



Joy Gee-Rasmussen, owner of Joy's Place, is always in motion cooking at her café in Malta. She often works 15 hours a day, six days a week.

Dream Job a Recipe for Success

Joy Gee-Rasmussen lands her dream job cooking food from scratch at Malta café

By Dianna Troyer

Joy Gee-Rasmussen pulls a tray of her homemade rolls from the oven as she reveals a guilty pleasure.

"I can't believe I get paid to do this, to cook for people," she says. It's been my dream job for years."

Joy, 53, lives her dream six days a week—about 15 hours a day—at Joy's Place, a café at 420 N. Main in Malta.

She has been renting the building since May 2016 and hopes to buy it this fall.

"It's exciting for me," she says.

The long hours making breads, soups, French fries and desserts from scratch have not crushed her enthusiasm as head

cook and manager of four waitresses.

"Even without days off, I still love being here," Joy says.

She works Monday to Saturday, opening the café at 7:30 a.m. and closing it at 8 p.m.

"I get here about 7 in the morning, and by the time we're done cleaning up, it's about 10 or 11 at night," Joy says.

Some evenings and weekends, she caters banquets, weddings, reunions or business meetings.

Joy's homemade food not only lures loyal local customers, it also tempts travelers who have read internet reviews about the café.

"We love Joy being here," says Nancy

Kossman, who lives nearby.

Nancy and her friend, Nadyne Sundberg, come in regularly for a late morning breakfast or afternoon ice cream.

"She's accommodating, so if you want something off the menu, she'll make it," Nancy says.

Customers writing reviews on TripAdvisor describe the café as "a gem, better than what I'd heard, and about as close as you can get to Mom's homemade cooking."

Joy says she can't believe some people drive out of the way to visit.

"Some truckers told me they read about the café on Yelp, so they detoured about 10 miles off the interstate for



Above, Joy is grateful for family support and keeps a portrait of her family at the café. Right, Joy's cooking brings visitors from all over. Her desserts are also popular.



lunch," she says. "Others come from Burley, Albion and even Snowville."

Randy Spoon, a cancer insurance salesman from Wisdom, Montana, says he stops in for lunch when contacting his southeastern Idaho customers.

"Her food is great, and her prices are less than what you'd pay at most places," Randy says. "I ran a bar and restaurant in Wisdom, so I know how much work and energy it takes to keep a place like this open."

Joy says restaurant work seems more like play. Feeding her customers is a lot like cooking for her family, "except I get paid here," she says, laughing.

At home in Sublett, she and her husband, Larry, have hosted spontaneous family get-togethers on Sundays.

"We might have 30 to 60 people, so I've always been used to cooking for a crowd," Joy says.

To indulge herself at the start of each week, Joy stocks her dessert display case with her whims.

"This week, I felt like making peanut butter and chocolate fudge and a chocolate cake," she says. "Fudge always reminds me of family and the Christmas holidays.

Most of the desserts are gone by Friday or Saturday, so I start fresh again on Mondays."

Her spontaneous desserts supplement her pies, cookies, cinnamon rolls and cheesecakes.

"For some reason, people like my cheesecakes even though they're not like the traditional dense recipes," Joy says. "I make mine light."

For a wedding, her client requested plain cheesecake with different fruit toppings and syrups.

"My spud nuts don't last long," she says of the airy, inch-square donuts smothered with a chocolate or maple glaze.

Even after the breakfast rush ends and lunch orders begin flowing in, Joy is still smiling. She says the café is a daily reminder to never give up on your dreams.

Joy began daydreaming of owning and cooking in a restaurant in the fifth grade.

"My mom worked in the kitchen at Connor's Café in Burley, so she'd take me along to work," Joy says. "I was too young to wait tables, so I worked in the back washing dishes and peeling potatoes. When I was older, I became a waitress and learned to cook."

After working there 13 years, she quit to raise her family and shelved her restaurant dreams.

With her four sons grown, she talked to Malta café owner Jay Black about running it. He offered to help her get started.

Keeping her dream alive inspired her youngest son, who was diagnosed with leukemia and is now in remission.

"He always wanted to own a trucking business to haul cattle, so he started doing that a couple of years ago," Joy says. "Another son wants to open a mobile welding business."

Joy says she is grateful her sons help with weekly shopping and sometimes baking.

"I couldn't do it without them," she says.

When she needs a vacation, she generally takes one in August, when business is slow because most families go to the Cassia County Fair.

Nancy says she reminds Joy to relax and give herself a much-needed rest.

"But be sure to come back," Nancy tells Joy. ■