an end, I see an alternate ending to that, and pies are that for me. My husband and I will get to be older and secure. I see security in pies. It's just brought my

family together. I just can't explain how close. I mean, I always knew we were close, but it's a whole different experience. So, pies: love, peace, freedom.

[00:53:51.02]

Sarah A.: And what do you think about when you think about people around the city, around the state, and one day across the country, maybe, eating your pies? How does that—I was gonna say, how does that make you feel, but I bet I know the answer to that. What do you think, what do you picture?

[00:54:07.09]

Joye M.: I picture families in their homes laughing, smiling, sitting around, doing nothing, doing lots. We started the Joyebell's family photo album on Instagram, so for everyone who purchases the pie, I ask them to send me a photo or a video of them enjoying it or their loved ones enjoying it. It's a connector. People are sending me pictures and videos of their kids, husbands, them, eating the pie. The pie gone. Ooh! It's wonderful. So, it's a connector. The main biggest thing is that sweet potato pies connects. It connects everyone. It crosses all boundaries, cultures, colors, genres and this; everybody eats. Everybody eats. So, I feel fortunate and happy to be making something that connects others.

[00:55:17.26]

Sarah A.: And if you . . . sorry, let me rephrase that. What else would you like us to know?

What is, before we start wrapping up here, is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to talk about, that you would like to cover?

[00:55:40.15]

Joye M.: I would just like to say, I know every year, the third Wednesday—or is it Tuesday—[in November] is Giving Tuesday, and if you are even, and that's coming soon, that's just a couple of months away. If you're looking for a way to support organizations to give to, please visit the website, and you will see a link for Joyebell's charities. I don't personally have any charities, but these are the charities that have made an impact in my life and a huge impact in the RVA community and the focus areas which, for us, are teen homelessness, mental health wellness, child abuse prevention, and phasing out what—expanded learning after school. So, if you're just looking for somewhere that's an organization that is making great strides to impact, please visit Joyebell's.com, that's J-o-y-e-B-e-l-l-s-.c-o-m, and then look for Joyebell's charities. And consider one of those organizations to donate to. And you don't have to wait until Giving Tuesday; you can donate any time. Really, you can, and they would be most appreciative. Particularly, my absolute favorite is R.B.H.A., which is Richmond Behavioral Health Authority. They work with my family for my son, and it's done wonders. It's been two years; he hasn't had any psychiatric breaks. All the programs have really helped him acclimate to do what he needs to do. Food Lion, as a matter of fact, gave him his first job. He had his first psychiatric break during his freshman year at O.D.U. during finals, and that stress and that pressure—and I didn't know before then, but I found out that's when most young men

have their breaks, is during finals and in college, their first year of college. So, but R.B.H.A. has helped him acclimate. Food Lion gave him his first job, after he made his recovery—or yeah, his recovery to be able to be functioning. They were awesome. He had breaks off and on while at Food Lion, they still held—I mean, they are supportive of the mental health community. So, I just want to say, check out Joyebell's charities and see if there's any organizations you want to support. R.B.H.A. for sure, whoop whoop! Thank you so much for all you've done for my family. And yeah, I think that's it. [Laughter] I'm sorry.

[00:58:35.04]

Sarah A.: That's great. Well, thank you so much, Joye. This has been wonderful and it's been really just illuminating to hear how you've really made your history with food and your love of food and just bridged it to so many different areas throughout your life, culturally and professionally and medically and everything else. Thank you.

[00:58:57.03]

Joye M.: Thank you for having me here. And thank you for making this so easy! You're such a sweetie pie. [Laughter]

[00:59:04.01]

Sarah A.: All right, thanks.

[*End of interview*]