

Celebrations in Today's Pandemic Stricken World

Reaching Roots Podcast, S1: E12

Dawn Lopez, CuteFetti

[Intro]

JAISON DOLVANE: Dawn Lopez is the owner of Cutefetti, a popular lifestyle blog with over 300,000 community members. Cutefetti provides practical resources that inspire and help families celebrate life's most important occasions. Dawn is a 2019 IRIS Awards Nominee for Photography and was awarded Favorite Food Blogger in the 2019 Sunshine Blog Awards.

According to research at the University of California Davis & University of Miami, people who cultivate a daily attitude of celebration and gratitude have more energy, less stress, are more likely to help others and actually make greater progress toward achieving personal goals – in life, at home and at work. Celebrating your occasions allows you to take a break, reset, look forward and be grateful.

Oprah Winfrey says, “The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.” Celebrations come in all shapes and sizes - it can be a creative party, but also a lot more - it can be gifts, a moment of applause, a celebratory picture, day off with family or a drive-by parade in today's pandemic-stricken world. It can be a thoughtful email, a handwritten note or a shout-out on social media.

In a pandemic year - your birthday and occasions were very different. Who knew that large family get-togethers & group celebrations would be a risk to our health? We're all figuring it out – from Birthdays to Thanksgiving, Christmas to Ramadan, Baby Showers to Anniversaries, Births to Cancer free declarations – we're still celebrating, albeit through smaller indoor gatherings, online platforms like Zoom & Facebook and in creative outdoor venues like garages, backyards and parks.

Whether online or physical – celebrations involve finding resources, coming up with ideas, figuring out online platforms, shopping, baking and gifting. These are all stressful and time consuming. Amplifying this is the anxiety to keep our loved

ones safe from the coronavirus, and the emotional toll of avoiding physical interactions that we as humans desire to keep us sane and happy.

Dawn Lopez can help make this all a bit easier and save you time. She provides creative party ideas, gift ideas, recipes & DIYs to help you free up time, find more joy and celebrate life. Dawn is a proud wife, mom and kitty lover who lives in Ocala, Central Florida.

JAISON DOLVANE: Hi, welcome Dawn.

DAWN: Hi, I'm so glad to be here.

JAISON DOLVANE: And happy new year.

DAWN: Happy new year to you too.

JAISON DOLVANE: Good, Dawn, well, tell us first how you actually got doing Cute Fetty and what got you started in it?

DAWN: Well, I think it's a, probably a really long story, but to make it short I kind of ended up in a dead-end job that paid fairly well to get by. But I just felt stuck. I felt like I never really was able to fulfill something greater. I just felt like there was something missing, but I really just couldn't figure out what it was. We were struggling to make ends meet and I think I was just kind of forced to like to think beyond like, what else can I do? So I started couponing and once I started couponing, I became really good at it and I started saving a ton of money. And then all of a sudden, I discovered that you could start a blog and share, you know, deals and tips and things like that. So that's how it all started. I started doing a coupon and deal blog. And once I discovered, like there was a lot of people doing this kind of thing and doing even more things like sharing recipes and tips, parenting tips, and so much more. I was just smitten with it and realizing I could do this in addition to my full-time job and everything else that I was doing and kind of on the side it just really fit in perfectly and I kind of became obsessed and

then I realized I could really just be doing so much more with this and here we are.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. And now you've grown to over 300,000 community members, which is very impressive. How did you get into celebrations? So, so much off. When I look at cute Fetty, so much of it is really about kind of celebrating. It's about party ideas and gift ideas, and just kind of, there's a fun aspect to it in terms of enjoying life. How did that become kind of your focus?

DAWN: That's a great question. I just think that at a certain point with trying to balance, like I said, my job and this blog on the side and family, it just kind of came to a point where I was like, this just kind of doesn't work, you know, like we all need to find a way to make everything happen, but also celebrate the little moments because when you blink, they just, everything just passes by so quickly. And so I felt like, I think I had like the personal desire to really like, how can I slow down time? How can I make moments, just simple things just mean so much more than they actually are. How can we make a simple dinner? We're going to eat dinner anyway, how could we make it special? Like to the point where we would remember it a year from now. So I think it was just the personal desire to just kind of make it all happen. You know, when it's busy, but like have the conscious, just be conscious of savoring the moments and not letting them pass by without making them as memorable as possible.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. I mean, you know, time goes so fast and we often Dawn's stop to just kind of enjoy these moments.

DAWN: Yes, it's definitely a must because without them, there just, there isn't much else, you know, I, Dawn want to just think all I did was work, you know, I really wanted to make sure that, you know, there were other things, and this was my way of doing that. I kind of worked it in, so I'm kind of working, but I'm also brainstorming for my own life. What works, how can I make these things, how can I make any day basically more special?

JAISON DOLVANE: Are there any personal experiences that you know, led you to this at all in terms of, was there a moment or some sort of a situation where, you know, things were not going right. That kind of led you to think about doing some of this stuff around celebration.

DAWN: I Dawn's think I really had necessarily a real moment, but I think, like I said, just that desire to kind of do more for my family and share that with other women. I think that a lot of women in particular that I know really struggled to make it all happen. We have guilt, I think, feeling like we're not doing enough, and I just really felt, all of a sudden, really all of a sudden and just really passionate about that.

JAISON DOLVANE: You talk about sort of helping people save time and so much of what you do in terms of providing these ideas and really the thinking behind being able to celebrate some of these things is about, you know, giving people their time back.

DAWN: Exactly. Yes. So really aiming to put out ideas that I would feel comfortable and happy celebrating and doing with my family. Like how can I really put that into words, easy to understand for everybody else. Like how can we make an easy cake? How can we make quick decorations? How can we do all these things? Basically how can we do it all, like with all these shortcuts and just, we'll just feel a whole lot better about being able to create these moments with our family, but not sacrificing everything else. So like the marriage of both things.

JAISON DOLVANE: Today, I mean, celebrations are something that are a little bit overwhelming. Because at first, it's hard to really think about what to do. Should we do it, just given the pandemic and everything that we're trying to do in terms of distancing. How do you think about that and what are your thoughts for people?

DAWN: That's a really great question. And one that I was really faced to answer this year, when everything was just starting to happen, I was like, this kind of goes completely against most of the things that I normally talk

about in the posts that I write and the ideas that I come up with, how am I going to become useful now to my readers and to people in general. And I had to do a lot of brainstorming. Like how can we still do this celebrating? How can we still connect with people, obviously our families, but beyond that, how can we still connect and also provide normalcy for our children? When, you know, things are not the same. So I really had to like sit down and really brainstorm, how could we really do this? And I think I came up with a lot of really good things. I really some good ideas. And a lot of them involve, you know, zoom, for example connecting that way, but also like hosting, you can still kind of host a party if you kind of do it outdoors and you stagger your invites. Like there are definitely ways if you get creative, there are so ways that you can keep connected with people and celebrate moments, even just beyond your family. And I have written them all, all the ones that I could come up with, and have provided them by different holidays and just general ideas. And I really think that was one of the best things that I could do for my readership this year. And I feel really good about that.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. Very cool. Let's talk about, you know, there's so many different occasions, right. But everyone's got a birthday, maybe kind of focusing on that. Can you tell us about some of the thoughts that you've kind of come up with around, you know, how can we celebrate our birthdays or, you know, we have so many parents that listen to this podcast, you know, how are their kids, what do they do for their kids?

DAWN: Yeah. Well, that's definitely a huge question. But yes, absolutely everyone does need to celebrate their birthday and have a little bit of fun. There are all sorts of ways. I have to say one of my favorite ways. And it doesn't necessarily work for a winter when it's, if you live in a cold environment, I live in Florida. So I have the luxury of being able to do this still, but kind of creating a party table outdoors. And like I said, staggering invitations or you could just simply have all your friends come by during a certain pair of time, wave and beep maybe drop off a gift, give them a favor like a party favor. So I love that idea. Like setting up the party table outside, making favors for everyone as like a thank you for dropping by, maybe beeping. It really just depends on maybe where you live and what your home situation looks like on what you could do with this. But the possibilities are really endless. You could really make a thing of that. And I also wrote about,

you know, like the drive by parades in general. So you could, you know, have friends and family, give them a time, stagger them 15 minutes apart and just kind of get to say hi from a distance. You can kind of do that. There's also like maybe a PR a foot parade, which I kind wrote about quite a bit. You know, where you can kind of gather a six feet apart and kind of just do like a cute little parade. Everyone might dress up. I did an idea where it was like ugly sweater theme for like Christmas. You could tell all sorts of kind of things like this, or even just through zoom or there are a lot of, there are a lot of ideas. Those are my favorite.

JAISON DOLVANE: You talked to me, those are all really cool. And, you know, you talked about sort of they may work for places with good weather like Florida, but you know, I'm in Canada and it's cold over here. And I think someone said, there's no bad weather. There's only bad gear. So I think as long as people dress up, they could do all sorts of things.

DAWN: Yeah. You know, it's funny, when I was kind of brainstorming, I was like, well, if I do live in a cold environment, I mean, I have lived in a cold environment, so I understand. But I was thinking like how cute it would be for people to set up like a sled outside and then put all the party favors set up on the sled. You know, I thought that was kind of a cool idea. Like that would look really cool.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, very cool.

DAWN: Yeah. And setting up like a photo opportunity outside if people wanted to like happy birthday, Joe, and, you know, with maybe balloons or whatever, and everyone's welcome to like take their own pick at the station. And that way, you know, there's no cluttering and mixing of people and they can kind of come. Like I said, staggering, the invites is a great way to keep things very limited and cut and dry.

JAISON DOLVANE: Very cool. And you know, we also think about sort of skating parties on the ice and tobogganing parties and things like that. So those are all things to do in the cold also.

DAWN: Very fun, I like that idea.

JAISON DOLVANE: So about zoom you know, there are so many people that kind of experience zoom fatigue, and then it's like, Oh, here we go. Let's do another party on zoom. Give us some thoughts as to how you can make it more exciting.

DAWN: That is a good question. I'm trying to think, like, can I dig up my own blog posts and check them out? Well, you know, you could do a couple of things where you kind of doing a joint activity basically at the same time, but you're all doing it together. Like you could say, okay, make sure to get appetizers. So, you know, get similar things like maybe we're going to get French onion, dip, and chips and do a certain activity at the same time. So you can make it a little bit more than just like here we are on the zoom. Like we can actually get interactive. You can play games pretty easily, obviously not physical board games, but I've seen a couple of things, actually. I know if you ever go on like, say Etsy, I recently saw some games. I actually downloaded some, I didn't play them on zoom, but there was zoom compatible. So you can actually find games that are [11:49 Inaudible - Technical Glitch ☺].

JAISON DOLVANE: We had some technical glitches here.

DAWN: So there are people actually creating games specifically with zoom in mind. So you can actually find like games that are intended to play using a tool like zoom. So they're not physical obviously, but it could be like a video or just something that people read and answer questions. So the possibilities are actually endless. There are a lot of things you just have to like think outside of the box just a little bit. And I really think that you can have a lot of good times doing things a little bit differently this time. I was going to say this year, but it is no longer this year. It's 2021. So yeah.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, we've still got to do things the same way, unfortunately in 2021 also, things seem to be getting worse versus better.

DAWN: Yeah. So yeah, getting creative is definitely key or finding, you know, easily just blog posts, where there are plenty of ideas just there or checking out things like Etsy where people are just like beyond creative, they just, there's so many.

JAISON DOLVANE: Okay, great. So Dawn, tell me about, has there been kind of a favorite blog post that you've had you know, around celebrations that's really resonated with a lot of people?

DAWN: I definitely think the one actually about just the generic one that I wrote where it kind of includes most holidays and birthdays. I put that together and I really didn't expect like the huge success that it was. And even still I've written about all the different holidays separately and that main post has still been definitely a Rockstar. So I really feel like I touched a lot of good areas and gave a lot of good tips and I feel really good about that.

JAISON DOLVANE: And can you talk about sort of what you think those tips might've been that kind of really you know, hit home?

DAWN: Just the idea of finding a variety of ideas all in one place. So we have like the ideas, like the party, I call it a party pickup table. I Dawn's know if I mentioned that specifically earlier, but the idea of the party pickup table, the idea of the drive by parades, I would say that those are the top two ideas that really sparked something there. There are a lot of other ideas, we kind of be covered a lot of them already, like the connecting on zoom. And I have another favorite idea, which is like, drive, like how do I say it? Like basically surprising people with, surprising people with gifts or this is not really relevant in the winter, but like decorating someone's lawn with like Flamingo lawn ornaments as like a surprise. There's a lot of funny things I have on my blog. But basically the idea of surprising somebody like everyone is kind of like adjusting so much. And I think almost anybody who could use a pick me up right now. So kind of like a no contact way to show

someone you care and give them a little bit of joy is to do like kind of like a surprise gift box. Like I've Dawne ones where I have blown up balloons, put them inside a box. So that way, when the recipient opens it, balloons kind of pop up and maybe other gifts inside. There's another idea. If you do have, if you work in a work environment, I call them desk drops. So like kind of like a little surprise, you know, basically no contact like surprise. It could be, it could be really anything. I think the idea and the element of surprise really adds so much to just gift giving and showing people that you care. And right now I think we really could all use that. So that's another really popular idea that I have included in that post.

JAISON DOLVANE: Okay, cool. Yeah. It's like drop off surprises or no contact surprises.

DAWN: Yeah. I never know like how to actually like what to actually call them. So I'm always kind of like coming up with [16:05 *#\$&#\$& ☺].

JAISON DOLVANE: Those are good names, nothing wrong with those names. They tell you exactly what it is.

DAWN: Perfect.

JAISON DOLVANE: That's great. So what about on the food side? Cause you do a lot of things around food. And we do a lot of things around sort of gifts also, DIY gifts and things like that. Tell us kind of like, you know, one recipe or one gift that have been really popular in terms of what you've been able to share with people.

DAWN: Actually one of my very most popular recipes is a dessert recipe. A pineapple dessert recipe and it is the absolute easiest recipe. There are just three ingredients and I Dawn's even know what possessed me to share it, because it was part like, the original recipe was part of a cake recipe that I followed. And for some reason I just fell in love with the taste of it. And I'm like, this would actually make a really good standalone dessert. So this was about five or six years ago, and I posted them in these cute little parfait cups,

and they have been like so popular ever since I think just the ease of them and they're just delicious and super easy. And you can, you know, you can accommodate a lot of diets too, if you, you know, sugar-free, low-calorie like it's very flexible and you can even make it different flavors very easily. So that was kind of like around the time that I was really focused on super easy recipes. And that is definitely easy.

JAISON DOLVANE: Well, it sounds yummy. Sounds yummy. We'll drop a link to it too when we post this episode. Now you also host Twitter parties. Tell us kind of what those are, and you know, what kind of parties do you host there?

DAWN: That's a good question. They've slowed down a little bit right now, but I usually do a lot of Disney focused ones with some friends. So I definitely keep consistent with that. Basically generally a Twitter party is about an hour-long period of time where you kind of invite people to have a discussion or online party, I'm using a hashtag. So it's the hashtag that kind of binds everything together. And generally there's a host and generally there's some co-host or panelists who help kind of engage the audience and things like that. And it can be really successful for brands to basically get the word out. Or if they have, if a brand has a deal and they want to strike conversation around it, it's a really, really great way to have like great online discussions and what a lot of people probably Dawn's realize is that the reach is really quite large. You probably wouldn't think so much. Like if you want it to engage with people, maybe you wouldn't go to Twitter. Maybe, you know, Instagram is more popular or whatever it is, but Twitter actually has like surprising amount of reach. I have kind of nerded out on tracking hashtags and things like that. And it just really amazes me like how many timelines a tweet can really get into, especially when you're having a party and you have people, the co-host supporting you. And re-tweeting the hashtag, it just, it's incredible. You can really reach a ton of people really easily.

JAISON DOLVANE: Like a good way to bring a community together.

DAWN: Yeah, absolutely. And I've actually met a lot of people that a lot of, especially women and moms that might be home during the day just

popping in for a conversation and I've just known some of these same women for years that they just, they love Twitter parties, and they chat, and they add a lot of value to the conversation. So it's really neat.

JAISON DOLVANE: Nice. So let me come back to, again, sort of celebrating birthdays and things like that, and want to talk a little bit about sort of kids specifically. I know we kind of touched on some of these things. You know, there's kind of an emotional element to kids. You know, they're young especially depending upon what age the kids are, but you know, they miss this contact with their friends. They, you know, obviously, you know, our kids are smart enough and they probably know what's going on around in the world right now with the pandemic, but it's still, it's still a very difficult thing to get used to. What would your kind of advice be new parents to, you know, create more excitement for them during their birthday parties? You know, are there specific kids tips that people can actually do or kids birthday party ideas around being able to do these virtually?

DAWN: That's a really good question. And you know, what, I haven't actually written, this sounds like a blog post in the making specifically for young children. That's a really good, and I Dawn's know if I actually have like the answer to it. That is definitely, I think definitely, probably a challenge because they're used to inviting 10 to 20 kids over and running around like crazy in the yard or having sleepovers and things like that. You know, I did touch on things like that, kind of doing things through zoom. And I know it's not really the same. But you know, I did suggest in one of my blog posts, having like a sleepover through zoom, it would really take a lot of cooperation with other parents to, you know, have kind of similar experiences. You could, even as the parent hosting, you know, send gift packages over to the families so that they can have the same thing, like maybe they're having the same snacks and the same cupcakes and things like that to kind of bring that connection there. But I do think that I think that I'm going to consider this as a challenge to come up with even more ideas on specifically younger children on how they can make it a little extra special at home.

JAISON DOLVANE: You're talking about, which is, you know, if you've got sort of a set of things that you're going to do for a kid's birthday party, then create some alignment with all the guests on the fact that they're going to do the same things.

DAWN: Yeah. I think that's really important.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, exactly. I've also heard like a, you know, like there's think Disney's got like their Disney plus party or Netflix party. So there's like these movie parties that..

DAWN: Like watch parties. Yeah.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So you know, those seem like actually interesting also as part of this.

DAWN: Yeah. I haven't looked into that too much, but that's probably definitely amazing to be able to connect kiddos together.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, I guess if you combine them together with your other ideas around the surprise gift boxes and stuff. That should be pretty exciting for them too.

DAWN: I like it.

JAISON DOLVANE: So Dawn, tell me about you know, any challenges or frustrations as you've kind of been on your journey.

DAWN: Absolutely. It's actually amazing how many times things change, and I think almost anybody can relate to that when it comes to just like social media. You know, today we're over here and then tomorrow is a whole new social media site. And should I join it? Should I not join it? Or, Hey, this is working over here, but guess what, they Dawn's have that feature anymore, it's gone. Or Instagram is a really great example because they continuously add new features or change the way things work. So once

you just get used to something, it can completely change on you any minute. So your workflow and what's performing can change with zero warning, zero warning. So yeah, there have been a lot of challenges and I would say a lot of times it really comes down to the way that social media is performing and how can I connect with people? There was a time when you could easily connect with people that liked your pages or your handles, but now it's a little bit more complicated. Now you have to like kind of work along with whatever algorithm or whatever's popular. So yeah, that one has that particular area has really kept me on my toes.

JAISON DOLVANE: And in terms of sort of, you know, what you've been able to kind of get out of this on a personal level, you know, outside of any kind of monetary side of things that worked out for you, what would some of those things be?

DAWN: I have always really felt like I needed to be helping people on some level. I had mentioned that I didn't finish college. I was going to school for social work and I also used to create a lot of fundraisers just at my place of employment. I have always just had this desire to just like help people. And I really think that's very much important, you know, obviously earning an income, doing whatever I'm doing has to be important for my family, but also like just personally, I really have to, everything has to feel right. And that can change over time, which is why, like, you know, I started couponing, but now I'm doing recipes and now I've introduced party ideas. Cause I kind of, I've kind of grown and changed and tried to you know, meet my own personal needs as well as helping my readers with the changing times and things that are happening. So yeah, it's been a journey.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. I can imagine. Do you get you know, obviously you've got a big community, you've got a big audience. Do you have some of the audience members that are coming to you and sort of really engaging with you around things that you might have Dawne to help them?

DAWN: I get an occasional really nice inbox message. There are some mean ones too. But yeah, I do get some feedback that is really positive and that really, really helps to seal the deal because you Dawn's, you kind of

Dawn's, sometimes you just Dawn's really know how are people taking this and you can only use your, you know, analytics to see who clicked here and who did this and all of this, but yeah, it's those personal messages. I have to say. The most beautiful thing that ever happened was a friend of mine somehow spotted someone that lived locally to her had recreated a cake that I made. And she shared the picture of just a family who had made the cake that live local to her. And she was like, look at this look what I just found, like somebody that lives in my community like found your cake online and they made it and like, you know, it was like, it was just really a beautiful photo. I actually saved it. They'll never know that I know they made my thing. Like it was just like so cool to see that.

JAISON DOLVANE: Very cool. Very cool. Dawn, is there one feeling as a parent that you would rather not feel?

DAWN: Yes. I think that number one feeling would be just guilt that, you know, and that's just encompasses so much guilt that you just didn't do enough guilt, that you couldn't make it all work, guilt that you weren't there for something really important. I definitely feel like that is the one I would give up if I could.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. Right. And what is your hope for your audience?

DAWN: I really hope that, you know, that I can help make their days a little bit more special, that I can help them find the right shortcuts to make everything make sense for them, for them to be able to have days where they Dawn's feel guilt and days where they were able to connect with their family and friends on a special level, regardless of what's going on in the world. I think that would be it.

JAISON DOLVANE: That's great. You know, those moments are so important today more than ever before. So I like the word shortcuts. Everybody likes shortcuts and you know, if you can provide people with shortcuts that allow them to celebrate things better and be able to save time that frees up time for them to go

and spend creating moments with their families which is just so important and so special.

DAWN: Yes, definitely. That's definitely, definitely in line with my goals.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, that's amazing. So tell us where the audience can kind of find you know, all these shortcuts.

DAWN: Absolutely. The main place that I post things are on my blog. That's www.cutefetti.com, C-U-T-E-F-E-T-T-I.com. And then you can also find me pretty much everywhere else with the same name, Cute Fetti except on Twitter, which is Dawn chats. But yeah, you should be able to find me searching up Cute Fetti weather on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, I am everywhere.

JAISON DOLVANE: Any final message or takeaway that you'd like to leave with the audience?

DAWN: That's a really good question. I guess, especially just right now that it's okay, you know, not to be okay for a moment. You know, you can always take a breather. It's totally okay to not feel like you're living up to your potential or doing everything you can for your family. It's a busy, crazy time with people schooling their children at home and everything is just changing so quickly. Just give yourself a little bit of grace and know that, you know, tomorrow's a new day and there are resources and tips and other people out there that are going through the same thing that are willing to connect and have hope, things can get better if you're in a crunch.

JAISON DOLVANE: And I guess Dawn's stop celebrating, right?

DAWN: And do not forget to celebrate the small moments. Even if you cannot get to the dishes today, you should leave them and focus on having a

great moment with your family. The dishes are not going anywhere. They'll be there tomorrow.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, totally. Totally. Well, thank you so much, Dawn. I really appreciate you being here today.

DAWN: It's been such a pleasure. I really appreciate the invite. Thank you.

[Outro]

Subscribe: Make sure to subscribe to this podcast on [Apple podcasts](#) or [Spotify](#) or wherever you listen, we would really appreciate if you can leave us a review on apple podcasts or send us any feedback to reachingroots@wishslate.com.

Download: Also download the wishslate app to help organize wish lists for your family and change the way you gift. You can download this from www.wishslate.com/download

[Links]

Cutefetti.com - Dawn Lopez

<https://cutefetti.com/>

Dawn's 3 Ingredient Easy Pineapple Dessert – Wildly Popular

<https://cutefetti.com/easy-pineapple-dessert/>

Drive By Party-Boxes Ideas

<https://cutefetti.com/drive-by-party-favors/>

Drive By Party & Car Parades - No Contact

<https://cutefetti.com/drive-by-party-social-distancing/>

No Contact Valentine's Day Ideas

<https://cutefetti.com/socially-distanced-valentines/>