

Speaker 1: [00:02](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. As many of you know, I wrote a cookbook this year. Well, hold on, let me rephrase that. I actually wrote the cookbook over several years, but it just now published this spring. So the reception of this cookbook has truly been beyond my wildest dreams and I have been so grateful and so humbled to see people all across the country in the world really cooking my recipes in their kitchen. In today's episode, I thought it'd be fun to do something a little bit different and take you behind the scenes of what went into writing the Prairie homestead cookbook.

Speaker 1: [00:52](#) I'm your host Jill winger, and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel disenchanting by modern life. I'll show you how to create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills. Writing a book is like having a baby. Seriously, did you know it takes two years for the average book to go from the outline mode to the point where it's on a shelf at a bookstore? Yeah, I didn't realize that either when I started this whole journey. It is intense. If you have ever contemplated having a book of your own published or you're just curious about what it took to bring the Prairie homestead cookbook into the world, I think you're going to enjoy this behind the scenes episode. So this whole process of the cookbook started back in 2016 believe it or not, like a long time ago.

Speaker 1: [02:02](#) So a very dear friend of mine, Dr Eric Zielinski of Natural Living Family, shout out to him, go check him out. He has a podcast, amazing website, all kinds of good stuff. We've been buddies for a while and he's always really good about, uh, encouraging me and giving me ideas. And he had approached me back in 2016 and said, Hey, I just found a really great literary agent. I'm working on a book of my own. Would you like me to make an introduction for you? So at that point I had sort of thought about writing a book, had not committed to it and definitely had not put a any sort of date on that goal. It just was way back in the recesses of my brain. But I decided to, you know, get the introduction to his agent and see what would happen. So a little side note here, for those of you who are interested in the publishing process, a literary agent is not a requirement for publishing a book.

Speaker 1: [03:02](#) However, they are really wise choice, especially if you want to work with a larger publisher. So if you are wanting just to maybe shoot for one of the smaller independent publishers, oftentimes you can approach them directly. You don't have to have an agent be the go between. But in those bigger publishing house cases, usually they are going to say, Hey, don't

contact us directly. You need to work with an agent. So I had my sights set on a big publishing house. That was kind of my goal. So I knew that an agent was going to be right for me. So I had a few conversations with my agent, John Moss. He was with Sterling Lord literary at the time. We agreed to work together. Long story short, and we ultimately came up with the idea of doing a cookbook. At first I wasn't sure if I wanted to do like a homestead manual or some sort of other homestead topic, but the food kept coming up to the surface and that being one of my primary passions and that being the thing that I'm known for.

Speaker 1: [04:05](#) So cookbook it was, so the first step in the process was to write a proposal, which sounds a whole heck of a lot easier than it actually is. My proposal ended up being a 40 plus page document. It took us, I'd say about four to five months to put together and this was a tag team effort with my agent and myself. I would write some things and he did some research and gathered numbers and we put it all together in this nice pretty package. But basically the goal of a proposal is to showcase your writing style, your stats of like your audience. If you have an online platform and how you can sell your book and all that good stuff. So it's basically helping publishers see that you're worth taking a chance on. Right? Because ultimately the goal of the book is to be a product that is marketable and publishers want to see that you're able to market and that your idea is going to be a hit in the marketplace.

Speaker 1: [05:19](#) The thing that I figured out very, very quickly is that no book that you propose, whether it's a cookbook or otherwise, can just be like a hodgepodge of ideas. It has to be very cohesive, very well organized with a very specific purpose and point. So the purpose of my cookbook, because you know, there are millions of cookbooks out there and my agent said, what is going to set yours apart? And so I decided that my purpose in the cookbook would be that I would be focusing on whole food ingredients that could potentially be homegrown, and I wanted the recipes to have a heavy homestead/vintage kind of twist. However, I also knew that most of the people who would be reading my cookbook wouldn't necessarily have a 20 acre garden and a milk cow. So I wanted it to be very approachable for everyone, whether they're a homesteader at heart or they're the hardcore homesteader, you know, with the 2000 acres spread.

Speaker 1: [06:25](#) So once you got that nailed down, we got the proposal finished. It was pretty, it was this nice package. We started pitching it. So my agent did all the heavy lifting here. He was amazing. And he

took the proposal to 10 different editors in different publishing houses. So he would approach them with a proposal if they were interested. Then we scheduled a phone call. So I can't remember the exact timeframe. It was over the course of a week or so. We crammed about 10 phone calls in. So I just talked to editor after editor after editor and I explained why I wanted to write the cookbook and why I was passionate about it. And they explained to me what kind of books they like to work with and what they look for. We ask questions. It was a really good experience to be able to talk to so many different people in the industry.

Speaker 1: [07:23](#)

But anyway, after all of that was done, I had three different publishing houses, make an offer on the manuscript and after some deliberation they were all really great offers. We decided to go with flat iron and that is a imprint or a division of McMillan. And the reason I ultimately went with them is number one, I really was determined to go with a larger publishing house just because I wanted a little bit more broad reach when it came to distribution of my book. So that definitely fit that bill. And I also really enjoyed talking with the editor there. Her name was Kara Rhoda, and when I talked to her on the phone, she really got the vision of the book as being like this beautiful all encompassing homestead cooking manual that would really be timeless. And when she and I were talking about that, it just felt like home.

Speaker 1: [08:22](#)

And so I was really, really excited for the chance to work with her. So we signed a contract and I agree that within six very short months I would have the entire manuscript finished. That's 80,000 words, 120 recipes and a hundred photographs done and delivered to them. Holy cow. Like I signed my name, I was excited, and then I instantly went into what have I done mode. So not going to lie, that was July when we signed the contracts I had from July until January for my deadline and it was stressful like it just was. And I, everyone I've talked to who writes a book, there's just a stressful period there. I don't know if there's any way to work around that. I had every minute of my days allotted out at that point and there wasn't a minute to spare. It was like cookbook on the brain 24-7 so first things first, the most important thing was that I had to finish recipe testing, kind of a big deal, right?

Speaker 1: [09:34](#)

I had started the process and it had been ongoing for many, many months as we were working on the proposal and doing all that stuff. But the recipes were nowhere near complete, so the first couple months there, it was all recipes all the time, and I had this running list of the recipes that I wanted to potentially

try out for the book, the recipes I needed to tweak the recipes I needed to make at least three more times because they just weren't turning out the way I wanted to and I cooked and I cooked and I cooked. The only food we ate during that period was cookbook food day in and day out. And some nights we would have the same thing for two to three nights or more in a row because I was just ha, I just really needed to get that recipe right. You know, the seasonings would be off, the technique would be a little bit lacking.

Speaker 1: [10:32](#)

It needed more salt and I was bound and determined to nail the details on the recipes, especially the seasonings. I kind of have a pet peeve when you try a recipe and the seasoning and salt levels or off or they give you vague amounts. And I understand that in some regards, but it's really nice to be able to trust the recommended amounts, especially with salt in a recipe because that can mean the difference between something that's bland or something. That's amazing. So I kept this notebook in the kitchen. I used an entire notebook from cover to cover. During this process. It was full of scribbles and adjustments more than once, I would write something on a page and I couldn't remember like the next day what I had been meaning by the note. It was, it was crazy. I had printouts, I would keep the recipes in a word document and then I would, you know, make them, I go make some edits, print it out, make it again, go make some more edits, printed out again.

Speaker 1: [11:36](#)

So there was like loose papers all over the kitchen. So it was a little crazy. But we ate pretty well during the process. I didn't have too many complaints from the family. So once the recipes were pretty much nailed down, it was time to book the photo shoots. Now, originally when we had proposed the book to the editor, I was kind of planning to do the photos myself. I have a nice camera, I like to dabble in photography. I'm like, Hey, I'll just do the photos. I'm cooking the food. No big deal. But after some more conversations with my editor, we agreed to hire out the photos. Now, if I'm being perfectly honest, when we first made that decision, I was a little bit bummed because I originally had this vision of me doing the whole thing. I'm like, I can have this book someday and I will know I wrote every word and took every photo.

Speaker 1: [12:36](#)

But let's just say that outsourcing the photos, even though I was disappointed initially, that ended up being a huge blessing in disguise because looking back, if I had had to photograph it and recipe test and write, I think I might've had a nervous breakdown. It would've been way too much. So thankfully we were able to find a Wyoming photographer and I was so excited

when I saw her portfolio because I could tell that she had this style I was looking for. It was really important to me that the food photos did not look like they were taken in a sterile studio somewhere. I wanted them to look very homey and very real, and I wanted it to match my style. I wanted it to look like me, even though I wasn't taking the photos. So her name is Lindsay Linton of Linton photography. She's incredible. And she got it.

Speaker 1: [13:41](#)

She got the Wyoming feel, she got the message I was trying to get across, and it was a fantastic fit. So we booked our shoot for October at that point, and the pressure was really on then because we had to make sure, I had to make sure that the recipes were perfect because the thing that can happen if you're still recipe testing during the middle of the photo shoot, you might end up changing the recipe after the fact. And it's a big no, no, that if, let's say you have the photo has basil in the photo and if you end up nixing basil from the ingredient list later, like that's very confusing to people reading the cookbook. So we didn't want that sort of thing to happen. So the recipes had to be perfect before the shoot. So as October arrived, we had lots of calls about wardrobe, wardrobe and props and dishes and there were spreadsheets.

Speaker 1: [14:43](#)

We decided we would give ourselves two weeks consecutively to get all of the shots in and we were shooting for about 80 recipe shots plus some lifestyle pictures and also the cover. So when photo-shoot time arrives, Lindsey and a stylist who works with Lindsey, her name is Gretta Eagan, they are amazing women. They brought a whole bunch of props and we transformed my house. My house didn't even look recognizable. We set up the office and turned it into a prop room. We took pictures off my wall so we could put printouts of the photos up. We'd take them into like this mosaic in my living room so we could make sure that everything matched like the colors and the composition matched. So it was crazy. We ended up cooking I think throughout that process about eight to 10 recipes per day. And we just had this assembly line going and anyone, like if you've ever worked in a really fun team atmosphere, I know you get this.

Speaker 1: [15:54](#)

It was a blast. Like we had our roles and we had our stations and it was this great energy and we had music going and it was just so much fun. So I would cook the food and I had some amazing friends come help me in the kitchen. Then Gretta, the stylist would arrange the food on the plates, make it look beautiful. Then Lindsey, the photographer would shoot from all sorts of different angles and then we would immediately send a shot of the food to my editor, Kara, so she could see if she liked

how it looked and if it matched. And we were just all on the same page. Originally, my biggest fear was that we would have so much food that we wouldn't know what to do with it. But thankfully with our photography crew, and we also had our amazing babysitter, Julie here, watching the kids and Christian and his friends who are out in the shop doing stuff.

Speaker 1: [16:55](#)

We did a pretty impressive job making sure the food didn't take over the kitchen. So no one complained with all of the taste testing that we had to do during that couple week period. So all the food that you see in the cookbook, every picture I made, every single dish with my own two hands. Like that was my food, my ingredients in my kitchen. And I'd say most of the dishes are mine. We did borrow a few just because we didn't want a whole bunch of repeat repeats over and over. And I only have so many plates. So thankfully Gretta and Lindsey had some amazing friends and family members who let them truck their dishes all the way across the States. But the pictures are legit. They are straight off the homestead. Um, they're the real deal.

Speaker 1: [17:47](#)

Okay. So once we got the photo done, Lindsey got to work on editing the photos and I got back to work on the book. When we had written the proposal, I had committed to the cookbook being more than just a cookbook. I had also agreed that I wanted it to have a lot of extra homesteading information and I wanted a whole section on how to grow your own ingredients. So I had to ride all of that and make it make sense and cross-reference it. And also I wanted to write some really fun head notes. Those were the paragraphs that you see in cookbooks in front of the recipe. I wanted those to be really enjoyable to read and engaging. So I spent a lot of time on those as well. So from about January or no, excuse me, November to January, it was go time. I don't really remember much about Christmas that year.

Speaker 1: [18:47](#)

It was just like we're getting through the holidays. It's survival mode. I spent a lot of Saturdays and Sundays in a local coffee shop. So Christian was amazing. He made a lot of time in his schedule where he would just stay home with the kids and I would drive in on a Friday and then go back in on a Saturday to hammer out the manuscript. There's a little coffee shop that's about 50 minutes from my house. It was like my writing, my writing corner and I wrote the book. It's literally powered by dirty chai, uh, breakfast burritos and bluegrass music in my headphones and I would just pound on the keyboard for 10 hours at a time. And then I would be like leaving the coffee shop, not knowing what day it was, not knowing my name could barely drive home. But uh, I had to really chunk it out to get it done.

Speaker 1: [19:43](#) In January. I hit the send button and sent the manuscript to my editor. It was a huge sigh of relief. It felt amazing to say I did it. I made the deadline, I fulfilled the commitment. It was just amazing. Although I did know that the reprieve was only temporary because then came the edits, so many edits and this is an entirely normal part of the process and truthfully it's a really good thing and it's part of the reason I did want to traditionally publish a book instead of just self-publishing because I wanted to have a lot of eyeballs on the manuscript and I wanted it to be held to a high standard and I wanted people to pick it apart before I sent it out into the world. Because once you publish a print cookbook, you can't just go make a quick edit like you can on a website and fix it.

Speaker 1: [20:47](#) It's really permanent and so I wanted it to be as good as it possibly could be. So my editor, Kara, did some edits. We had a copy editor come through and do a whole nother round. There was a recipe editor who read through all the recipes and made sure that my directions made sense and would say things like, okay, you said to Brown the beef, but how long is that going to take? Or, okay, you said to cook this bread until golden Brown, but how long is that gonna take? So she made sure that everything made sense, so thankful for that step. Because my biggest fear was that someone would get the cookbook and I would have left out like the most important part of the recipe and they'd be like halfway through and get stuck. So that was a lot of peace of mind having her go through that.

Speaker 1: [21:41](#) The thing I didn't love about the edits is that I never really knew for sure when the next round would come, so they would send me the red marks, you know, or their changes and I would implement the changes into the manuscript. So it was a big project for me each and every time to go through and make the tweaks. They usually always came, no one's fault. It just was the way the cookie crumbled always before I was headed out of town on a trip, like without fail, if I had a plane ticket booked, I knew that the edits would come in 12 hours before I was set to take off. That was a little crazy. There was also this one time when my editor had sent a ton of changes and I had spent about four hours implementing all of the changes into the manuscript and then my computer had a little moment and erase them all.

Speaker 1: [22:37](#) So I had to start from scratch and redo all of the edits and I totally cried when that happened because it was so frustrating. But anyway, we survived. The edits gradually started slowing down in that somewhere in that part of the process, I believe it was spring or summer 2018 it's all a blur at this point, but I got

to see the cookbook designed, we sent the manuscript and the photos to this amazing layout designer and she got the fonts in place and really made it look like what you see it being today. That was surreal because prior to that it was just black words on a white word document, you know, it's kind of hard to envision that being in people's kitchens across the country. But when I saw the layout and she nailed it from day one and it was like amazing.

Speaker 1: [23:34](#)

It felt surreal. So we were trucking along. Things were going pretty good. I was feeling good about the process. And then my editor had said, Hey, we're just about done with edits, so if you have any last minute things, you've got to get them in now or you're not going to get them in because it's going to the printer. And then I realized that we had not gotten some of the endorsements I wanted. And endorsements are just the little blurbs you see on the back of covers. Um, when you have someone famous say, Oh, I love this book, or you know, they're just, it's called a blurb in the industry, but it's just endorsing that, Hey, this author in this book is legit. Since day one, my dream had been to have Joel Salatin write a blurb for the back cover of my book. And I realized that we had sent out some correspondence to him, but it never heard back.

Speaker 1: [24:32](#)

And I told Cara, my editor, I'm like, Oh my gosh, I've got to get, Joel Salatin contacted like I need him. Like it's my dream for it to have him somehow look at this manuscript before it goes out. And she said, well, you know, we're running on a very tight time schedule. This is going to have to be submitted and ready to go in just a few days. So I had a heart attack. I was freaking out because I just knew that I had to have him endorse the book. So thankfully, I was able to reach out to him. Lo and behold, he said that he doesn't do endorsements for books. He does write forwards because he wants to be able to read the whole book before he says anything about it, which I totally admire. However, the problem was I needed it back in like four days and writing a foreword for a book is kind of a big deal.

Speaker 1: [25:24](#)

It's like extensive writing. So I said, Mr. Salatin, I don't know if you can do this, but I just have to throw this out there. You know, if I send you the manuscript, would you look at it and see if possibly you could write the forward and Oh yeah, I need it back in like three days. No big deal. He was amazing. Of course, he not only agreed to write a whole forward for the cookbook, he got it back to me like immediately he was flying across sea or overseas to do a speaking engagement. He read the manuscript on the airplane and wrote the forward and send it back. So that was, that was just like a mountaintop portion of this whole

thing to have him read it and write the most heartfelt incredible forward. Um, that was a dream come true. And you can see that in the front of the book.

Speaker 1: [26:14](#) It was super special. And then the rest is really history. The book hit bookshelves in April of 2019. It was incredible to start seeing it pop up on shelves across the country to see you guys take it into your kitchens and use it. And it's been such a worthwhile endeavor. So much work. You know, two plus years of work. But I would 100% do it again. I had amazing people and amazing team. And the impact has been just beyond my wildest dreams. I was honored to have the book, make the editors pick, the midyear editors pick on Amazon, which is a really big deal because all the books are on Amazon. And to have them pick my book out from all of those new releases was amazing. We also hit people magazine this summer, which, Oh my goodness, like a homestead cookbook in people magazine is just insane.

Speaker 1: [27:18](#) Like this is my goal, my friend. This is what I want to happen. I want to get homesteading in to the awareness of folks everywhere, not just us country dwellers, but to people who live in the cities and who live in the apartments. And I want people to know that this wholesome from scratch lifestyle is possible and being able to hear from people like you every single day that the cookbook has inspired them to try a new technique or that they made their first pie crust or that suddenly they just feel like trying some new recipes in the kitchen. Cause it doesn't seem as difficult as they thought. That's really all I could have ever asked from the whole project. So if you're contemplating writing a book of your own cookbook or otherwise, know that it is a heck of a lot of work and it will be all consuming for a period of your life.

Speaker 1: [28:19](#) But ultimately it's a fantastic way to make an impact. It's a fantastic way to help your message get spread to a larger audience and it's really fulfilling in the process. So if you don't have a copy of the cookbook yet or you maybe just want to peek inside and see what it looks like, you can go to www.homesteadcookbook.com and if you do decide to purchase your own copy, come back to that website, input your receipt number and I'll send you a whole bunch of awesome bonuses. And that's it. Thanks for listening to this kind of different behind the scenes episode. If you have a second, I would be so honored if you'd pop over to your favorite podcast player, hit subscribe and leave a quick review. So more people can find this podcast and bring homesteading into their lives. Thanks for listening and I'll catch up with you on the next episode.

