



Q&A with Cynthia Wong, Chef and Founder of Life Raft Treats®

Cynthia Wong, six-time nominated James Beard Foundation Award semifinalist for Outstanding Pastry Chef is the visionary behind Life Raft Treats. Wong grew up in the South, then studied baking and pastry arts in France before spending many years working in some of the top restaurants in the Southeastern United States. Wong's husband, John David Harmon, formerly of the specialty food and wine industry, now also works full-time with the business. Their two young sons serve as expert taste-testers. They reside in Charleston, South Carolina.

What's the story? How did Life Raft Treats come about?

I was **tired of the grind**, working long hours in restaurants, working for other people and never seeing my kids. I had always dreamed of starting my own business, and one particularly exhausting day left me fantasizing about just paddling away on a life raft. My husband was like, 'You've always liked ice cream and experimenting with ice cream. Just do it. Why **not** now?' And that was it.

So, I **started with an ice cream cart**, selling at local farmers markets around Charleston. In 2018, we bought and outfitted a **food truck**, and we've been growing ever since. Now you can order Life Raft Treats nationwide via [Goldbelly](#). 2020 has been a year of surprising growth; a year of really stumbling up.

Why ice cream?

I obviously like sweets and I **like being able to create fun, tasty desserts**. Everyone loves dessert. There is this ice cream shop in France in a sleepy little beach town. It's magical and it's a vacation spot, so of course the memories stay with me. There's a nostalgia that goes along with ice cream and just making moments fun.

Where did the idea for the *not-fried-chicken* ice cream come from?

Back in my restaurant days, during one of those extra exhausted, drool-inducing couch naps, **I had a dream about ice cream that looked like fried chicken**. I just thought, wouldn't it be funny if I could make ice cream that looked like a fried chicken drumstick? And put it in a bucket like a bucket of chicken? I told my team back at the restaurant and they thought I was crazy."

What differentiates Life Raft Treats from other ice creams?

We definitely have fun and we get creative. **I love to make ice cream that looks like other food**. I just think it's fun. We made an entire Thanksgiving meal that was all dessert. It looked like turkey, mashed potatoes with gravy, green bean casserole, stuffing and cranberry, but it was all cake and ice cream. I also do a lot of custom orders, **experiment with fun flavors for local restaurants**, and make seasonal items.

Where do you source your ingredients?

All of our ice cream and treats are **made using local milk from [Low Country Creamery](#)** in Bowman, South Carolina. The milk is so good, and so fresh. They raise all Grade A Jersey cows, which produce milk with a high butterfat content, and the milk is non-homogenized. We use **local-as-available produce**. Sometimes that even means **fruit from our own backyard**, like grapefruit, lemons, figs and mulberries.

Where do you make your ice cream?

We currently work out of a shared kitchen space on **James Island, South Carolina**. We have plans to build our own facility in 2021.

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