



Friends in butter,

It's with both a heavy and buoyant heart that I share that we're closing up shop this summer. Sunday, July 16th will be our last day open.

We started having conversations as a staff about closing in January, with the goal of at least earnestly exploring a worker owned co-op model for Bramble. The light-chaos of making from-scratch goods each week has meant that I've neglected to be intentional in some key ways, and I've built the bakery up in a way that isn't personally sustainable. Our pie crust is so flaky it has brought tears to my eyes. We've gone from making a couple of dozen to hundreds of pastries each Saturday. We work together in a kitchen that (while not a technical co-op) is non-hierarchical. I am very proud of all of this. But my family is also very depleted at a moment when we're trying to make decisions about our future.

I haven't written or spoken publicly about this because it's emotional, it's messy, and it might seem contradictory. Bakeries are sweet places, and in pop culture, their owners do not tend to succumb to bone-crushing ennui. When I tell people what I do, I get a lot of responses like, "that sounds so fun!" And it sure is sometimes! It's a beautiful thing to share something so tangible that brings a bit of joy into someone's day. But while some flourish leading a team and selling a high volume of laborious \$5 pastries, I *really* struggle as a leader in this context. Even when the eventual goal is more shared ownership and responsibility, someone needs to step up to get everyone there. As many a food business owner before me, I've simply run out of steam and chronic health issues abound.

It hasn't been a golden, sustainable ride for those that work here either. After years of trying to allocate resources so we can all thrive, I find myself so bogged down by what we **can't** make happen. We've capped out on higher wages, we can't afford the family leave folks need, and we can't afford to cover health insurance in a marketplace tailored to larger businesses. We source as much locally and as ethically as we can, but are priced out of some categories by virtue of hoping to pay our employees more. The ways capitalism stands in the way of ethical decision-making in the food industry are myriad, and I have always told myself that if the bakery can't authentically support its workers, maybe it shouldn't exist.

I'm thankful to BRED, the [Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy](#), for working with our staff to explore models of shared ownership. We are so lucky to have this resource in our city—and in the sputtering food industry—I'm grateful for those that still manage to see the same slog in, through, and around capitalism as an opportunity to create something beautiful and authentic. Even with these resources, we came to the decision that it's just not the right time for anyone else to sign onto the risks and debts.

There's a lot to be said about the deeply personal ways the food industry continues to fail everyone. I know we are the smallest potatoes in the systemic stew, and in many ways I was in an extremely privileged spot when starting Bramble. While there was no larger family money or investment, my partner was at least able to work in tech to support us. I had lots of cultural capital and two college degrees that people loved to connect to the bakery's origin story. We had lines at our farmer's market stall and tangible, monetary community support. But the things Bramble has going for it still isn't enough to sustain it and its people for the long haul. I'm not trying to be negative for the sake of it, but taking a stab at transparency feels important in case it is helpful in any way, to anyone, to hear about our specific challenges and their context.

It's helped me so much, to take myself out of my own head and remind myself of the social and institutional pressures that have impacted this endeavor. Most importantly though, just because it didn't work for us at this bakery doesn't mean I'm not still hopeful. So many people and orgs (like BRED!) are doing the work to imagine new structures and new ways we might engage with our jobs.

And on that more positive note, though the shop is a young toddler, Bramble is a kindergartener at five and a half. That's no joke! When I started baking for markets late in 2017, I never dreamed I would end up baking for my day job, let alone own a shop. So while I know to some this will look like a failure, I only feel a teensy bit of socially-programmed shame. I'm an idealistic ex-educator, after all, and I love the idea of failures as THE most important moments in our lives—our flop eras wherein we grow and stretch and learn a ton.

The first bakery year actually felt just like flopping. I aimlessly worked the longest hours until my first collaborator Jaime came along not long after with the original recipes and industry knowledge that became our wonderful croissants. Shortly after that Emma dedicated her creativity via fleurs and operations acumen to our cause. Our offerings and capacity grew exponentially. I try to tell everyone I work with that I admire them and their creations in lots of small moments, but I probably don't do it enough (could it ever be enough?) To Jaime, Emma, Drew, Felicity, Betsy, Dayna, Lucy, Carrie, Elle, and Rahma: thank you for the literal work but also the emotional work exploring what might feel true and good. To Robin, Laurel, Bingo Queen Sam, and Abby: how could I not include a thanks for some of the earliest market help?

Now I'm feeling quite overwhelmed with gratitude, so I'll go for it all. Thanks to you, of course. You've read quite a bit of this, and perhaps you contributed to our GoFundMe, or you shared a kind word with us or a friend about your favorite treat. Of course, Bramble would never exist without you and you're a butterfriend forever. Thanks also to the *many* Baltimore businesses and orgs that provided us with creative energy in the form of food, flowers, or collaboration. For all the difficulties, one thing a small business does is really force you to reflect on what it means to be in community, and what a gift to operate in this city. In no particular order:

- Natasha's Just Brittle and Bmore Made with Pride Kitchen (just up the street from the bakery!) provided me with my very first commercial kitchen rental, and Gundalow Gourmet before we found our own shop.

- Thank you to LieAnne at Dear Globe for stocking our treats way before anyone else was, and Eric and Zena at Pillion Tea for the same (and for the beautiful teas that have graced our shop). Thanks also to good neighbor, Bird in Hand, and B. Willow for stocking pastries and providing various space for markets and collaborations.
- To Kris and everyone at Sophomore Coffee: we love your coffee, buds. Thanks for roasting us such special beans to offer in the shop.
- To Daniel, Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street, and the neighborhood: thank you for your kindness and welcome. I love living here, and I'll see you around.
- Thanks to the 32nd Street Farmers Market community and fellow vendors (special shout-out to neighbor Blacksauce for winter emotional support). You helped us believe in ourselves in a really cool way.
- To the farms and local purveyors that have made our food possible: Karma Farm, Charlottetown Farm, Moon Valley, One Straw, Calvert's Gift and Chesapeake Farm to Table, Strength 2 Love, Lancaster Farm Fresh Co-op, South Mountain for all our dairy, and Andy's for all our eggs and bacon...a billion thanks.
- And a billion more to our flower friends including Violet Florals, Spore and Seed, Local Color Flowers, Two Boots Farm, and Locust Point Flowers. Especially Maya and Hillen Homestead: in trading pastries for shortie stems, we definitely got the better end of the stick and we're forever grateful.
- Thanks to Kelci Tillman for all of our merch and sticker illustrations, and for helping us with related things like the awning for our shop that never came to be but I love all the same. Thanks to Sean Danaher for bringing the signs to life.

My mom packed a lot of cookies for our first Greater Goods Market at R. House, and my dad served as our dishwasher and resident handyperson at the shop for many months right after my mom passed away. He painted the bakery with myself, Emma, Laurel, and Miriam, and refinished the counters we inherited from the bakery before, Batch Bakeshop.

These weird, wild moments and connections have made this the best job I've ever had and the most devastating. It's a miracle that I've been able to hold both of those truths through this endeavor, but that's thanks to some very kind souls. I'll always treasure that anyone would choose to be along for the ride on someone's grief bakery train in the middle of a global pandemic.

See you with alllll of our favorite things to bake through July 16th.

Much love to you for being here,
Allie

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS; TLDR:

Some of our bakers are looking for opportunities in food or adjacent fields, and we've worn many creative, shared hats here. I would love to connect you—and to tell you at length how great they are—if you're looking for help.

Our space, in a neighborhood that has been so good to us, is also available. It's been a bakery for many years, which is an honor in its own right. Feel free to reach out here or via the website to chat more.