

A photograph of a white school bus with three people looking out the windows. On the left, a woman with a colorful headwrap smiles. In the middle, a boy in a blue cap and green jacket smiles. On the right, a boy in a black leather jacket and grey beanie smiles. The background shows bare trees and a grey sky.

when
life
gives
you
lemons

AN ENTREPRENEUR'S PATH TO JOYFUL LIVING

BY LISE METZGER



“When life hands you lemons, you make lemonade.”

This is one of the many mottos Carleen Goodridge lives by, and it’s the perfect tagline for a woman who has built a lemonade-drink-mix business among other things. Every new enterprise and skill that Carleen adds to her repertoire contributes to her journey—first to survive, then to thrive, and eventually to flourish as she works to fulfill her ultimate dream: to own and work a piece of land and to welcome people to come and stay there, offering them healthy food and educational experiences and creating community.

Running a bed-and-breakfast on a farm has long been a retirement dream for the 39-year-old mother of four, and it took her a while to realize it is a dream that might be within reach before her later years. However, there was a lot of difficulty and a lot of healing to live through first, before Carleen would get to this dreamy, lemonade part.

Carleen was four years old when her father began regularly sexually abusing her, which went on until age twelve.

“All my life, if I tried to talk to someone, no one wanted to talk about it, so I just stopped talking about it. I had a secret I had to keep, and I had to put on a front.” She has been a single mother for most of her parenting years, during which time Carleen has endured more than her share of further struggles.

Two particularly significant developments that happened in conjunction with the births of her last two children informed the growth of Carleen’s dream. During her pregnancy with her third child twelve years ago, big weight gain and heart palpitations led her to make the connection between food and health for the first time. Working with a nutritionist, Carleen’s energy was renewed when she cut out processed foods and added lots more fresh vegetables and fruits. She had always enjoyed food and cooking, but she never had understood nutrition and the significance of food choices.

Fast-forward to 2012, when Carleen was married and living in Texas. Her husband was not a healthy eater, and during her fourth pregnancy she let herself backslide on her clean

diet, out of what she describes as laziness, a willingness to please her husband, and the need to save money. “I didn’t just stray a little,” she admits. “I went full-blown. I started having soda again. We ate at McDonald’s.” Carleen’s health problems returned—dramatically. She was in the hospital almost every month. She was diagnosed with autoimmune issues, but her physicians could never identify specifically what she had: Rheumatoid arthritis? Lupus? MS? “I didn’t want to keep going through the loops of what they wanted to diagnose me with,” she says, “or how many more drugs they wanted to add to my Ziploc bag full of prescriptions. So I started looking back at something I knew I should have been looking at: my nutrition, my diet—what am I eating?”

Around the time of the birth of her son, Carleen’s husband lost his job. Carleen was in school full-time, studying psychology and Christian counseling (“I thought I was going to open a counseling center”). The family needed money, so Carleen started having yard sales. She offered shoppers homemade cupcakes and cocoa because, she says, “If you bring someone into your home, you feed them.” People enjoyed the refreshments so much they insisted on leaving money, although Carleen never charged.

Then, as a gift for a friend’s Sweet Sixteen, Carleen’s daughter gave a cake that her mother had made. The girl’s mother insisted on paying something for it, then she referred a friend to Carleen, and then that person referred someone else. Before she knew it, Carleen was making cakes professionally. Then someone needed food for an event. “I realized, ‘Wait a second, this is money!’” Carleen says. So she decided to launch a catering company.

A year after Carleen began selling cakes, a board member at a nonprofit she catered for offered her his food truck—for free. So she sold paninis out of it. A year later, she opened a café. There, instead of soda she served her own unique flavor blends of lemonade made with healthier date sugar instead of white sugar. Carleen was also homeschooling her children *and* serving in the Army National Guard. A few months after she opened the café, Carleen and her husband separated.

Carleen maintained this hectic life for about eight more months, and then came the wake-up call. One day she had a headache, then an arm ache. But Carleen was having so many physical symptoms already during those busy years—swollen legs, the inability sometimes to lift her arm, backaches—that she ignored these symptoms as well. The following day, a co-worker insisted on taking her to the hospital, where it was discovered Carleen was having a TIA, a “mini-stroke.”

During her three days in the hospital, Carleen got some rest and physical therapy, and just after that short time she felt rejuvenated and free from the aches and pains that she’d been living with for so long. “I hadn’t felt that energized in years,” she says. She finally acknowledged she was doing too much; she knew she needed to slow down and simplify.

Carleen made the decision to close her café, stop catering full-time, and focus on her children. In the mix of everything else she was doing, she had been selling her café’s popular lemonade as a mix at farmers’ markets, and she realized she could make enough money from just this busi-



ness if she could also lower her cost of living. Carleen also knew she needed to make a fresh start in a new city, afraid that catering requests would keep coming in and she would be unable to say no.

Carleen chose Baltimore as her family’s new home. “I felt it called to me. I knew it had a lot of farmers’ markets where I could sell my product, and it had a great movement of

small businesses. That was important.” Carleen’s expenses in Baltimore were still too high, however, so she began to consider the idea of living in a tiny house. “I had to minimize what ‘making a living’ was for me. [I asked,] What could I get rid of? What don’t we really need?” As a family, Carleen and her three boys made the decision to buy and convert a school bus to live in. (Her daughter, now grown, stayed in Texas.) Converting a school bus is the most logical choice, Carleen says, because she knows she wouldn’t be able to take on building a traditional tiny home. Because a bus already has the framework, she reasoned, she and her sons could build it out themselves from the inside. She plans to get help with plumbing, but everything else she and the boys are doing. “We YouTube it,” says her eldest. Now the idea of parking that bus on farmland has begun to seem like a possibility as well.

“The main reason I want land is, of course, I want to grow my own food for my family and have my own livestock,” Carleen says, “but I [also] want to host people. I love people, and I love fellowship. It’s why I loved having my catering company. I loved feeding people. I’d love to have other tiny homes on my land, be it a yurt or a tent, or eventually get a container home and have that there. And have this cute little community on this property where people can come and try out other tiny homes, and I prepare a few meals for them, and we invite other farmers to teach harvesting or whatever. Just have fun, really! That’s my heart. Why is there this amazing passion in me for food and fellowship? It’s family. It’s the family setting I didn’t have growing up.”

But as she has been searching for land for her dream farm, Carleen has struggled to find something affordable in Maryland. Last year she began to embrace the idea that they go mobile, exploring different states in search of affordable land, and staying on farms along the way to work and learn more about farming. (She has discovered Try It Tiny, a website that offers a list of farms, including educational farms, where one can park a tiny house.)



The extreme cold weather this past winter slowed down the build-out on the bus, however, so the family wasn’t ready to go mobile as planned. Also, business opportunities arose that made it better to stay in Baltimore for the time being. Carleen is now working out of a commercial kitchen, which has opened up the opportunity to grow her Le Monade business by selling her product online. Although Carleen, who is now mostly healthy, still experiences some inflammation, she noticed a drastic decrease in her inflammation once she started drinking golden milk. As a result, Carleen has developed a new product line to share these healing properties with her customers: she just launched her golden milk mix, a delicious

turmeric-pepper blend to stir into one’s milk of choice.

The projected growth of her business this year should help greatly with a future land purchase. The bus is a reality, and its conversion is being worked on, if slowly. Although Carleen is busy in the Baltimore kitchen, her farm dream is more alive than ever.

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Although Carleen's path has taken her through trauma, poverty, illness, and heartbreak, she has no regrets, she says, because "everything leads to the next thing." Like the time in 2003 when she was at an emotional breaking point and her car literally broke down in front of a church. Church members came out to help her, and over time she found community and a path to healing within that church.

Carleen is very comfortable about sharing her life story now, but it wasn't always that way. For years she wanted to keep her childhood abuse secret. It wasn't until 2007 that she was forced to face her past publicly, taking the healing that had begun within her church community to the next level. Carleen chose to broadcast her history in an attempt to save her sister, who had also been brutally abused by their father, in her case until she was 18, and was facing prison time for his murder.

Carleen spoke on the TV news and at colleges, churches, and nonprofits. The speaking helped to further her healing in large part, she says, because of the stories others shared with her about their own experiences. But merely talking did not lead to the transformative healing that came later. "I think when we're dealing with hurts and the past, a lot of us don't really look at and feel it. So it still sits with us and you can't move forward. I have this cheesy saying: 'With feeling comes healing.' Meaning you have to allow yourself to feel the experiences that you've been through. Every time I've gone through a dramatic healing experience, it was because I allowed myself to feel. That's when I really started to heal."

Carleen believes that healing is a lifelong journey. "You are going to come across situations, people, at all times. Even someone who has gone through cancer and is in remission. It's a continuing healing because you can't take on any old habits, you still have to watch your diet, you are at risk. It's the same thing with a life. You're never going to be completely healed, like there are never going to be additional issues. That's absurd. We have relationships that go wrong, we have jobs that we lose, we have health issues, issues with our children—whatever the case may be. There's always an opportunity to heal, so we're always on a healing journey.

"I'm very intentional about my healing. There are times when I can get caught for a moment, but thanks to the tools I use of having people around me, or journaling or stopping and pausing, I can catch myself. We're all at risk of backsliding, of moving without care, but I'm very intentional about keeping community around me and keeping tools that are healthy.

"I want Le Monade to have a social mission, like who we have work with us. Because I can't continue to do it by myself. So I'm looking at how I'm going to grow the company and how that's going to impact other people's lives. I wouldn't



be here doing what I do if it hadn't been for a community of people who have invested in me, and I want to share that with other people. I'm a huge advocate of people acknowledging *interdependence* over independence. We have a lot more in common—the words may be different, but we all have a story to share."

One of those commonalities is the various lemons we each are given—the raw material that shapes our story and also helps us conceive our dreams. "How do we take our story," Carleen asks, "and embrace it, redirect it, and live it joyfully?" Carleen got a basketful of abuse, divorce, and illness, but also children, a catering business, a café, a thriving boutique company, and lots of community support and healing—enough raw material to fuel her ultimate dream. There's no doubt that, someday soon, she'll be living her tiny-house dream on her own farm, hosting and feeding a community of guests and sharing what she has learned about health and healing.

To be sure, Carleen knows just what to do with lemons.



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