

from-is-land-to-i-can-stirring-up-the-american-dream-with-le...

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SPEAKERS

Jennifer Malcolm, Lela Morgan

- J** Jennifer Malcolm 00:10
Calling all women who are curious and called to be women warriors are rising in this day and age to heal and grow together. I'm your host Jennifer Malcolm, self made entrepreneur, women advocate and life balance expert. Welcome back to the next episode of Jennasis Speaks podcast The Transformative Power of Women's Stories where every woman has a story and every story matters. And yes, that means you ladies, if you're listening to this, that means you you matter. Today I have a guest with me that I just recently met in December of 2020. the very end of December. And Chad and I got away to the Miami area Fort Lauderdale area for a long, much needed weekend away. And when we travel, we tend to go to Airbnb and other apps like that to find unique things to do. And we came across this beautiful soul Lila, and I want to welcome you here today. Lela.
- L** Lela Morgan 01:06
Thank you.
- J** Jennifer Malcolm 01:08
You are most welcome. And we had such a phenomenal experience in Lila's home, having

the food that she made and just experiencing her story, that before I left that night, I asked her if she would like to be a part of this podcast because I thought she was a gleaming light. She was genuine. She had a unique story. And I was she immediately said absolutely. So welcome, welcome.



Lela Morgan 01:33

Thank you. Thank you.



Jennifer Malcolm 01:35

You're welcome. So I'm gonna quickly read a bio that we prep for you. And then we're just going to jump into who you are and your story. Sounds good. All right. So through out a personal and literal journey that has taken Leila from her Jamaican homeland to the US. She stayed true to her authentic passion for food, and her dream of owning her own boutique catering service. Pursuing that dream meant taking jobs as varied as being a manager for a major restaurant chain, and being executive assistant to a personal caregiver in order to pay her bills. But Leila never stopped cooking. Nor did she stop believing. Now the owner of backyard Bistro, her boutique catering service that brings events to life with creative and beautiful food. Lena also has been host of Island cooking with Afro shuffle de la and Airbnb. Like many restaurants, her business is currently on hold due to the pandemic. Lots of canceled plans, believe that remains true to her passion for food, and is now writing a cookbook that will combine her favorite recipes with her dishes inspiration. So welcome my friend.



Lela Morgan 02:47

Thank you. Thank you so much.



Jennifer Malcolm 02:49

You're so welcome. So it was fun, because I think it was the day after we did your food tasting. Or maybe that even night like I made this collage of food and put it out on my Facebook and on my Instagram, and had so many jealous people of what are you eating? That looks amazing. And then as you send in pictures for preparation of this interview, my team is like salivating and I said, if I ever private event up here in Cleveland, I will fly you in, and then have you catered meal. So it's just it was a phenomenal, phenomenal experience.



Lela Morgan 03:23

So that that's really wonderful to hear. I'm really, really happy that you enjoyed and that your friends are enjoying my food.



Jennifer Malcolm 03:31

Well, I got to enjoy the amazing food. And we're now just excited to share who you are. And the pictures of your story. And if people are traveling down into the Florida area, hopefully to send some new people your way as well.



Lela Morgan 03:44

That will be awesome.



Jennifer Malcolm 03:46

So let's You're welcome. So let's start at the beginning. You grew up and were born in Jamaica. And just talk about that experience growing up and at what point did you come over to the US?



Lela Morgan 04:00

So I was born in Jamaica, and central as well, which we have 14 parishes in Jamaica parish. I was born in St. Louis. But I was I grew up in Manchester because that's where my father was from and my mom moved there. So growing up in rural Jamaica, I didn't know any different it was just growing up. We had a normal happy childhood. I would say both parents who loved us dearly, protected us and gave us a sense of identity. So I was happy child, so to speak. I went to school. And in Christiana. I had my high school was Homewood and in High School, home back and cooking was was mandatory. And from then on, I just developed this love of cooking. When prior to that my mom cooked everything we ate because I mean you didn't go to the store to buy food, you didn't go out for dinner. Your mom cooked everything from the garden around your house, my father had a smaller farm. And everything we ate we grew. So I kind of was exposed to eating healthy and home cooked meals from a very early age. And but my real love of cooking developed when I was in cookery class in high school, and whatever I made would be a hit, of course, I took great pride in that. I, after high school, I moved to Kingston, and I was a restaurant manager for, like you said before an international food restaurant chain, actually. And I stayed there for a while. Then I moved on to work in a corporate settings, so to speak. I was not totally at home in the corporate setting in Jamaica. So of course I quit.

I opened a small restaurant. And myself and my partner at the time, were delivering lunches all over Kingston in our little Volkswagen bug. Funny, I'm a pioneer.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 06:17

You and I talked about this when I was down in Florida, that you were like Uber Eats before there was an Uber eat. That way before it was even a thing.

L

Lela Morgan 06:32

Way before it was cool. You know what I mean? So that was that was because I was always passionate about food, and how I ate and then I always wanted to share it with other people. So even in my little restaurant, when we had people who dine in I would always go over to their table and said, Yep, try this. Try that, you know, I was very enthusiastic about getting people to eat and to eat healthy. They do. And so the development of my interest in food just continued. Even when I moved to the States, even though I had to work other jobs. I never ever, ever not cooked, I would cook for whomever wanted me to cook. I cooked for the soup kitchen, I cooked for the Ronald McDonald House. Any friends who wanted food, of course they see us as Lela Morgan, or they used to call me at my job is called me chef towel.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 07:35

That's awesome. Well, before you fast forward, I want to I want to ask you a quick question. Were there any special recipes or meals that your mom made that that really got transferred to you like that your that became maybe some of your signature pieces? or was she just really I know that you talked about her with me about the really using all the local stuff and all this stuff? Was that just a fresh infuser infusion for you? Or was there a couple maybe family recipes that now are showcased by you?

L

Lela Morgan 08:11

You know, there are especially my ginger beer. No, my mom used to make ginger beer almost every Sunday and this is like fresh ginger root, grated and steeped and and spiced and sweetened. And I remember after church on Sundays, there would be almost a line of people four or five sometimes following my mom home because they were coming for their ginger beer and she would take some the church and they, you know they they officials in the church. And all these people would come home with my mom, my mom after church and they would get their bottle of ginger beer and it's something that she bakes because she also used to bake almost every weekend. So the things that ginger

beer is one thing that I totally include in my in my experience and if you didn't get it while you were here you have to come back to get it and then at the time when you were here ginger was sort of in short supply because at Christmas time all the island people like myself buy all the ginger to make or sorry. That's another thing that my mom made. It's a Christmas drink called sorry so I do also include that in my repertoire so to speak. He made a really really good rice and beans and even though I've changed it a little bit I never not make my rice and beans and every a lot of people said to me, how do I get it that way?

J Jennifer Malcolm 09:46

But you had a few secret things so we did get to experience your ginger beer. So at the very end of our experience, we got to do that. And I think I shared with you like Chad when he cooks we do use a lot of fresh ginger but we by the size of have like a thumbnail. And you're like, no, I like this big piece, it'll cost you like \$2. Because usually our piece is like 25 cents. And I have this huge piece of ginger root upstairs in my refrigerator that I bought last week. And now like, not quite sure what to do with it. So

L Lela Morgan 10:18

I'm going to tell you what to do with it. Put it in your blender, put it in your blender, blend it and have ginger juice, put it in ice cube trays, freeze it, and then you will have a cube of ginger juice to drop in your cocktail and your curry, whatever you like to have ginger in. So that's a good way to use your ginger.

J Jennifer Malcolm 10:41

And so I did get to Paris because we were there a few weeks before Christmas. So we didn't get to partake in your journey here. So No, you're good. You're good. So let's fast forward now going into you grew up in Jamaica and at what age and at what point did you then migrate over to the US?

L Lela Morgan 11:01

So there was major hurricane in Jamaica in 1988. And almost everything close down. So I'd been to New York a couple of times before so I decided to go to New York and you know, cool off for a while. maybe find a jobs at the time and kind of allow things to come back to some kind of normalcy in Jamaica life was really hard after a hurricane. Right? So while I was in New York, of course, I had a long distance breakup. Other people have long distance relationships. I had a breakup. So I kind of hung around in New York and never

went back to Jamaica. At the time, I eventually went back, you know, but I stayed in New York, I sit in New York for probably about three or so years. And then I wandered down to Florida and kind of said, If I got a job in Florida, I would stay. I did get a job in Florida within a month. Private caregiving, so I stayed in Florida. And no, I complained that I ended up in Florida and got stuck here.



Jennifer Malcolm 12:21

Well, this is a lot warmer, because I'm up in Ohio. And our Ohio weather is cold and Elise down where you're at in Florida, you're about 30 degrees warmer than we are today at least.



Lela Morgan 12:33

So it's really nice. Right now, we've been having really beautiful weather here in January. And so a lot of Northerners or Midwesterners are like, really, really coming down here.



Jennifer Malcolm 12:45

When you came to New York, did any of your other family come with you? Or did you do that truck on your own?



Lela Morgan 12:51

I just did that on my own with a carry on my carry on luggage and \$70 in cash. 70 US dollars.



Jennifer Malcolm 13:00

Yeah. So that was a huge leap of faith of Adrian. And not knowing what was to come or what would even unfold. And then that leap of faith turned it into three years, which turned into Florida. And down the rabbit hole we go.



Lela Morgan 13:17

Yes, well, it's a nice hole. Actually, I know you. I've been a US citizen for years. And I'm like, this is home now.



Jennifer Malcolm 13:25

That's so good. So I have here in our from our pre interview questions, that you had some pushback from your family and maybe at a younger age, and you can describe it approximately what age but you have some pushback from your family, when you started to professionally pursue a culinary career. And what was that about? Because that seems a little odd. Like I was one of my kids can came and said, I think I'm gonna go to culinary school. That's a pretty cool gig. But why was that? A little bit frowned upon with your family.



Lela Morgan 14:01

I think, you know, it's not so much my immediate family as it was people around who not necessarily my immediate family, I would say, but there were people, boyfriends and that sort of thing. And who just saw that as sort of a dead end, so to speak. If you worked in a restaurant or you're a cook, that was not something that you should aspire to, especially if you passed what we call the common entrance test in Jamaica and you ended up going to high school you sort of was expected to go on to tertiary education or, you know, something more ambitious, but I was always rooted in food and I really wanted to cook and I think I mentioned the story where I was Aa the gathering, and everybody, everybody's talking about their jobs in new Kingston, and you know, there, and I was talking about how to construct a burger. And they were all almost horrified. Everybody feels silent. What about a burger? It's like, Okay, next. So I got that kind of that kind of pushback, so to speak, even when I quit my job, which is, everybody was happy at that time that Oh, finally, she's normal. And then after a few years, I quit my job and took my E which saved it savings, which was about \$3,000. At the time, I opened my little restaurant that I told you about earlier. And my boyfriend at the time had a had a Volkswagen bug. And we partnered together and we're like, well, we don't have enough market around where we are, but we can deliver. And yes, we did deliver. So and I remember one of my, my parents used to say, Oh, we always know when our lunches coming, because we can hear the Volkswagen from about two miles away, maybe, you know. So after all that pushback was you start to question yourself, you know



Jennifer Malcolm 16:26

So you said you started questioning yourself?



Lela Morgan 16:29

Yes.



Jennifer Malcolm 16:30

The pushback from other people and just self a little bit of doubt starting to creep in there?



Lela Morgan 16:35

Absolutely. Absolutely.



Jennifer Malcolm 16:38

What made you overcome that, or at least continue to push the naysayers or the doubt? Because for a lot of people that would likely divert them and say, Well, if, if people are seeing something that maybe I'm not seeing, maybe it's a blind spot, but really, you push through that fear, you push through that doubt, to pursue a passion of yours. But what inside of you took that leap of faith?



Lela Morgan 17:04

Because, to me, food, it's the sustenance of life, food is love. I really say that, and not in a cliché sort of way. And when I when I eat, it's like, it's like, I'm giving life to my body. And when I feed somebody food, I'm giving you life as well, you know what I'm saying? Yeah, so I saw that way. I even had a little rule in my own life from way back then I would not go out to dinner with a date. If I didn't like them, because I wouldn't eat with the people I didn't like or feel comfortable. around. And that was really early, I did not even know, I didn't even know what drove that kind of feeling. As to man, if I don't like you, we're not going to dinner with you. You can save the money, you know, that kind of almost like something deep inside you kind of kept me connected to food, even when I worked. Separate from, from the food business, I always felt like I said, Do you want something cook? Just ask me, I'll be cooking it for you.



Jennifer Malcolm 18:19

So good. One, I think the difference too is I know that, you know, in a lot of America and American households, dinner is a very quick, quickly get down, get your food and keep going because we have to we have evening plans or we have to get out the door. We you know, start getting fast food into our homes. And I know from you like it's community, it is relationship. It is love. It is an experience, and not just nourishment. And I remember when my mom and dad went to Italy about 15 years ago, and they sat down and they said meals were like three to four hours like that was your evening like you sitting and having conversation. And having a slow paced meal. And connecting with the people around you

for an entire evening was the experience and it wasn't like let's quickly eat so that we can go do something else. It was the experience in the evening. And that's what Chad and I experienced in your home and in your backyard. It was sitting there talking to you drinking wine while you were cooking and learning the foods that you're cooking, and then migrating outside and having a very slow paced dinner. That was about conversation and community.



Lela Morgan 19:40

Absolutely. So and so that is why I make I created my experience for four hours long. Which is unheard of and they in the experiences community and I wouldn't change it. I've been told who you can know because no one must be in a hurry. And they talk as no one gets kicked out. Thank goodness, it's at home. Yeah, because you need to take your time. Nothing needs to be rushed when you're eating. And I know that's not a luxury that everybody can afford all the time. But to the friend of mine, once I said, every child should have a free favorite dish that their mom cooked for them. And, you know, that encouraged my friend to start cooking at least once or twice per week. And, you know, I would share recipes with her so she can make something for her family. And we actually used to go out and eat it, eat out dates, like once per month, and I would go out to eat because I honestly wanted to learn the art of eating and eating well, and eating slowly. Now, the idea of fast food was totally foreign to me. Until I came to America. First of all, we didn't go out for dinner, I'd never gone out for dinner until I was when my twin is. And that would always be to a Chinese restaurant. And so that's the reason for my love of Asian food still, you know? So when I came to Florida, I never forget, some friends decided that they were going to take me out for breakfast. And they thought we were going to somebody's house. And when we ended up with the restaurant, I'm like, what are we doing? For breakfast, the restaurant for breakfast. I was 30 years old. I've never gone out for breakfast.



Jennifer Malcolm 21:49

And that is such a unique perspective. Because, you know, I know even for our family, we love family dinners. And we do cook probably four to five meals a week for Chad and myself or our teenagers. But it is convenient to be like hey, let's just grab subway or let's just grab, you know, something quick. And there is the benefit of that quick and easy. But there's also that, that you can prepare things beforehand that is still nourishing to your body that is still healthy. That can still be quick, but it just takes a little bit of preparation. So what are some of those things in your refrigerator or cupboards that would be more on the I don't have two hours for a dinner meal. But that could be a quick healthy solution as well.



Lela Morgan 22:38

I always have fish, I always have shrimp. I always have spinach and garlic and green onions or scallions as we call them. Now, you don't have to chop an onion and be crying. None of those things become a little bit of green onion, you chop a little bit of garlic and toss it in the pan with a little olive oil and you don't use spinach and you have a piece of fish if you like your broiler you just a little seasoning as you like it, put it in the broil under the broiler and give it 10 or 15 minutes. You have fish and spin it. Right.



Jennifer Malcolm 23:18

So good. And why do we charge? No no, we take you longer to get in the car drive to a fast food restaurant and back then what you just described?



Lela Morgan 23:27

Oh, absolutely, absolutely. If for for some of my sisters, they like to see pre season things and keep it in their freezer. I tend to believe it or not not to do that that much. But if you if you like to pre season things you have it prepared and portioned in your freezer. And I also don't recommend having things in your freezer for more than a month to stockpile I really don't either. But you have something in there that you can always grab out and I didn't think and put it in the oven. Now my oven is my best friend. class but I love my oven because I would have put a potato. I'll put my tray with my fish and everything in the oven and walk away and do things and then I go back and it's ready.



Jennifer Malcolm 24:19

So good. And then we'll have Chad and I were able to experience with you was the the Jamaican jerk night. So we had the pork we had the chicken thighs. We had shrimp we had fish, black beans and rice and we had an amazing salad. But the interesting part was and I would love for you to just describe because you did a lot of things similarly and then there was might be an additional one or two ingredients that change the complexity of a sauce or rub or something and it just slight modifications that you did it's presented two completely different flavors. But it has to face. So where does that magic come from?



Lela Morgan 25:09

So my mom was very creative, I really do credit my mom's creativity if genetics or, or culture has anything to do with it, my mom, she was very, very, very creative in the kitchen. And I remember, my father would milk cows and we would stand there and watch

my father milk, the cow, we'd brought it, we bring it home, my mom would do things like she would schema rice with milk with that to a milk, no need for butter. The smell should make porridge which is a lot of a lot of Jamaicans you can't be a kid without getting your porridge. porridge is like the essential no formula, just your porridge everyday made from corn meal, or bananas or something else. So that's, I think, I inherited that little aspect of creativity from my mom. However, having lived in the states for these many years, I've also had to improvise and and while I'm improvising, I do discover new things that I can do with some of those original recipes and make them my own and make them modern, and somewhat lighter to his journey. As you probably know not. It's one of it's a very spicy, very bold, sometimes some of the things we make can be a little heavier to start with and all of that I've modified some of those lightly lighten them up a little bit. You know, you to a wider audience too, but at the same time, they're heavy.



Jennifer Malcolm 26:45

Oh, so good. Everything was so delicious. And the variety and believe me when this podcast goes out, you will see my pictures again. And Lela also sent pictures that she had as well that she sent in, but the complexity and then the variety, like there was so much food, no one would ever leave your home. If anyone left hungry. It's their own fault. There was so much food, there was so much conversation. And I love that. Yes, the the pork and the chicken were heavier than spicier. But you balance that with, you know, a big fish and your vegetables and all that that it just really is it bought balmy.



Lela Morgan 27:24

Mommy, yes. Bread. Oh, wow, I forgot that. So it was so good. Bread we made from cassava. And we usually pair that with fish, right? Mostly. And yes.



Jennifer Malcolm 27:40

So what is one of the most unique cooking experiences that you have been a part of. So I know that you have been able to host in your home. But maybe there was another opportunity either with family friends, it could have been professionally that would have been a very unique experience for you.



Lela Morgan 27:59

I actually did an online cooking experience recently has always a host from India. Wow. And he made a curry yogurt and roti that was out of this world. And it was my first introduction to using fresh curry leaves. And I got in my car and drove to them to the

Indian supermarket to get my curry leaves which I know keeps them in my freezer. And it was so delicious. And that's one of the most interesting cooking experiences I've had.

J Jennifer Malcolm 28:42
That's awesome.

L Lela Morgan 28:43
To be honest, most times I am the one who's cooking. Right? I'm really selfish that way on holidays and so on. I am usually the one who is cooking. You know and when I used to have these pop up dinners in my backyard prior to Airbnb, and I am the one who is always looking at my old job when I worked for I worked for a construction company for four years and some of my co workers used to literally come by me and say, Okay, this date at your house be there. What it means is that I am going to cook they're going to come over and bring tons of beer and wine so good. And so that used to happen in my backyard prior to Airbnb

J Jennifer Malcolm 29:30
And for the audience to if you ever have the experience of doing this in at home it is that you also grow a lot of stuff in your backyard so when the herbs and all that because as you were at the grill and preparing some stuff, we were able just to explore your backyard and so you're in the back also cultivating and growing a lot of your herbs and vegetables and stuff. So what are some your specialties that are back there now?

L Lela Morgan 29:55
Okay, right now. nice and big and round. To eat, I have a lot of parsley, Italian parsley, I have curly parsley, I have kale, I, my time are really getting nice and happy right now too, I have several parts of time because I use a lot of time. I have rosemary and lemon grass and different kinds of meant and more stuff. I even have coffee, I even have a coffee coffee plant that's producing a lot of copyright. Now, I may only be able to get a cup at a time, but when it's fresh from your backyard, I have dill. there lots of things around you, I have seen this pretty much all the herbs in the backyard right now.

J Jennifer Malcolm 30:45
That's so good. And, and I think we were sharing with you when we were down there that you know, I, I think that I have a green thumb. I keep trying. And we do herb gardens. And

I love to cook and I love to host people. And then when Chad and I got married three years ago, he loves to cook. He doesn't really like he doesn't really like to entertain as much, but he loves to cook. And so we're like fighting over my kitchen. And I'm like back. And then children. Now they're, you know, almost 2018 and 16 started liking his food better than my food. And I was like, we both really enjoy cooking and beauty when we travel. We've done it in Charleston and Florida and other places. When we go, we always try to find a food tour or something very unique and local and yours just

L Lela Morgan 31:39
I'm sso glad you came to me.

J Jennifer Malcolm 31:43
And when you're talking about your unique cooking experience, I had, you know, here's my entrepreneur brain, I was like we should do some pop ups. For you. That is online cooking class. And maybe you get a pre list of here's your 10 ingredients you need to have and get online and do a class together.

L Lela Morgan 32:05
No, I did. I need one recently, it was my first one. I'm so ready to do some of those. And like you said, Send a list of ingredients that you shouldn't have and a couple pieces of equipment, it's never anything major. Most people have the things that you will need your kitchen, your kitchen already, I think

J Jennifer Malcolm 32:28
I would be so good. And you know, get on zoom and you know, get some revenue coming into you and some people learning how to cook fresh in their kitchens. Could be

L Lela Morgan 32:38
Absolutely that would be a wonderful thing. I actually do have my website that's being published. I just, I'm trying to work out schedules. So I don't clash too much with Airbnb.

J Jennifer Malcolm 32:52
So I know that through your story and do your journey that there were a lot of years that you had to defer your dream for whatever reason it could have been for family, it could

have been because of health, it could have been because of provision and needing for finances. Was it hard for you to have to be in reality like this is my current reality? But also know that your dreams out there? Yeah, were you able to migrate or manage that while you just had to deal with some stuff as well?



Lela Morgan 33:23

So while I worked in the construction field, I was the builder I was an admin. So you know, I would, there were a lot of social things, and you would go out and sometimes people would, what do you do? Or if I travel, you know, what do you do for a living. And I would always say I work for a construction company. But in my head, I'm a chef who owns a restaurant. And they always cry out. But it was drilled in my head. I am a chef, so good. And I do and they have a restaurant, and they have a cookbook that's coming up. That's all in my head. It still is actually not sure about the restaurant now. But I'm having wonderful people from all over the world and all over the US come to my backyard and eat and that is just off the chain. That's a little bit more than I even dreamed. So good. It's amazing actually.



Jennifer Malcolm 34:24

Well and I love my kids make fun of me because I'll talk to anyone you know, I'll be sitting you know, in a restaurant or I will be going somewhere at the grocery store. And I just connect with people. There's something about people that I love I'm an extrovert and so that piece for you that as you're hosting people in your home that you get the people from around the world are coming to your home, like yes, phenomenal. Like you're not having to go out into the world to find people. People are finding you and coming into your home and having unique stories, unique backgrounds. Unique experiences and what a gift that is and how small you've made your world. But in a beautiful way.



Lela Morgan 35:07

It's a wonderful gift. It's a beautiful gift that I really did not see coming. When I started, when I started hosting. I really started because I needed an income, I was no longer working corporate and, and I needed to do something, but it brought these beautiful people into my home and into my life. And when some people would say, you have all these people coming to your home? I'm like, yeah, and the more the better, you know, not all at once. But I really do enjoy it. And I think I've been preparing for it for a long time, based on the number of things I have that really works. It's almost as if you're preparing for your, you're preparing, but you don't know you're preparing. And I say this to say that when I started hosting, I didn't have to buy even a four. I had like 100 pieces of flatware.

Like probably 150 plates and bowls. And what am I doing with this many, because I jokingly say when most of my friends were buying diamonds, I was buying 40s style things from my kitchen. So no, I use one of them. And it's amazing.

J Jennifer Malcolm 36:37

And I and for those of you who are listening to this podcast, I think that's a beautiful part is it even on any journey of life, and maybe you're not living the dream that you want to, but as Lela sharing making those baby steps of activating your dream, and as she's acquiring forks and utensils and dishes and and just saying, you know, someday I'm going to do this, but really not just in our head saying that in our heart and in your activation, you're making headway into making that your reality. So that when time and the world universe higher power, God, whoever you pray to, opens that opportunity, you can just step into that in fullness, without going, Oh, now I have to go get all this stuff prepared. You already had it prepared. And that's beautiful.

L Lela Morgan 37:24

Absolutely. Thank you for that. That is exactly how it went.

J Jennifer Malcolm 37:30

Tell us about this cookbook that you're making. Because I know that you have been spending some time on that deliberately. So what does it all gonna entail?

L Lela Morgan 37:38

So mostly my own recipes that I've created over the years food and cookbook and restaurants are always residing in my head, or in my heart, I don't know which one are both flows through your blood. So the dream of writing a cookbook, and not just a book of recipes, a story book as a book of stories on the food that, that that made my life special. And that I like to share is really what I want to do. Of course, there are recipes, but I don't want it to be just oh 123456789 is a there's a story in there too. And that while I'm curating the recipes and the stories are there, also, and I hope to I hope that will come to fruition soon I'm working on it.

J Jennifer Malcolm 38:39

And it sounds like you're creating it exactly how you do your dinner experiences. Like you want the book to be an experience and and capturing stories and the importance of

maybe ingredients and why this recipe is important. Which was the beauty of coming to your place. It wasn't just sit back and watch me cook. It was sit down have a glass of wine. Let's start having conversation. Let's learn about food. Hey, can someone go grab this and like it, we just felt like we were family. Like it was just such a sincere and beautiful experience. And it sounds like you're wanting to replicate that gift and that importance was in your heart throughout your book as well. Thank you. Yes, yes, absolutely.



Lela Morgan 39:23

Absolutely. I like my guests do i do know with what's going on right now it's a little bit more difficult. But I like to say smell this, you know, you want to see this. You know, touch it. It's so good.



Jennifer Malcolm 39:39

And that was the fun part is that we were able to do that alongside you. And it was way more fun than just watching something because we can always turn on a cooking show and watch someone cook but to be able to you know, look at the seasonings. Look at what you're doing. Ask questions, smell it. It was so good. So so so good. So if time and money weren't an issue, what would be on your menu? Maybe it's just a dinner menu. Maybe it's a breakfast meal. But to have the most amazing meal? What would be like a day of your? This would be what I'd want to create.



Lela Morgan 40:21

Oh, wow. Well, let's think surf and turf. It has to be ribeye. And of course, if I could afford washougal, or, you know, any of those expensive steaks, but no, I, if I can ribeye, a nice ribeye would be good. And it either be lobster, or king crab legs.



Jennifer Malcolm 40:52

Delicious.



Lela Morgan 40:53

Yes, it would have to have a fluffy baked potato. Which is not particularly Jamaican. Baked potato. That's right, and the really light salad of red onions. cherry tomatoes, and arugula. That's it. Wow. That would be my if I really wanted to impress somebody. So that would be my way.



Jennifer Malcolm 41:27

That's awesome. So if anyone is wanting to maybe take a stab at some Jamaican cooking and and and maybe they Google it, what are some like essential ingredients? And you said some of that for garlic and green onions. But other any other special spices? Or I think he used coconut milk in in the race that you made. But are there any other like staples that you're like, these are the things that you should start curating and having in your kitchen?



Lela Morgan 41:55

Absolutely. And the first and main one, especially if you're thinking of doing any iteration of jerk, you must have or spice. We call it the mentor in Jamaica. But you must have that because you can't have dirt without it. Otherwise it would be BBQ No, I love barbecue. But you know, we have to split the difference. So you have to have all spice, you have to have fresh time. I didn't even know we could use dry time until I mean, it's just, it's just where we grew up. No, you could use dry time. So you have to have fresh time. And of course you can have some dry time in the background. Because I always say if you are making jerk sauce or any other dish and you don't have one thing, there's something that you can substitute. Go ahead don't deprive yourself from making something at home if you don't have one thing that's good so he keeps some dry time in the in the pantry. I also keep onion flakes and garlic powder. But for a staple staples in Jamaican kitchen, you must have curry powder. You must have all spice pimenta You must have fresh time somewhere. Scotch bonnet peppers is good. I remember that one. So good. Yes you have to have that also in jerk it's you know it's a beautiful spice is really really hot but it's also very flavorful and it's a big part of Jamaican cuisine it's



Jennifer Malcolm 43:33

So good and I think I'm a scotch bonnet peppers to you actually had some and had frozen some off and we're able to so some of the stuff that you buy fresh you're also saying like with your ginger to put into ice cube trays and your Scotch bonnet peppers yes you pulled up you know in a gallon bag in your freezer. So some of this stuff you don't you can utilize without wasting your investment as well.



Lela Morgan 43:59

Oh absolutely. Because Scotch bonnet is not always readily available. Okay, so when I see them I buy a bunch and I put them in my freezer or I make a light picker. So I always have a bottle of little bottle of pickles scotch bonnets in my refrigerator. And then I have some

frozen I you can go either way.



Jennifer Malcolm 44:20

So good. So and you can also freeze. And I actually our time a couple years ago did so well. And we you know cut off the large stems and then we just did a 200 degrees in the oven to dry it. And then we just fell in bags too. So it was fresh that we dried. But it is you know we in the winter we don't always have the fresh herbs that we can get. We can get them at the grocery store. But that was a kind of a workaround for us and we had time for like two years ago or so.



Lela Morgan 44:51

Absolutely. And that's and you know, the drag into the oven is a great idea. I'm not there yet. I tend to drive things in my backyard in the sun.



Jennifer Malcolm 45:05

We don't have much sun up here in Cleveland, it is one of the great cities in the nation. And so it can be warm, but it's still great. The sun does not come up often here. So



Lela Morgan 45:17

I have to start thinking outside of Florida. And and kind of remember that there are people who don't live in Florida, they don't have all that sunshine, so maybe tailor make some of my ideas.



Jennifer Malcolm 45:33

Yeah, and I think the beautiful part is just the way that you had to migrate some of your things from when you move to from Jamaica, to the US, and maybe things weren't as plentiful. Now, I know you go down to Jamaica a couple of times a year and you come back, you leave all your clothes, I think, then you come back with all your ingredients you can get in the US.



Lela Morgan 45:50

But yes, I do.

J Jennifer Malcolm 45:56
And you go back a couple times a year, right?

L Lela Morgan 45:59
At least twice what at least once, prefer, prefer to go twice. You know, then I get on my nutmeg, my pimenta. Because I really do love to go to Jamaica to get my mentor, especially because you can get in the States. They're from different parts of the world. And they don't have that kind of aroma is just not the same. You get the grains, but you don't get that

J Jennifer Malcolm 46:26
Only you would know what that is. But yeah, I know that when you smell it or taste it, then you're like that's the that's exactly it.

L Lela Morgan 46:36
So I do go to get things like those in Jamaica, and my son's still there. And my sister have a couple of sisters and my brothers. Oh, yeah. Lots of family.

J Jennifer Malcolm 46:48
So good. Well, as we're wrapping up today, and we're talking about, you know, a dream that was in your heart from an early age, you had some naysayers or you know, doubting Thomases around you, you had to push through, you took jobs as needed in order to pay your bills and get through some seasons of life. What advice would you give to other women that may have a dream in their heart? And maybe they are in a job that is not where they want to work? Or maybe they're dealing with small kids, and they just don't have time and capacity to explore a dream? What advice would you give those who kind of that have that burning dream, and it hasn't come to reality yet.

L Lela Morgan 47:34
I would say hang on to it. It's never too late. And, and you'd be surprised one day you get up and you find that you're doing the thing you love, never stop doing it. That's the thing. So when I said, if you have to cook with somebody for free, do it, it's okay. You know what I'm saying? I used to go down to the soup kitchen or just somewhere. And I was lucky, I didn't have small children. So of course, you have to balance that if people have small

children, they may not be able to do that, but good for your kids. Right? So good. You know, good for your family, good for your children. Don't take them out to fast food. And that has to do with cooking. But if there's something else that you like to do, if you like to solve, so for your kid, so for your your friends, kids, you know what I'm saying? Keep it keep keep your fire burning, never let it go.

J Jennifer Malcolm 48:33

And I love that. Because you're saying keeping it at the forefront. So even if it's not to the full extent of what you are envisioning or desiring, keep, you know, whether it's just sewing a couple times a week small things or cooking for your family or painting, you know, in your garage, something that keeps that dream at the forefront, and that that Ember and fire live in your heart?

L Lela Morgan 48:59

Absolutely. Absolutely. Never let it go.

J Jennifer Malcolm 49:03

That's awesome. Well, we are gonna wrap up here, it has been such a joy to reconnect. And through the podcast, I think we're about 30 some episodes. And there's been a lot of people that I have known for years and years and years that I've interviewed. And it's so fresh and beautiful to say I just met you less than three months ago, and that we were able to connect that you impacted my life and you impacted our lives that night, that it meant something for me to continue to reconnect and I feel like just through your entrepreneurship desires and your cookbook and things that you and I will continue to stay in touch.

L Lela Morgan 49:43

Oh absolutely. You have impacted my life too. So thank you so very much, Chad.

J Jennifer Malcolm 49:49

You are very very welcome. It was such an honor to be there and anyone who goes to southern Florida like you have to experience her cooking your cooking. It's just amazing. Delicious, relaxing, and we were just blown away by it so and affordable and affordable. So it was very affordable. Well, thank you so much everyone for tuning in today, I hope that your mouths are salivating, you're inspired to go and get some fresh ingredients. And

just start with simple things. I love that that alila just even position, having some fresh, easy things in your kitchen that you can pull out, spend 15 minutes or less to make a fresh meal, instead of going out to eat or instead of going and getting fast food. So here's some options for you. We will also be putting connections to her social media sites. And as she's developing her website and her book, we'll make sure to update our website as well to showcase those two. So Well, thank you, my friend. It's been an honor. Thank you.



Lela Morgan 50:53

Very well, thank you so much.



Jennifer Malcolm 50:56

Thanks, everyone. Have a wonderful and blessed day and we can't wait to connect with you next week. Alright ladies, talk to you later. Bye bye. Thank you for listening to the Jennasis Speaks podcast. If you love the show, one of the best things you can do is to share it with a friend. Tell them what you like about it, how it inspires you and invite them to listen. Subscribe to the Jennasis movement to empower women's voices and reclaim the power over your own narrative.