

Hecht/ Tanya Andrews/ Lead

On Tuesday, April 23rd, Yellow Dog Bakery was quiet, with bright rays of sun beaming onto hardwood floors, and lines of breads and sweet pastries lining the white wall. “Our owner’s name is Tanya, that’s pronounced “Tan-yuh” not “Ton-yuh,” said the bakery’s shift leader, Hannah Williams, as she slid one of their award-winning pecan sticky buns across the white marble counter. “I mean she’ll *tell* you herself, but just wanted to let you know beforehand,” Williams warned, subtly alluding to the bold spunk about to wash over anyone as they meet Tanya Andrews.

Tanya E. Andrews, 38, is the co-owner of Yellow Dog Bread Company, a Southern Bakery on East Franklin Street in Raleigh. She and her husband, Matt, grew the bakery from a weekend hobby into a thriving, staple-of-Raleigh business. When the two first opened the bakery’s doors in September of 2013, they dreamed of obtaining their current lives. Now the mother of two young boys and a successful business, Andrews reflects on her meandering path to Yellow Dog, one full of shitty toilets, state fairs, Ramen noodles, and edible underwear.

“My life is like a series of embarrassing moments,” Andrews laughs. “I fully believe that God’s plan for my life is to make others feel good about themselves.”

Her ability to maintain that life is hilarious, even in difficult times, has been a part of Andrews since she was a child. The native of Red Oak, in Eastern North Carolina, fondly recalls a conflict with her younger brother.

A high school aged Tanya Ezzell was watching *Free Willy* with her parents and brother, Will, nine years her junior. Tanya jokingly accused Will of having a romantic inclination toward the main actress of the movie. “I was just teasin’ him and tryin’ to embarrass him. The next thing I knew, I got socked right in the eye. Which was great, because, you know, I had a date picking me up in fifteen minutes,” Andrews chuckles. Her brown eyes light up when she tells about the look on her date’s face when he came into her living room to see Tanya with a steak on her eye.

Tanya spent a great deal of her childhood outside in the woods. Even at a young age, she was a “dreamer and a schemer,” spending her playtime setting up scenes instead of playing with them.

“I never got around to actually playing house, I’d just be setting the scene,” Tanya reminisces. “I was always setting wood booby traps. Then, I’d have my kitchen outside, and I’d have my spaghetti and meatballs, which, you know, were actually pine straws and gumballs.”

Andrews’ love for the outdoors can be traced to this time, as her “heart comes alive” when she is outside. Andrews especially appreciates the freedoms allowed by being outdoors, believing “you can just do what you want” in the country.

This “do what you want” attitude can be seen in Tanya’s high school persona, as she tells of flirting with a cute boy, named Matt Andrews, in line at a Christian youth group concert, asking him to swing dance with her. Tanya has been with her now-husband for over half of their

lives, even through college when Matt followed her to Boone, where she attended Appalachian State University for a communication degree.

Andrews took her studies seriously. She says school never quite came naturally for her, but she was determined to make the chancellor's list every semester, setting her sights on goals, and always aiming for A's.

"One time I got a C on an economics quiz and I thought I would have to go to therapy." Andrews tells with wide eyes.

In addition to her stellar grades, Andrews was a resident advisor, president of the snowboard club, and, as she puts it, a "goody two shoes with a pepper of hellion."

Tanya and her best-friend-from-high-school-turned-college-roommate, Tiffany, loved to play what they called "The Walmart Game," a mischievous prank where the girls would target an innocent Walmart shopper, and slip a random item into the victim's cart. "I mean, we would put anything from a jumbo pack of tampons to a 20 inch Christmas wreath in their cart, then go a couple of aisles over and just wait for chaos," Andrews chuckles.

Several years after her college graduation, Andrews finally arrived in her field of study, at Bramfield Promotions and Marketing Company. The 25-year-old granddaughter of a southern pastor, with limited sexual experience, was assigned her first account: Adam and Eve, a "sex toy and porno" company. Andrews still laughs at the extreme contrast between her "walkin' the straight and narrow path" and her task to plan a promotional campaign for Adam and Eve's new World War II based film, "How They Won the War Through the Back Door."

“During meetings, I always received care packages from their rep guy. He looked just like a grimy character from the Simpsons.” Andrews laughs. “He was nice, but I was always like, well, I don’t know what to do with these edible underwear you’re givin’ me.”

Even through the excitement of planning promotional campaigns, where Andrews was quite successful, she was not satisfied with her work.

“Sometimes you have to work things you don’t like to figure out what you do like,” Andrews said. “During that job, I was like, you know, all I feel like I’m doing is putting logos on pens and cups. It just wasn’t scratching my itches.”

During this time, her husband was feeling equally dissatisfied with his job. They began filling their weekends with time in the country, riding mini moto-cross bikes and raising chickens. When asked, “why chickens?” Andrews smirks and exclaims, “well, why not!” These chickens provided the Andrews with a plethora of eggs, so the two started baking.

They began with typical recipes: muffins and cookies to name a few, then began to venture into more complicated territory, conquering everything from sticky buns to heavy breads.

During this time of baking on the weekends and dragging through the week days at their corporate jobs, Matt and Tanya began dreaming about owning a bakery together. In the woods of Durant Nature Preserve, the Andrews planned the ways in which they could run a bakery and live their best lives. These dreamy “fantasy conversations” took place as they hiked with their beloved golden retriever, Ellie.

“The quietness of the woods afforded us the freedom to dream” Andrews said with more than a hint of nostalgia.

The little girl who spent her childhood planning in the woods was back. Instead of imagining meatballs, however, she was conceptualizing a business plan, crafting her future, and scheming up ways to get out of her corporate life and into the baking industry.

The two began fine-tuning their baking skills. Friends and family took notice. They gained quite a following, and decided to enter their creations into an “old-school baking competition” at the North Carolina State Fair. They came home with eight ribbons, including a blue ribbon for their sticky buns on Matt’s 30th birthday. Tanya quit her corporate job two weeks later. Those ribbons were all the affirmation she needed to take the gamble and dive into the baking business full time. As Tanya’s father says, “It’s time to piss or get off the pot.”

It would be another five-and-a-half years before Yellow Dog Bakery finally opened its doors. Andrews spent the time in between learning the baking business through a minimum-wage job at Stick Boy Bread Company. Tanya said there was a large knowledge gap between what she knew and what she needed to know before starting a bakery. Working at Stick Boy was where she bridged the gap, saying “if you want to learn something new, you need to make yourself useful to someone in that world.”

Andrews now calls this her “season of preparation,” noting the extreme difficulties of making finances work, training for her future bakery, and turning thirty. Andrews felt all of her friends were “arriving” to life. Walmart Games Tiffany had a masters degree, and a stable job teaching English. Tanya was scrubbing toilets.

“We have this expectation that having a dream and a passion is enough, that it will just be served to us on a silver platter,” Tanya said. “But if you’re not going to work hard, it’s not going to happen.”

The Andrews spent their weekends a bit differently than most thirty years olds. Every Friday night, they were given access to the large kitchen at Stick Boy. They would quickly load up all of the equipment and ingredients they needed into their grey Subaru Forester, and rush over to their rental bakery, where they spent eight hours cooking as many breads and pastries as they could manage, then pack it all back into their car and go, leaving no trace of their midnight baking escapades.

These goods sold out consistently at local farmers' markets. Every weekend, Matt and Tanya made more products, and every weekend they sold out. They made money, found popularity in their baking, and could see their dreams "had legs."

In September 2013, after no banks would lend the Andrews money, their families took risks and gave them the money they needed to open their bakery. Yellow Dog Bakery struggled at first.

"During the first little bit, we completely ran out of money. We ran out of ice and any money to buy the ice," Tanya recalled. "For Yellow Dog's fifth birthday last year, I bought a \$5,000 ice maker."

Since the bakery has taken off, Tanya remains firm in her philosophies for running the business, which are modeled after her golden retriever, Ellie's, personality. She strives for her bakery to be faithful, loyal, and gentle, just as her own yellow dog was.

As a boss, Tanya's intensity can be just a bit intimidating at first. Lauren Welsh, a Yellow Dog employee recounted her first few shifts working with Tanya.

"Tanya pays really close attention to small details, like the way products are stamped, bread bags are tied, and making sure that we know about every pastry and tasting note," Welsh

explained. “But after my first shift, she gave me a big hug and encouraged me on how well I had done.”

Now a financially stable mother of two, reflecting on her journey to success, Andrews wouldn’t have changed a thing.

“Those years were the hardest. Thinking of all the Ramen still makes me feel nauseous,” Tanya smiles. “But if Yellow Dog had opened right after I quit my first job, I would be half of the person that I am today.”

Her favorite part of owning the bakery?

“Becoming a part of families’ lives. I’ve watched kids grow up,” a soft smile spreads across Tanya’s face. “One time a kid did her first public poop in our bathroom, which is a big deal for a kid, you know? She was so proud of herself, we all clapped, and I gave her a special cookie. Those are the moments I treasure here.”

Poopy toilets have taken on a whole new, positive meaning since Tanya’s transition from working the bottom to the top of a business, and she is certainly not scrubbing them anymore.