

KILCHRENAN VILLAGE HALL COMMUNITY LIBRARY AND CROMKA BAKERY - A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS



Where neighbours connect, sharing the passion for good food and exchanging their stories, recipes and tips



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Having been called someone's Mum for so many years and more recently a "Cake Lady" or "The Baker" introducing myself by my full name feels rather strange and not something I do very often, so I have been humbled to be able to do so and nicely surprised to be asked to write this month's blog!

Where it all began

My name is Karina and I am a passionate home baker, micro bakery owner, and self-taught cook. My cooking journey began in Poland where I was born and raised. Growing up, I was lucky to be surrounded by great cooks and an abundance of fresh produce. I learned to appreciate the food and the source it came from, whether it was vegetables, meat or fish. My Mum is a gardener and she used homegrown fruit and vegetables to prepare wholesome meals for our family every single day.

I grew up in the middle of National Forest, which my Dad managed, so foraging for Mushroom and Berries became a second nature. My first job was planting new forest and collecting Blueberries when I was 7 years old. My grandmother and great grandmother, were both natural bakers. My Dad often reminisces about his grandmother's huge sourdough loaves of bread baked in the community bread oven with real butter and pinch of salt... I don't recall ever seeing my granny use any recipe books however she produced the most spectacular dishes.

Oranges are only for Christmas!

Back in the 80's in Poland Food was either homegrown or you had to stretch all available contacts to get ingredients like meat or sugar. This doesn't mean we were deprived or hungry; we just ate differently to what you might know as "normal". One of my great memories is receiving Christmas parcel from my Dad's work and the taste of imported oranges and bananas... We could only get them for Christmas. As a child, I was disappointed not to eat oranges more often but this experience stayed with me. Ever since then, using Seasonal Ingredients has been a key factor when I am preparing the Menu or working on a New Recipe

Leaving Home. Yamas!

I officially left my Family Home when I was 22. My journey started in Greece where I travelled with my friend Ola to take on summer job in a small village of Vassiliki on the island of Lefkada. In April 2005 we boarded a ferry from Ancona in Italy to Patras. I don't think I have ever been so scared and excited all at once. Little did I know this journey would completely change my life. Not only did I fall in love in this small village but also fell in love...I met my husband, Sean in Vassiliki and spent nearly 2 years there indulging in Sun, Watersports and some of the best delights I have ever had the privilege to sample. Greece and Greek cuisine has been a big part of my culinary journey and I am delighted I had the opportunity to experience them.

Fusion Cooking isn't a trend

As you go through life you are influenced by people, events and different experiences. The same goes with cooking. While some people follow the recipes to the dot, others are open to tweaking them, unknowingly developing completely new dishes.

I have to admit I stopped following recipes many years ago, I still like to pick up a book now and then or a free supermarket magazine and flick through it to see what's latest in the Food world. However, I use them as inspiration to create something new, something that is my own.

Travelling and learning about new cultures and cuisines has been one of my favourite activities. It still is, and I hope to do more of it in the future. You can learn so much from locals just by observing and asking questions. You then take this knowledge with you, mix it with what you already know, add a splash of newly discovered ingredient and a pinch of a novel technique and there you go! Fusion Cooking at its best! We are all doing it, and we should be proud of it and most of all, enjoy it!

I love Food

I love food, I always have. Ever since the first time I helped my mum to make Pierogi, jam or pickles or my dad smoke ham, sausage or cheese... This doesn't mean I enjoy everything! For example, I never could swallow "kluski śląskie", regional potato dumplings very popular in Silesia, where I come from, nor could I even come near the lamb, one of the British staples. It doesn't stop me from appreciating the food and the people who produce it.

Cooking and Baking are interconnected and integral part of my life and now, my Business.

I couldn't agree more that you get better with practice, but you also get better with learning. I've never stopped learning! I might not be professionally trained in food since or hospitality but I was very lucky to learn so much from school, my family home and previous jobs, about nutrition, chemistry, biology, economy and maths! Yes Maths! You might be surprised how often I use maths in cooking, but that's a topic for whole new blog...

CROMKA Bake & Dine

CROMKA, which translates to "Slice of Bread" in Polish (Kromka) has been brewing in my head for many years, on and off. I already had experience working in the catering and food industry so I knew how much work it involved. I fought the urge to start my own micro-business for a very long time. However, in June 2023, I eventually handed in my notice and CROMKA Bake & Dine was established.

Some people say if you can't fight the current, flow with it, so I did. Is it easy? Absolutely not! It is by far the hardest job I have ever done. Late nights and stupidly early mornings, often merge into one and there is the anxiety of weeks ahead as you try to get up to speed with everything business-related while constantly baking and cooking and keeping family and customers happy. If I didn't have my family backing me up and often picking me up when days don't go well, I would have stopped a few times already. Being determined and passionate helps tremendously too. What I didn't expect is the impact I have made on so many people. Food brings people together and I keep discovering that every time I join KVH Community Library. On the first Saturday of the month I join Kilchrenan Residents and it gives me so much joy to see neighbours connect, share their passion for good food and exchange their stories, recipes and tips. I am so grateful for being part of your lives and hope it will continue and grow among other locations and communities. To the Next time! In the meantime keep an eye on my Facebook Posts with updates on latest Creations and links to Cromka's Regular Order Forms!