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Profile on Fluff It Marshmallow in Gilbert

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From left, Tricia and Hazel Arce at Fluff It Marshmallow's Gilbert location.

After losing a family member, a Gilbert woman found comfort in baking and decided to turn her passion into a full-time career.

There is no right or wrong way to cope with the death of a loved one. While some simply let time heal their wounds, others find more comfort in devoting themselves to an all-consuming hobby or job.

In the case of Tricia Arce, she decided to pour all of her energy into creating **Fluff It Marshmallows**, a gourmet marshmallow shop and s'mores bar in Gilbert.

Having worked in retail management for over 20 years, she never felt any desire to own a store dedicated to gourmet marshmallows or s'mores. In fact, she had never even enjoyed eating them.

"I have never been a fan of marshmallows," she said. "The texture of the marshmallow just doesn't sit with me, at all. It just feels like I have a mouth full of foam."

Yet, despite having distaste for marshmallows, she found the process of both making and creating them to comfortably fill the time she had previously spent caring for her grandmother, who died in 2012.

Tricia Arce's wife, Hazel Arce, explained that because Tricia Arce had devoted so much time to her grandmother, there was a significant amount of empty space left open in her week. Hazel Arce said that at that time, "all she really had was work."

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acting as the primary caregiver to her grandmother. In doing so, she had made sure that all doctors' appointments were attended, grocery trips were kept up on and all required pills were taken. "I had made all the decisions for her on her health and wellbeing," she said.

But after her grandmother died, the routine Tricia Arce had known no longer existed. "You know, you get used to doing something on a consistent basis with someone that you love and took care of and then they're gone and you're like, 'what do I do with my life?'"

Though grieving, Tricia Arce maintained her position as a manager and made efforts to keep her days consistent, including the continuation of participation in the store's managers baking contests.

Held on a monthly basis, each contest was given a different theme that the participants were to incorporate into their food. The monthly contest following her grandmother's death required the usage of marshmallows, which Tricia Arce decided she would make from scratch.

"I went and got my first mixer, never owned one. First tablespoons, never owned a pair," Tricia Arce said. "Everything, I had to figure out everything."

According to Hazel Arce, Tricia Arce seemed to immediately enjoy the work involved with making marshmallows. "It was good because she wasn't crying, she wasn't sad, she wasn't focused on the negative and she was looking forward to making new stuff," she said.

After perfecting her methodology, Tricia Arce brought her homemade strawberry marshmallow into work and won the contest that month. Before long, Tricia started to feel a "want" to make more marshmallows and began experimenting with creating different flavors like strawberry, chocolate, pineapple and lemon.

As the number of marshmallows she made increased, she began bringing them into work for employees to eat. Eventually, an employee inquired about buying marshmallows, sparking the idea to sell marshmallows on [Etsy](#).

Offering strawberry, chocolate and vanilla flavors on Etsy, Tricia Arce began noticing an increasing number of orders placed for her marshmallows. Recognizing the growing demand, the couple made the decision to start a crowdfunding campaign on [kickstarter](#) with a goal of \$5,000 in 30 days.

By the 30th day, the campaign surpassed their goal by over 50 percent with \$12,000 and 263 pre-orders for marshmallows. This meant that over the next year, while working full-time, the couple would make, cut and package marshmallows in whatever time they could find.

Inevitably, both Tricia and Hazel Arce's involvement with Fluff It Marshmallows steadily increased, prompting them to leave their previous careers and work full-time at the shop.

Long-time friend Jean Torgersen says that the progress Fluff It has been experiencing is tremendous. "... The growth and where she's heading with this is just remarkable, remarkable," she said. "And I know she's gonna continue, she's not gonna stop."

Fluff It Marshmallow was moved into a brick and mortar shop in 2014 at 1034 N. Gilbert Road No. 3 in Gilbert. Since then, the business has steadily expanded, allowing for the planned opening of a second location in Scottsdale at the OdySea in the Desert, next to the OdySea Aquarium, in September.

Olivia Q Davila is a journalism student at the [Arizona State University Walter Cronkite School of Journalism](#) and wrote the article as a class assignment.

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