

I wasn't always Knotty!

Born and raised in Dover, Delaware I lived the idyllic childhood. Loving parents, a doting aunt and grandparents whose attention and guidance still influence my decisions today.

When I was four, my father worked for "Ma Bell" and we lived in a mobile home park managed by my grandparents for the Dover Air Force Base. That is where my father met a man named Louie Hall. That is when my families path took an entire different direction. My father took a hiatus from the telephone company to spend a summer exploring the outdoor amusement business and never looked back.

We moved to Tampa and I would now have two lives, my winter life and summer life.

As a child who grew up traveling from fair to fair for the summer months, life was always an adventure. In between events, my family would take day trips visiting the sites of whatever city it was we were in. As a child I didn't realize how fortunate I was to experience so much of the country and its people as I did. There were times I wish I could just stay home for the summer like my school friends but once "on the road" that thought would vanish.

After graduating high school I dabbled in several different jobs only to find myself missing the fair life.

I was focused on the food side of the industry and needed to build something no one else had in order to acquire the events I wanted as opposed to what I could get. In 1994 I was sitting in the food court at the Christiana Mall in Wilmington, Delaware. I was eating my Sbarro's pizza and watching the little blue shop selling pretzels and it was as simple as that.

Anything made fresh and in front of people will sell, I thought to myself. There were plenty of frozen pretzels being sold at fairs but none that were made fresh. I got out a piece of paper and some colored pencils and sketched what is today "Der Pretzel Haus"

I had never made a pretzel in my life before but I thought how hard could it be? After spending 3 months of 16-18 hour days building the trailer and trying to get it contracted with fairs for the season, I had little time to consider the fact that I still had not made a single pretzel let alone have a recipe. Details.

July 7, 1995 I opened at my very first fair in Penn Yann, NY. I went out to my trailer two hours early to figure out a recipe! I had researched ingredients in hard pretzels in the grocery store and in cook books in the library (we did not have the internet). I gathered all the ingredients and made a go of it. All I could think was what a beautiful trailer I had built; it would be a shame if I couldn't make a pretzel.

At 3:45pm the first tray of successful pretzels came out of the oven. A husband and wife were our first customers. After biting the pretzel, the husband looked at his wife and said "this is the best pretzel I've ever tasted!" Every feeling of stress and uncertainty lifted and the recipe has never changed.

During the first season on the fair route Der Pretzel Haus received more 1st place ribbons than income. By the third year the route had completely changed. We acquired all the events we wanted to be a part of and business was good.

In 2004 we moved to St. Augustine, FL with no intentions of staying long. My son was entering pre-school and enrolled in St Johns Academy. It's 2021 and we are still here. Over the years we have been blessed to be surrounded by dear friends and a lovely city which we call home and look forward to returning after our summer tour.

On March 11, 2020 COVID hit and my entire industry was shut down. There would be no festivals, fairs, circuses, concerts or outdoor events. No place for the 4H and FFF students to show their animals and agriculture. The people effected by this is more than most consider. The outdoor entertainment industry consist of thousands of small family businesses and their employees. All now unemployed but the expenses remain. County and state agricultural fairs have a 4.2+ billion dollar impact on the nation and provide hundreds of thousands of temporary and seasonal jobs.

I chose to use this time to venture into shipping our pretzels and since the space we rented had the ability to have a store front we opened to the public. Since opening on August 25th we have received wonderful feedback and have new customers everyday along with our regulars. Due to a wonderful couple who love pretzels, we've started catering weddings, corporate lunches and parties.

Thanks to our governor, the state of Florida is thriving and fairs are back. We look forward to growing our St. Augustine shop, The Pretzel Lady and getting back to serving our fair customers in FL, NY, NJ, MN, VA, NC and SC in 2021!

Always Knotty,

Samantha Fairlie, The Pretzel Lady