**Juggling Motherhood, Business, and Creativity S5|139**

Welcome to today's episode where we are so excited to be hosting Lexie Bird. She is the creative force behind Mamey, a standout confectionery business in South Africa, whose Turkish Delight just happens to be my favorite. Lexie joins us to share the captivating story of how she built a thriving brand while balancing the joys and challenges of motherhood.

We'll delve into her practical insights on achieving work-life balance. Does it even exist? She actually talks about something called work-life seasons, and it aligns with the rhythms of family life. So if you are trying to balance setting up a business or being a working mom with having little ones, this is something you really don't want to miss.

It's just so much wisdom. We also have this incredible conversation about creativity, and we explore some of Lexie's imaginative ideas for children's birthday parties, from whimsical unicorn poop treats to bath ball party gifts, absolutely fabulous ideas, and then also some really incredible ideas for school birthday rings. Lexie gives us a peek into making celebrations both magical and manageable.

She also shares a refreshing perspective on the pressures of perfection and reminding us that life is not supposed to be a Pinterest board. She offers us wisdom on embracing imperfections and letting go, alongside some really practical tips that promise to enrich the lives of busy parents everywhere. So whether you're planning your next big party or you're just looking for personal balance, this episode is packed with invaluable takeaways.

Welcome to Sense by Meg Fora, the podcast that's brought to you by ParentSense, the app that takes guesswork out of parenting. If you're a new parent, then you are in good company. Your host, Meg Fora, is a well-known OT, infant specialist, and the author of eight parenting books.

Each week, we're going to spend time with new moms and dads just like you to chat about the wins, the challenges, and the questions of the moment. Subscribe to the podcast, download the ParentSense app, and catch Meg here every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life. And now, meet your host.

Welcome back, moms and dads. This is Sense by Meg Fora, and I'm Meg Fora. And this week, we've got a fabulous episode.

We are going to be going into the topic of entrepreneurship and the balance of motherhood. And we've done a couple of these topics before, and they're always quite popular because many of us are working moms, most of us are, and every single one of us is doing the juggle of life and juggling little ones and juggling real life as well. So, today, I'm really, really excited for this conversation.

I have got Lexi Bird with me today. She is the founder of Mamere, which is a very well-known confectionery business in South Africa. And actually, my favorite Turkish delight is made by Mamere.

And I think it must be one of their flagship products. Lexi is a mom to two little girls. And over the past 12 years, she has grown Mamere into one of the most loved confectionery brands in South Africa, whilst raising two little ones who share her passion for baking and so on.

She's a business owner and a mother, and she's learned to navigate the delicate balance of professional ambition and personal life. So, Lexi, I am super delighted to have you here with us today. Welcome.

Thank you. I'm very, very happy to be here. I feel like it's taken us a couple of weeks to get here.

Yes, absolutely. But quite interestingly, years and years of a journey that's been very similar. I also started a business very early on in my adult life, and you did too.

I mean, Mamere is 12 years old. So, did you start at pre-kids and how did that all happen? Yes. So, Mamere started, gosh, my whole life, all I'd ever wanted to do was to be in advertising.

And throughout high school, that's all I thought about. And I did art and design. And I told anybody that would listen that I was going to be in the ad world and this is all I wanted to be.

So, I did that in high school. And then after school, I did a one-year course at Silwood before I went on to Red and Yellow to fulfill my destiny. Anyway, I then went and worked in the ad industry.

And after about three years, I realized that I absolutely hated it. And now I was like, well, my entire destiny is now invalid. So, obviously, you run home to mom and you weep.

And yeah, that's when I've always grown up in a household who loves to cook. My mom is incredible in the kitchen, as was my stepmom. And the one weekend my stepmom, she makes nougat as a hobby and she taught me.

And I started making nougat. So, I would make for a couple of caterers. And then I started making for more caterers.

And then I've got a little store at the Biscuit Mill and then would go and sell every Saturday. And then after a while, I decided I was going to rent a shop for one year. And if after that year, it was a disaster, I would pack it in and go and get a corporate job.

And it's kind of just the hobby has like gotten more and more out of control. And here I am. And I grew from that shop to a shop at the Biscuit Mill.

And I was there for, I think about a year when Hélouise, who's my general manager, she joined me. And her and I have just kind of walked this road into this insane business ever since then. So, it's never been the intention.

It's just been like a result of us just hard-headedly walking down this kind of journey and seeing where it takes us. That's incredible. So, you went from one store.

Do you have more stores now or do you supply other people? No. So, we actually don't have any shops. We've only got the online store and we manufacture.

We sell on our online store and then we supply other businesses. So, Poetry is our kind of biggest retailer who we work with and we love working with. And then we supply a lot of delis, farm stores, wine stores.

You know, there's so many people with beautiful businesses. And I think to run an actual physical store is quite difficult, especially when you are a mom and you never know what's going to happen in the middle of the night or who's going to be sick or who's going to have extramural. So, for me, actually, the thought of having a physical store is terrifying because there's just so much logistics.

So, I like to supply people with the stores and leave the admins to them. That's brilliant. Well, you've mentioned a couple of times things that have piqued my interest around motherhood because you mentioned that you had two very significant mothers in your life.

You've mentioned that you are a mother and so you couldn't have a store because the juggle was real. And I've also noticed that your business is called Mamare, which if I'm not mistaken means my mother. Yes.

How did that come about? The whole premise of the business, I think, is that all the kind of core recipes from the business are from my mom, my stepmom, grandmothers, friends' mothers. And often, right in the beginning, we used to make this fudge and people would come in and buy it and they'd eat it and go, you know, my gran used to make this fudge. And I kind of wanted to pay homage to that.

And I think my mom has instilled such a love and passion for what I do now in me. You know, she was also super creative and I love that. So, I think I just wanted to honor that feeling.

I love that. I really love that. Of course, it's not all rosy and it's not all romantic, this concept of being a mom and running a business.

I mean, the juggle is really real. And I know this because I started BabySense back in the day when I had two children. I was in my early 30s, and I think just 30, and ended up building a business quite similar to yours, starting organically and then eventually supplying everybody from Woolworths to BabyCity to Babies R Us, and it became a monster.

It became absolutely massive. And that daily juggle was really, really hectic. I'm sure you must find that that juggle of being that mother that we want to be and that we idealize and that we think is the ideal mother, along with running a business must have its super big challenges.

Yeah, you know, it really does. It's funny, before you become a mom, you think, oh, one day I'm going to have a child and I'm going to be this mom and my whole life is going revolve around my child. And then you have a baby and you realize actually that the rest of your life has got to keep on running and business has got to keep running.

And I think the trick for me also has been surrounding my people, surrounding myself with people like Heloise and not surrounding myself with people, and I might get in trouble for saying this, but who don't have kids. You know, the bulk of the women who work at my mare are moms. Heloise is a mom.

I'm a mom. And we all know and we've all got empathy for the fact that you could call on any day and say you've got a problem. It also means that you are a great problem solver.

You know, but it is tricky. I grew up with a mom who did work. So for me, it was important that my children see that a mom is not just there to serve and to make sandwiches and cut crusts off, but that mom's mom.

But we also go out there and we run races. We run businesses. We are creative.

We are, you know, I love that. I love that my see that moms can go out and do anything that other people can do. Yeah, and I enjoy that.

Yeah, absolutely. I think my girls have also modeled themselves on me as a mom in that respect that, you know, I'm very hardworking. They see it.

I am there for them, but often the juggle is really hectic. I actually interestingly attended a very interesting entrepreneurship panel yesterday. I wasn't on the panel.

I was just attended it. And one of the questions that was asked of the very, very successful entrepreneurs, these are women who've sold kind of multimillion rand and dollar businesses. And one of the questions that was asked is how do you get work-life balance? And one of the women said, you don't.

It is a fallacy and anybody who's chasing it will be frustrated because until such time as men are carrying as much load as women are, women will never get work-life balance. And it was such a like, wow, okay. Right.

You know, and so for me, it was, I don't know if you found that, but, you know, there's this kind of holy grail of, of we can, we can have it all. We can be, you know, successful career woman and we can be, you know, completely committed to our kids. But the reality is the chasing work-life balance is really, really tough.

Have you found that? For me, I think the word balance in, in that phrase is where the problem comes up for me because nothing, there is nothing in life that is always equally balanced. And for me, initially, you know, I always thought it had to be 50% of one, 50% of the other, but for me, it's more like work-life seasons. You know, sometimes it is 80% work and 20% parenting.

Sometimes it's 80% parenting and 20% work. And for me, you've got to find peace with that. You know, there's no way to keep the scales always equal.

And, you know, sometimes I do, I feel awful that I'm working really hard. And maybe I know that at the back of my mind, my kids really need attention, but it's just part of life that sometimes you've got to go to work and you've got to get stuff done. And I know that I will have a couple of really busy weeks, but then I will have a couple of really like great parenting weeks.

And it's that kind of finding peace with knowing the seasons, as opposed to trying to always keep things 50-50, because that is where the kind of exhaustion and burnout, I think, picks in. Because you're so busy trying to keep all the cups full all the time, when in actual fact, you should just concentrate on like maintaining one cup at a time and making sure that the other cups aren't just like totally empty. Yeah, it's absolutely true.

I mean, that's concept of a season is actually something that came up between my son and I recently. He has had a breakup and he's also in the middle of a startup, which is a really hectic startup based in London in the AI industry. And he said to me a few weeks ago, Mom, I'm so scared that now that I've gone through the breakup, my life is going to be completely out of balance because I'm just going to be throwing myself into my startup.

And I said exactly that to him. I said, I said to him, James, this is your season. Like this is the season, not for relationships, because yep, it's going to be too difficult to balance that.

It's a season for work and the season for relationships will come. And I love that you've said that work-life season. I think that's going to be my new go-to when people ask me about work-life balance, because I am asked about it a lot.

I think another thing just to add to that in if, you know, finding work-life balance, you know, I've been very lucky in that I'm not traveling my work journey by myself. And I'm able to, I'm able to get done what I need to get done because I've got a great team in place. And I think people that like single entrepreneurs that have got businesses that they run entirely on their own and have kids, I don't know how those people function.

You know, I've got my work wife, Eloise, who for the most part carries 50 to 80% of the load most time. And that is also a huge factor in keeping things going is, is not trying to do everything on your own and having somebody that you 100% trust and rely on to carry the load with you. And like when she's going through the shit, I can try my best to hold things up.

I don't always do so well. And then when I'm going through the shit, I don't even have to ask. I know that she's got it.

Absolutely. And I've got a work-wife like that, Tove, and I think you might know Tove, but she's an absolute dynamo. She holds together so much of our business, but our seasons are super different in our private lives.

She's got three children under the age of five. One is special needs. She has, as an example, right now is out of office completely for three weeks because her eldest daughter needs quite a bit of attention for the next three weeks.

And so I'm picking up her pieces. But a few weeks ago, I was able to go away with my family for two weeks and she held fort. And you know, I think it's that kind of balance within your business relationships that's very, very important as well.

So I'd like to turn my attention from the season of life in terms of work towards the season of life as of mothering. And so that is part of your life as well. And obviously connecting that in with your confectionery business and your love for cooking, how do you instill healthy eating habits in your little ones? And how do you model that? Because I don't know that your confectionery is necessarily the most healthy thing for us.

It is the most divine. But how do you instill those healthy habits in your little ones? This episode is brought to us by ParentSense, the all in one baby and parenting app that helps you make the most of your baby's first year. Don't you wish someone would just tell you everything you need to know about caring for your baby? When to feed them, how to wean them, and why they won't sleep? ParentSense app is like having a baby expert on your phone guiding you to parent with confidence.

Get a flexible routine, daily tips and advice personalized for you and your little one. Download ParentSense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out of parenting. But how do you instill those healthy habits in your little ones? Look, I think I, by nature, am, I gravitate towards kind of healthier food naturally.

So my kids have always grown up with healthy food around us. And I think one thing that I have tried to do with them is not go, okay, we having dinner now you must eat your vegetables. And for me, I've always kind of tried to celebrate all food.

So if we go to Willy's, I'll go, gosh, you know, these red peppers look so delicious. Let's grab one. And, you know, my kids now, if I chop up a red pepper and put it on a plate, they would eat it like a piece of fruit or a, I haven't kind of celebrated sweets and vilified vegetables and healthy food.

I think I'm also very, very lucky in that both of my kids naturally gravitate towards healthy stuff. Lily, my oldest one, especially, I mean, her favorite food is nori paper. She would actually bankrupt me if she had the chance, you know, by just eating seaweed.

She loves raw, crunchy vegetables. She actually doesn't like sweets or sweet things. Kelly, my baby, will gladly eat like ice cream with gnocchi and mashed potatoes as a meal.

She's all about the carb life, but, you know, I think just being practical about food and not kind of making a big deal about, oh, you've got to eat some broccoli. It's, gosh, this is really lovely broccoli. Let's give it a taste.

Another rule we have in our house is that you don't have to like it, but you do have to try it. So, yeah, if we go somewhere and there's a new food the kids haven't eaten, I'll say to them, cool, like, taste it. You might hate it.

And I've also made it okay for them to not like something. You know, Kelly loves peas. Lily hates peas.

So I'll cook a vegetable and I'll go, right, Lil, you can have broccoli. And Kelly, you having peas, because I know Lily doesn't like them, but she's tried them. She's told me she doesn't like them.

So I don't force them on her. And I think the fact now that they understand that if they try something and go, oh, I really like it or no, I hate it. I'm like, that's fine.

Now we know that you don't like peas or artichokes or asparagus. And I feed them the stuff that they like. Yeah, I think there's no easy way because some kids just don't like healthy food.

But it does have a lot to do with the way that you cook it as well. I mean, I can remember many years ago, going back to when my kids were toddlers, I had a friend who one day we went to her house and the kids were maybe one years old. I mean, they were tiny babies and she took some tender stone broccoli, steamed it for like 30 seconds.

So it was bright green and then put it in some olive oil with herbamayo salt and flash fried it for a couple of seconds and all the kids devoured it. And, you know, it's that kind of way in which you prepare vegetables to taste wonderful and, you know, to tick the boxes on the palate. And that actually means that, you know, then you're not forcing them to eat like overcooked mushed gray brown broccoli, you know? Yes, yes.

I think also like if we go to restaurants, I also try not to order off the kiddies meal, you know, like, oh, let's sit down at the restaurant. OK, well, girls, you can have a toasted sandwich or chicken nuggets and fries. Usually I'll try and encourage them to eat something off the main.

And I say to them, like, you know, you've got to discover food. We went to a birthday the other day and Lily ate an entire plate of beef tartare. She saw it on someone else's table and said, oh, what's that? Usually I would go, no, Lily, you can't have that.

You're not going to like it. But I thought, you know what? She actually may. So we ordered it.

It arrived with a raw egg in the middle of it. And I thought, you know, what are you doing? And she sat down and she ate an entire bowl of tartare raw and she loved it. And I think often we presume our kids won't like something.

So we say, oh, no, you can't have that. You won't like it. But how do you know that? And then you're putting it in their brains before they've even tried it.

Absolutely. So you mentioned birthday parties, and I think that's a huge challenge for moms. And being that you come from the confectionery background, you know, what would you be offering and how do you handle birthday parties? What do you offer? Are there healthy snacks that you think little ones can have at birthday parties? So look, Lil is a big planner.

So she's eight years old now. And I would say since she was about four or actually old enough to voice her opinions, she's kind of planned her birthday. So we always sit down two weeks before the party and I'll go, right, you know, what are we doing? And because she doesn't like actual sweets, it's been quite great because it's forced me to be a little bit more creative.

So one thing we always have is little cooked sausages, like chicken sausages or porkies and some tomato salsa dipping. And then we always do a thing called unicorn food or unicorn poop, which some of the kids call it, which I take popcorn and I mix it with a cereal. So like shreddies or fruit loops or and then we'll chuck in maybe one thing of Smarties and a nut.

And you make kind of a fun trail mix that has got a mixture of healthy and unhealthy. I think having absolutely no sweets doesn't help. But I always try and make sure that I've got a mix of savoury and kind of fruit skewers, healthy, fun, bright coloured things.

I love your unicorn mix. We always used to do that when we went to the movies. We would buy a box of popcorn.

We'd get one of their kind of super meals or whatever they call them, snack trays. And we would have the popcorn and then the packet of Smarties or M&M's and we'd chuck the Smarties and M&M's into the popcorn and eat that while we were watching the movie. It was a favourite.

So I love your idea of the unicorn poop. It sounds perfect. Yeah, because then they're getting a bit of like popcorn, a bit of nuts and a Smartie.

And so it's kind of diluting the volume of actual like sweets that they're getting. And filling them up with something else. Absolutely.

And then usually I will take her to the sweet isle and she's allowed to choose two big bags of like whatever she likes. So yeah. Yeah.

And you know, I think there's something to be said for that. You know, I think when you have this forbidden fruit, you know, you may never have this because it's bad for you. You end up with those kitties who arrive at a birthday party of somebody else's and scoff their face and choke on the sweets because they're not allowed it.

And so now they had a birthday party and it's, you know, that forbidden fruit. So yeah, it's being balanced that makes sense. And then I love that Lily is a big plan, party planner, because I am too.

I have always been obsessed with my kids' birthday parties and always planned them. And my kids have often said to me that their birthday party is growing up always the best of all the mums. And so I had certain themes that I absolutely loved.

And what sort of themes has Lily come up with or do you come up with? What have been really good themes for birthday parties? So I think one thing for birthday party themes with me is that I'm so I'm an A-type Virgo. I like everything to be like controlled and perfect. And obviously, when I first had kids, I had Pinterest boards and was like, you know, you want the balloon arch and the theme treats.

And after doing that once, I've realized that the 80s party is where it's at for us. So my absolute go-to party theme is to stop trying to be the Pinterest birthday and to embrace the old school, jumping castle, hot dogs, playing games on the grass, you know, because I find I get super anxious from about two weeks before the girls' birthdays because I'm like obsessed with wanting them to have the best party of their whole lives and the best birthday because if it's the best birthday, then they'll feel the most loved. And what I've actually realized is that that is totally untrue.

You know, if they've got the basics down, all the kids want is a great slice of cake and some sweets and to run around with their friends and to have a good time. So I've kind of I've canceled the theme. We have no theme.

If Lily wants to have a superhero jumping castle and pink balloons and starfish shaped sandwiches, if that's what makes her happy, rock and roll, because trying to control the theme often leads to so much expensive anxiety and stress. And I don't I don't have the space for it with all my other cups that I've got trying to keep balanced. Yeah, absolutely.

So you mentioned there's some starfish shaped little sandwiches. What other type of things do the kids get involved with making and do they help you with something like that? So Lil makes her cake every year. We bake it together.

The last two years she started doing her own icing. And it's also been a thing for me to kind of let go of because I've always been, oh, my gosh, I'm going to make her cake and it's going to be perfect. And I'm going to choose what theme and what she now does the whole thing.

And it is one of her absolute best things. We start thinking about the birthday cake kind of six months before. And then, yeah, I get the girls involved in fruit skewers.

Usually they've got to peel the fruit and chop the fruit and put it onto the skewer. And I think as well, getting the kids involved in making the things almost helps them to appreciate it more instead of just going to the shop and buying it and chucking it in a bowl. So, yeah, the fruit skewers, the cake she always makes.

Then for class, you know, the birthday ring, always a big thing. And we've started doing non-conventional birthday ring things. So, you know, instead of the cupcake or the enormous donut, we started making bath salts.

So we looked up on YouTube how to mix Epsom salts that you get very cheaply in the baking section with a bit of coconut oil and a bit of edible glitter and, you know, trying to come up with non-sugar based things. Lily is a high feeling kid. She has also got ADHD.

So a big sugar boost in the middle of the day is not going to help us. So, yeah, trying to also get a little bit creative with non-sugary things and maybe like not always edible stuff. So bath salts or bath bomb or something kind of out of the norm, which is also great for after the party when the kids get home instead of a party pack full of fizzes, which are not bad mouthing, but I mean, try getting one of those out of your child's hair.

It is a nightmare. It's true. But coming home after a party and putting a beautiful glittery bath salts in the bath and letting them unwind with a great bath instead of letting them unwind with a party pack, you know, it works a good trick.

I love that. So that's an Epsom salts bath ball. I suppose the moms can just go and Google that.

You literally get a box of Epsom salts and you mix it with a pinch of edible glitter, which you can get at, I think even Wooly sells it and at baking shops. You can chuck in a spoon of coconut oil and a little bit of powdered food coloring and you mix it all up. You can put in literally flower petals, whatever you want.

And then we scoop it into little tubs that you can also just get at Mambo's or whatever. And then each kid gets a container of bath salts. Oh, I love that.

And little lads making it, they get to make a potion and be like creative. And, you know, it's great. No, that is really, really amazing.

Gosh, well, you've given us some really fabulous practical tips for birthday parties. And I'm also just loving your slightly, I don't want to say laid back because you're clearly not laid back, but you're kind of take it as it comes approach to motherhood and business. Because I think that is what it's all about.

You know, it's going to, life is going to throw you curveballs and juggling kids in a business is a curveball in itself. So lots of fabulous advice there for mums. Before we head off, I'm sure there are lots of mums who are listening, who are thinking about not returning to work because they don't want to necessarily be juggling somebody else's balls plus their kids. And so wanting to go into entrepreneurship.

Looking back on your journey of being a very successful entrepreneur, what advice would you have to another woman who's aspiring to start her own business while managing family commitments? I think often people wait to start a business until everything is perfect. You know, I'm not going to start now because I'm still building my websites and I'm not going to start it now because I still need to make business cards and come up with the best idea. And I think for me, the biggest learning has been that, you know, my business started as a kind of small seed of a hobby and it's just naturally evolved.

And I think my biggest piece of advice is just to start and start with what you can cope with. So if you decide you're going to start a bath salt business, you know, you don't need to start with trying to supply Woolworths. Like start sending them to the moms in your class.

Feel it out, start small. And I think also making peace with the fact that it is never going to be perfect. You know, it's never going to be the Pinterest party because it just can't be.

Life is not perfect. So making peace with the fact that it may take you a bit longer because you're not going to start a business and have 24 hours a day of, you know, perfect time without any distractions. You are going to have to take weeks off when your kids are sick.

You are going to have weeks when you feel like hell and your mental health is in the toilet and you actually cannot write a succinct email. You are going to have to miss stuff. You are going to drop balls.

And so maybe as a mom entrepreneur, what would take a single childless person one year might take you two and a half years. But, you know, so what? Life is long. Stuff will take you longer.

You know, I had a big up last year that kind of derailed me for about six months longer than I thought it would derail me for. And so what? And, you know, things have taken a bit longer and you panic that things have got to be perfect and sorted out right now, but they don't. I think just learning to make peace with doing what you can with what you've got at the time is also okay.

Absolutely. I love that. Well, that's fabulous advice.

And actually very much advice for moms who aren't going to be entrepreneurs as well is, you know, to kind of roll with the punches and to be a little bit less amped about ticking all the boxes perfectly. I really do love that because you're right. Life is not a Pinterest board.

Life is real. Thank you so much, Lexi. Been absolutely wonderful to chat to you.

Thank you for your time. And moms, if you have not tasted my mare, which I know most of you would have, pop off to poetry and get yourself some because it really is fabulous. And I am looking forward to having a box of Turkish delight fairly soon.

And they are so pretty. Your packaging, they are one of my go-to dinner party gifts. So really awesome.

Thank you so much, Lexi. Thanks for having me. It was great.

Thanks to everyone who joined us. We will see you the same time next week. Until then, download Parentsense app and take the guesswork out of parenting.