

Putting Yourself Out There with Beverly Clutter

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food businesses, about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I am talking with Beverly clutter. Beverly lives in Fairmont West Virginia, and sells custom cookies, cakes, and other baked goods with her cottage food business, west Virginia cookie jar.

Now the first ever national cottage food conference happened just over a month ago. And Beverly was one of the attendees that really stood out to me. Uh, There was actually a photo contest during the conference, and I felt like Beverly's photos were some of the best submissions that I saw. And there was also a leaderboard which kind of tracked people's uh, activity during the conference.

And Beverly was in this tight battle with one other attendee, Joanne, they, they had like over 400,000 points each, which was, I think at least a hundred thousand more than anyone else had. Um, But they, they were um, super active during the conference. And that resulted in her leaving a ton of helpful comments on pretty much anything and everything.

So I felt like, got to know her a little bit just because she was so helpful with other people. And I could tell that her experience with baking uh, extended well beyond the two or so years that she's been running the business. So I am looking forward to learning from her today and with that, welcome to the show Beverly, nice to have you here.

Beverly Clutter: [00:01:28] Thank you, David. It's nice to be here today.

David Crabill: [00:01:30] So Beverly, can you take us back to the beginning of not necessarily your business? Cause I know your business started only two years ago, but feel like you had experienced baking from well before that. So maybe from when you started baking all the way up until you actually started the business

Beverly Clutter: [00:01:49] Well, I started baking with my mom as most people do. She was an avid Baker. We lived in the country. She baked everything that we had So I learned to bake with her,

David Crabill: [00:02:03] and then, when did you actually decide to start this business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:02:08] the church I was attending at the time. Decided to have a cookie tray sale to earn some extra income for the church. And people had signed up for thumbprint cookies and drop cookies and chocolate chip cookies, things like that. And it was kind of one note in color. So I volunteered to do um, decorated sugar cookies.

I had never done them before. So it was, it was quite a learning curve, not so much the sugar cookie itself, but the decorating with Royal icing. Um, The first one I attempted to make the icing slid right off the cookie. After a few attempts though, I got the consistency down and I figured out that I was pretty good at it.

David Crabill: [00:02:52] How did you learn? I mean, you, you say you had no experience decorating cookies and you signed up to provide cookies for this event. So were you like using YouTube or something? To learn.

Beverly Clutter: [00:03:04] I used a lot of YouTube,

David Crabill: [00:03:06] And I know I know when you started your business, you're working full time, so what's your work experience? Like

Beverly Clutter: [00:03:15] I work full time. I still work full time. Um, I'm a nurse. So my work experience didn't give me a leg up in the business at all.

David Crabill: [00:03:26] you say that, but you know, nurses work long shifts, right. So you're used to a lot of work and you're used to working a lot. Right. And I think that might have something to do with uh it's. I feel like that's actually similar to a food business in some ways.

Beverly Clutter: [00:03:41] Well, yeah, the, the hours actually are. Long hours in nursing and, and in baking.

David Crabill: [00:03:48] And so you um, you still do nursing full-time?

Beverly Clutter: [00:03:53] I do.

David Crabill: [00:03:54] Okay. And so how are you able to run this business while running a full-time job?

Beverly Clutter: [00:04:01] Well, I'm lucky enough to have a position now that I work from home. So I don't have the commute time anymore. So that gives me an extra one to two hours a day that I can work on my business. So I work till four o'clock as a nurse. And then I worked from four o'clock on, in my baking business.

David Crabill: [00:04:25] Would you say that's about what you're doing a day is just one to two hours or do you think you do more than that?

Beverly Clutter: [00:04:32] I usually work from four o'clock to 7:00 PM.

David Crabill: [00:04:36] And about how many orders are you doing consistently? Per week.

Beverly Clutter: [00:04:41] That varies. depending on the size of the orders this week I have five orders and they're fairly large orders like four dozen each. So that keeps me fairly busy cause sugar cookie decorated custom sugar cookies do take quite a while to do.

David Crabill: [00:05:01] So you started this business from the church event, right. but how did that actually kickstart the business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:05:10] What I did was I started a separate Facebook page and it was simple. You know, you have to call them something. That's where WV cookie jar came up. I just thought, you know, I'm in West Virginia and they're cookies, so that's the name. And I just started that page so I could post pictures of the cookies I was decorating.

that's when, um, I started getting questions about orders and I was completely floored that someone wanted to order cookies from me and pay me for them, especially when I first started, because they were cute, but they weren't the quality that they are now.

David Crabill: [00:05:51] Let let's say that you hadn't started that Facebook page WV cookie jar, Facebook page. Do you think you would have still gotten the orders or do you think you needed that Facebook page to, to kind of kick things off?

Beverly Clutter: [00:06:05] I think I would've gotten a few orders just because of the cookie trays from the church. But I think the Facebook page was the main reason I got most of the orders that I did. And still continue to today.

David Crabill: [00:06:23] And I feel like you've been baking for a long time. So even though you say, I know you were new to decorating cookies, but I feel like just from the products that I see on your site now you probably had, you probably underselling yourself. You probably had some pretty decent looking cookies in those early days.

Beverly Clutter: [00:06:41] They weren't bad.

David Crabill: [00:06:44] Okay. Yeah, I can imagine why people probably wanted to buy them. Um, but, okay, so you started the Facebook page and it's just surprising to me, cause I feel like most people wouldn't do that. Where did that idea come from to actually create um, kind of an online space for showcasing your cookies and the work that you're doing?

Beverly Clutter: [00:07:07] Honestly, I just felt that I didn't want to post keep posting cookies, cookies, cookies, cookies on my personal page, because I just felt like, you know, friends and family would be, Oh, there's another cookie. There's another cookie. And it's mostly. My personal page is a way to keep in contact with family that, you know, doesn't live very close.

So I started a separate page, just, you know, if they wanted to see the cookies, they could go there. If they, you know, if they didn't want to, then they could just stay on my personal page.

David Crabill: [00:07:43] Got it. Well, so were when you started the Facebook page, did you have any ambition of, could you see this taking off and becoming a business or was it really just to get those posts off of your personal page.

Beverly Clutter: [00:07:55] It was just to get them off my personal page. I had no idea that it would become a business.

David Crabill: [00:08:04] Interesting. Okay. So this is a kind of an accidental business that fell into your hands because your cookies were super impressive and people were buying them and asking to buy them. And do you remember how much you were, people were paying for you in those early days for your cookies?

Beverly Clutter: [00:08:22] The earliest ones were \$12 a dozen. And that's just simply because I had no idea how to price anything, not a clue.

David Crabill: [00:08:33] \$12 dollars a dozen for decorated sugar cookies?

Beverly Clutter: [00:08:37] Yes.

David Crabill: [00:08:38] Okay. So I imagine you, you charge a bit more than that these days.

Beverly Clutter: [00:08:44] I do.

David Crabill: [00:08:44] That's about as low as I think I've heard for a decorated sugar cookie. But yeah, we all start somewhere, of course. And just as a comparison, you're over two years in now, what, what is your pricing look like now?

Beverly Clutter: [00:08:59] My sugar cookie, start out now at \$30 a dozen and go up to \$50

David Crabill: [00:09:06] Okay. And are There any bakeries in your area that that sell decorated sugar cookies that you compare to like it, to give a sense for what the pricing is like in your area?

Beverly Clutter: [00:09:19] There really isn't, it's a fairly small town. The town I actually live in doesn't even have a bakery that does cookies. The next town over there's a bakery. They don't really focus on cookies. They have some occasionally Really it can't compare. there are a few local decorators also that have a cottage businesses and we all stay within, you know, \$5 of each other.

David Crabill: [00:09:47] So do you think that's part of the reason why there was so much demand for your cookies from the beginning? Because There's not many other people offering this in your area.

Beverly Clutter: [00:09:58] Right. I really think that is what helps me and cause me in this area. There's just not first. I didn't know. There wasn't even a market for it. And then when I found out there actually was a fairly large market for it. There aren't that many people doing it.

David Crabill: [00:10:16] All right. So you started the Facebook page. You started to get an interest or attention. When did this start to really feel like a real thing that had potential to go somewhere?

Beverly Clutter: [00:10:28] It was probably may. I started the page in December and by may, I was getting enough orders to keep me busy. Now I wasn't as fast at it as I am now, but I, I had enough orders to keep me pretty busy most weeks.

David Crabill: [00:10:51] And I can see that your Facebook page now has, I think almost 2000 likes, which is a lot. And do you know, like how, how did that ramp up? How has that growth happened over the last couple of years? Like when did, when did you gain most of your followers or has it been just a gradual increase over time?

Beverly Clutter: [00:11:10] The majority of them have been a gradual increase. I did have a giveaway when I hit, I can't remember the number. I think it was 500, so I did a giveaway and that got me a lot of followers, you know, who doesn't like free cookies.

David Crabill: [00:11:30] And what was the, can you tell us that, how that giveaway worked? Like how many cookies did you give away and how many winners did you have, et cetera.

Beverly Clutter: [00:11:41] I did one dozen cookies and I let the person pick when they wanted them and what they wanted.

David Crabill: [00:11:49] And did they like have to comment on your Facebook posts or something in order to enter.

Beverly Clutter: [00:11:55] Yes. They had the, like my Facebook page and they had to share it on their page.

David Crabill: [00:12:00] Do you remember about how much your following grew beyond 500 from that giveaway.

Beverly Clutter: [00:12:07] It jumped up to almost a thousand from the one giveaway

David Crabill: [00:12:12] Wow. And have you done more giveaways since then?

Beverly Clutter: [00:12:15] I haven't yet. I'm going to, when I hit 2000.

David Crabill: [00:12:21] I feel like you just need to do a giveaway tomorrow. It sounds like well you're getting really close to 2000, so maybe you'll jump from 2000 to 4,000 and you know, and you'll be well on your way. So that gives me a good sense for kind of how this business got off the ground, but I know that it wasn't just your area, but also your cookies really do look amazing and, and your photography looks really good as well.

you knew not like nothing about decorating sugar cookies when you started this? Just a couple of years ago. And did you know anything about business marketing photography? Like have you had to learn everything brand new or do you think you had some skills already in place when you got this started?

Beverly Clutter: [00:13:10] Oh, I had less than zero business knowledge. That was the hardest part. And still is today photography. I've always liked to take pictures and everyone always says, Oh, you have a good eye, but I really had no training on especially indoor photography. So that was a learning curve also.

David Crabill: [00:13:34] Yeah. Well, you do, you do take really nice pictures. have you taken any courses or anything like that to improve your photography?

Beverly Clutter: [00:13:42] No, not the photography part. I, I just practice.

David Crabill: [00:13:47] Wow. Yeah. So it's all trial and error, probably also looking at other people's photos to get inspiration. Well they, they do look great. Do you shoot them all from your smartphone?

Beverly Clutter: [00:13:58] I do.

David Crabill: [00:13:59] Do you know of any like tips that you would recommend to somebody who needs to improve their photos?

Beverly Clutter: [00:14:07] I think you just have to, the main thing is good lighting and it can be early morning sun, or it can be later evening sun. I have two spots in my house. One is in the kitchen, it gets early morning light. And if I want, if I have brighter, happier cookies, fiesta cookies, baby shower cookies. I usually photograph them in the morning light.

It's just brighter light. If I have a moody or deeper kind of cookie, like, you know, the dad cookies or just something a little darker I do in the evening in that light. And it's all natural light. If he could get outside, it helps. Um, Keep the house lights off. It makes a horrible yellow tinge to the pictures and just practice your, if you have a smart phone, I have an iPhone, but all smartphones have good cameras and they have wonderful editing built in your phone, you really don't need anything else.

David Crabill: [00:15:08] well, they do. They do look very good. And actually, I feel like you've used props with some of your photos and that might be. The, the good eye that other people are referring to, but I feel like you do a pretty good job of setting up your photos as well.

Beverly Clutter: [00:15:25] Right. And I did on my web page, I did a little blog about the picture that you see versus what's really happening. And, you know, like I am up on a ladder, there's a mess all around me, but the picture you see is a nice, clean little picture with a blurred effect, you know? And you just don't see what goes on behind that camera.

David Crabill: [00:15:53] I can certainly relate to that as somebody who, even outside of The baking space, but like with, with my um, video that I do sometimes through Forrager, if you saw what's happening behind the camera of like, sometimes I've had cardboard boxes stacked on cardboard boxes to set my camera up in a certain location.

And it's just, it's just funny if you see the behind the scenes stuff, do you ever, it sounds like you do with that post. Do you like to showcase behind the scenes and put that on your Facebook page?

Beverly Clutter: [00:16:28] That was the first time I had done that. But I am going to start posting a little bit more about the actual making. Aspect of it, like icing cakes and cause people, you know, they don't know what goes into it sometimes. And it's interesting. They want to know so they can see the fresh ingredients that are going on in it. I use locally sourced whenever possible. And I, I don't think I showcase that enough.

David Crabill: [00:17:00] I did see the locally sourced on your website somewhere. And what does that mean? What do you particularly locally source in your business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:17:12] eggs. If I can get them milk, if I can get it, we don't really have any grains around here that I can purchase locally. I would love to do that. This, this is a small area and we just don't have any Millers. We have, I want to start offering lemon lavender cookies, and we do have a lavender farm here in Fairmont that I'm going to get some lavender from this summer.

David Crabill: [00:17:39] does your area have any local markets, like a farmer's market?

Beverly Clutter: [00:17:44] We do, we do.

David Crabill: [00:17:47] Have you ever tried to sell at that market?

Beverly Clutter: [00:17:51] I have just been so busy with custom orders that I can't get any made ahead to actually go to the farmer's market. Now this summer, our town is having like a main street market. They, they have food trucks come vendor set up. They have games for kids.

It's the new thing they're doing this year. And I have signed up. For what is it? August, September, and October for that. So I can block the week off so I can bake for that market.

David Crabill: [00:18:26] So your business is just all organic growth word of mouth and then the Facebook page. And that's gotten you to, being pretty busy. It sounds like.

Beverly Clutter: [00:18:37] Yeah.

David Crabill: [00:18:38] I can imagine like how big is Fairmont? In terms of population.

Beverly Clutter: [00:18:43] I believe it's like 20,000,

David Crabill: [00:18:47] Okay. So it's a sizeable town. It's just, it seems like your business is gonna take off even more. If you get out to an event like that,

Beverly Clutter: [00:18:56] right? I, I did one pumpkin festival it was two years ago. And it was kind of hilarious because people were coming up to me saying, Oh my gosh, I've wanted to meet you. I keep watching your Facebook page. And that was just so bizarre to me. It was like, Oh my gosh, why would you want to meet me?

David Crabill: [00:19:17] that's the benefit of living in a small town. It sounds like everyone's hearing about you.

Beverly Clutter: [00:19:22] Right.

David Crabill: [00:19:23] So you said that one of the hardest things. About starting this business was the business side of that. Can you elaborate on that?

Beverly Clutter: [00:19:31] I didn't really know anything about the business side. Like I knew that I needed to get. Registered and get a license, but I didn't even know how to do that. I just, Googled how to start a business and found the websites I needed to go to. The West Virginia cottage food law had just passed when I was looking into this.

So the West Virginia agriculture and our city had no idea how to even help me. They didn't know what I needed to do. So we all figured it out together.

David Crabill: [00:20:08] That's pretty common. That definitely happens quite a lot. I hear that a lot from people who say. My officials don't even know what to do, especially in a small town like yours. But it sounds like they were very willing to help you though.

Beverly Clutter: [00:20:23] They were, they were very nice to help me out. They worked pretty fast as far as you know, I figured it would take quite a while, but they got back to me with answers within a day or two. Usually

David Crabill: [00:20:37] That is, that is not common. I don't hear that too much from people working with their state officials, but it sounds amazing. So how long did it take for you to actually get your business off the ground officially?

Beverly Clutter: [00:20:50] Officially started in August of 2019, so less than a year after I started um, I actually got turned into the health department went legit. Yes.

David Crabill: [00:21:05] Oh, wow. And how did that happen? Did someone, do you think they report to you because of competition concerns or,

Beverly Clutter: [00:21:15] the one local bakery that I mentioned has workers that look on Facebook and turn in anyone's selling baked products.

David Crabill: [00:21:28] That is pretty much the only time I hear of someone getting turned in is from another bakery or Baker who, cares about competition and, you know, feels like you're taking business away from them. but it sounds like it wasn't a huge problem and it didn't take too much for you to get your business legalized. Right.

Beverly Clutter: [00:21:49] No, it actually, it actually turned out to be a really good thing because now I'm, you know, I'm an official business. I have the right to make and sell whatever. Well, not whatever I want, so I can't use cream cheese or, or things like that. But but yeah, I'm a business now and it really did help because now I, I post more on Facebook than I did before.

David Crabill: [00:22:11] So as you developed your Facebook page to show off your skills did most of your orders start to come from people who found you on Facebook? Or do you think they came from recurring customers or do you think they came from word of mouth? Like, do you know how people were finding you.

Beverly Clutter: [00:22:30] I think it was just a mix of everything I did have returning customers. As my prices went up, I did lose some of the early customers you know, bless the hearts of the people that stuck with me because. It's a completely different thing than it was when I first started, not the cookie itself, but packaging and the quality of the decorating how we deliver and how people pick up.

I mean, I learned a lot just by doing it things that I wish I had known before, like where to get the best packaging and how to package, you know, who to get items from locally. I just learned as I went

David Crabill: [00:23:19] so what specifically, what were some of those things like we could start with packaging. What did you have to do to start improving your packaging?

Beverly Clutter: [00:23:27] well, when I started out, I just used like a shirt box. with some tissue paper and I put the cookies in there and, you know up to now uh, heat seal the

cookies in a cello bag. And they're packaged in a white bakery box with a clear panel on the front so they can see their cookies in the package.

David Crabill: [00:23:53] And where are you getting the supplies for the packaging?

Beverly Clutter: [00:23:58] I get boxes a lot from CK products um, clear bags. I get the cello bags from they're really great. They always have sales and they're wonderful to work with if you need to contact them.

David Crabill: [00:24:14] Where do you get the cello bags from?

Beverly Clutter: [00:24:16] it's called clear bags. And I get a good bit of things from Amazon. Uh, I get a lot of cookie cutters from Ann Clark.

David Crabill: [00:24:27] So that's the packaging side. What were some of the other things that you feel like you just, you just had to learn as you went have you adjusted your ingredient, sourcing at all? Where do you get your ingredients from?

Beverly Clutter: [00:24:40] I get most of the ingredients from Sam's club. I'm not quite big enough to get it from like a wholesaler. yet.

David Crabill: [00:24:49] Yeah, most people aren't quite ready to do a wholesale, but yeah, Sam's club or, or some kind of membership wholesale is, is typically a good way to go.

Beverly Clutter: [00:24:58] Right. We, around here, we don't have a Costco. We don't have, any kind of restaurant suppliers. So Sam's is about the cheapest place to get ingredients and they're good ingredients

David Crabill: [00:25:10] have you improved your labeling at all?

Beverly Clutter: [00:25:13] I have at first. I didn't have any labeling.

So now I have uh, some stickers I put on the boxes do a little wrap around the box with a bow sometimes to make it look more gifty.

David Crabill: [00:25:29] So you do the decorated sugar cookies? Um, What else do you sell with your business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:25:35] Um, I do cupcakes and custom cakes. I just, I've actually, I've sold a little bit of everything. Hand pies different kinds of cookies macarons if I absolutely have to make them, I attempt to make them, I go through a lot of those before I get a good batch. I'm not very good at those yet. I've just recently started doing some wedding cakes. I really enjoy that.

David Crabill: [00:26:04] I did see, I think on your about page or something, you said, just tell me what to make and I'll make it

Beverly Clutter: [00:26:10] Right. I haven't turned down an order yet. The, the newest one that I got that is due this week is for mahogany cake with ermine icing. I'm like, sure, I can do

that. And then we get off the phone and I I'm Googling what is mahogany cake and ermine icing. so that was new to me.

David Crabill: [00:26:33] So what did you do with your recipes when you're starting out, where were you getting your recipes from? Or did you already have them on hand and how have those changed over time?

Beverly Clutter: [00:26:45] I had some of them on hand, like some cake recipes of the sugar cookie recipe. I tried out on my family until they're like, oh, this is the one don't change it. So that's the sugar cookie recipe I still use today. Um, Yeah, that's a good thing. If someone's just starting out to did test all your recipes before you put it out to the public so if they get a cookie or a cake from me today in three months, they can get a cookie and a cake from you, and it's gonna taste the same.

David Crabill: [00:27:19] And what's the process like for. Developing a recipe or are you um, still testing it out on family and friends, like for this mahogany cake and ermine icing order.

Beverly Clutter: [00:27:31] Yes, I looked up recipes after you bake for a little while, you kind of know what, more butter, less butter, less oil, more oil will do to a product. So I combined several different recipes and I tried. Three different ways on all my family and uh, settled on the one that we liked the best.

David Crabill: [00:27:56] Now I know that some bakers have said they started out, like you are doing, you're doing everything. And then they kind of settled into their zone of what they do best.

And I'm not sure if you're quite there yet, but w is it the decorated sugar cookies or what do you feel like you enjoy doing the most.

Beverly Clutter: [00:28:17] I started out and I was just going to do the decorated sugar cookies, but then I got requests for other things. And I find that if I just do one thing that. I really get bored and I'm not as satisfied as if I can do several different things right now. The cookies sell really well, cupcakes always sell well, and I really am enjoying the decorated custom cake side of it.

David Crabill: [00:28:49] So do you feel like you will at any point get so inundated with orders that you'll have to start moving back towards one thing?

Beverly Clutter: [00:29:00] I don't think I will. I will just take orders as they come in until my schedule's full for that period of time. And then I'll just work on whatever orders I have.

David Crabill: [00:29:13] And you're still working a full-time job. So is there any part of you that thinks about maybe leaving the full-time job to pursue this full time?

Beverly Clutter: [00:29:26] I don't see that happening. I would truly like to stay in nursing until I can retire, which isn't that far away. And then I'll have more time to do the baking. So I think I'm happy with the way things are going right now. I do wish that I had a little more time for the baking now because I do enjoy it.

David Crabill: [00:29:50] I don't know if the fact that you're a nurse. Affects this in a unique way, but how did the pandemic affect your business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:29:58] The pandemic did not affect my business much. Before the pandemic hit. I offered cookie decorating classes, which were a big hit. I was doing anywhere from two to six a week, and we just had a blast then when the pandemic hit, of course, that had to stop. It was all in person.

David Crabill: [00:30:23] Were you advertising these classes through word of mouth or through Facebook or, you know, how did people hear about them?

Beverly Clutter: [00:30:31] I would put them on Facebook and book that way. I used Eventbrite for the tickets that helped keep track of the tickets a little bit better. So I didn't have to do that. End of it.

David Crabill: [00:30:44] Yeah. Two to six per week. Sounds like a lot to me. And like, were you having a small group size or a maximum group size for these classes?

Beverly Clutter: [00:30:55] Yes, I did a maximum of, let's see some groups were 10 and once in a while I would do 15. That way they could have personal instruction. I would be right there to be able to help each person.

David Crabill: [00:31:09] That's still a pretty good size for classes, especially for how often you're doing them. What were you pricing the classes at and how long did the classes last?

Beverly Clutter: [00:31:19] They lasted about two hours, hour and a half to two hours. And they were \$30 a person.

David Crabill: [00:31:29] But \$30 would be, you know, 10 people's, you know, you're making a few hundred dollars in a couple hours. That's pretty good.

Beverly Clutter: [00:31:38] Yeah.

David Crabill: [00:31:39] And were people coming back over and over again for the classes? Where are you usually dealing with new people?

Beverly Clutter: [00:31:46] I had several repeat customers. People would come to classes for themselves with their friends, and then they would come back the next time with maybe a grandchild or their daughter. And then, you know, they would go to work and tell their friends what fun they had and how they learned so much. And then they would book the next classes.

David Crabill: [00:32:08] So as you've run this business over a two, two years now, what are some of the moments that stand out to you? Uh, anything memorable?

Beverly Clutter: [00:32:20] I think the moments that stand out the most are the extreme, like the extreme good and the extreme, Oh, no moments for the extreme. Good. I had a mother tell me after her five-year-old birthday party, he had a whole party. She said, what

was the best part of today? And he said it was my birthday cake. that was just, that was awesome.

And I've had mothers pick up bridal shower, cookies, and start crying when they picked up the cookies, they were just, Oh, they're just so perfect. You know? And so that's like, that's just overwhelming joy. On the other side, I have done some blunders, like I've dropped wet cookies on the floor, So I had to make the whole thing over. I've went to pick up a cake for delivery and my hand slipped and went into the cake. That was, you know, they're just things you have to think really fast, what to do.

David Crabill: [00:33:24] Were you able to recover from that experience?

Beverly Clutter: [00:33:27] I was, I was, it was just, it looked like a bowling ball. I had three fingers went into the cake. luckily it was at the bottom, so I could fill the actual cake part with icing and then put like icing grass around the area and it covered it. Well,

David Crabill: [00:33:47] Uh, Any other delivery mishaps?

Beverly Clutter: [00:33:50] okay. I have been very lucky with delivery so far. No, no trips, no slips. I've been very fortunate with deliveries. I've learned from other bakers in their stories to be extra careful.

David Crabill: [00:34:07] So in terms of running this business out of your home, do you feel like this business is taking over your home kitchen or your home space?

Beverly Clutter: [00:34:16] We no longer have an official dining room. I've taken that over completely. The dining room tables where I decorate cookies. I have lots of supplies everywhere.

David Crabill: [00:34:28] And so it sounds like you have, you know, obviously grown your business quite a lot, but do you feel like. Much of that has been intentional. Like have you intentionally marketed your business at all? Or do you just feel like it's happened on its own?

Beverly Clutter: [00:34:46] It's really been organic. I haven't advertised, I did one Facebook ad. Like I, they gave me free \$20, so I used it for an ad, but I really didn't notice anything different with that. Maybe a few more followers, but it's just really been organic word of mouth.

David Crabill: [00:35:07] Yeah. I don't think that a Facebook ad would really be applicable to a business like yours, where you're marketing to a very local area. And I just think that Facebook ads work particularly well when you have a higher order value than what, you know, your cottage food products are likely going to command.

So I wouldn't necessarily expect \$20 of Facebook ads to lead to anything, but it's always helpful to try it, you know, and that doesn't hurt to try things.

Beverly Clutter: [00:35:35] Right. And it was a \$20 credit. So I was like, okay, I'll try it.

David Crabill: [00:35:41] Yeah. I feel like you've learned enough through the conference and other things probably have quite a few marketing ideas to work with, but it sounds like you're pretty good. Like, are you trying to expand your business at all at this point?

Beverly Clutter: [00:35:55] I'm just trying to get more into maybe like the wedding side of things. you know, like doing the markets that are coming up, I just learned a lot from the conference. That's like, you know, I really need to get my face out there as much as I would like to hide in my house and just be the baker it's like, I need to get out and interact more also.

David Crabill: [00:36:20] Well you certainly did that with the conference. What was your perspective of the conference?

Beverly Clutter: [00:36:25] Oh, the conference was just amazing. it just made me feel, not alone anymore. Like, you know, other businesses have conferences all the time and they can communicate more. Well, we really didn't have a network before. Like now I'm in contact with people from California and Oregon and Texas and Minnesota whereas before I knew a couple around here, but that was it.

David Crabill: [00:36:55] Yeah. I feel like a lot of states have Facebook groups or things. I mean, I think even Minnesota has an association, but I don't think West Virginia does. Unfortunately, I feel like you just happen to live in a state that doesn't have as much organization around your cottage food law.

Beverly Clutter: [00:37:12] Right I did find one on there, but the last post was like Halloween a year or two ago.

David Crabill: [00:37:19] Mm, I mean, it could just be, I've noticed less interaction online from some Midwestern States or more rural areas. So that could be, it also could just be the fact that your law is so new. I mean, it really didn't change until just before the pandemic hit. So you know, it might just take some time to get more people on board and realizing that they can do this legally pretty easily.

Beverly Clutter: [00:37:45] Before the law changed, you had to have the whole separate kitchen. You had to have the commercial kitchen you could bake from your house, but you needed the whole separate area with, you know, everything that entails mops, sinks, hand-washing stations, separate entrance, all the rules that now don't apply.

And I was lucky that my town I'm in a residential area and I was lucky enough that they said, we'll work with you. Just, I, I can't post a sign. Any signage outside that says this is a business.

David Crabill: [00:38:19] That's a zoning requirement. Did you have to get like a general business license

Beverly Clutter: [00:38:24] Yes.

David Crabill: [00:38:25] and there wasn't any other requirements, like No fire inspection or other types of uh, requirements for your home or a zoning permit.

Beverly Clutter: [00:38:36] No. I had to register with the B&O tax with the city and get a state license. And that was the only requirements that I had.

David Crabill: [00:38:45] Yeah, that that's pretty minimal overall. what did you have to learn about doing taxes and accounting in your business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:38:55] Well, honestly, everything, the only taxes I had ever done were personal taxes. And it was the easy form. I didn't know what a B and O tax was when I started Luckily, my husband is well-versed in taxes and he does our income taxes and the business taxes. So that helps out tremendously.

David Crabill: [00:39:19] Do you do anything like having a separate bank account for your business? like how do you keep track of your sales and your expenses and such.

Beverly Clutter: [00:39:28] I do have a separate, bank account, and I didn't when I first started. And it was so confusing to try to figure everything out because up until pretty much the conference, I was really, really bad at keeping track of expenses and gains and losses. So that was another thing I learned during the conference.

David Crabill: [00:39:52] Do you feel like you, I mean, you, you know, you've been a nurse for a long time. Been an employee for a long time. Did you ever see yourself owning and operating and running a business like this?

Beverly Clutter: [00:40:07] I never did. my mom did run her bakery for awhile and I just never thought that that's something that I would want to do. until I started You know, it was an accidental start. People wanted me to make them some cookies and it just kinda snowballed from there. I have learned so much in the last two years. Some of it, I wish I would have learned before I started it, would've made the process much smoother.

David Crabill: [00:40:38] And what is your perspective now that you are a business owner?

Beverly Clutter: [00:40:42] It's very rewarding and fulfilling um, in my job as a nurse, I'm not always part of the happy moments in people's lives. if you need medical care, then you know, it's not that greatest moment you've ever had in your life. Usually On the other side in my business, it's all about the happy moments. And I just love that. I get to be part of people's special days.

David Crabill: [00:41:12] have you. Merged these two interests at all. Like, have you brought your cookies and such into the hospital for things? I mean, even just to give away to patients, have you done anything with both of them at the same time?

Beverly Clutter: [00:41:28] My position that I have now, I work from home. So I'm not actually at the hospital. I have had local hospitals emergency squads, Life Flight. I have had them order from me and I always give them a discount. On cookies, just because of the work and the, you know, the stress they go through every day.

David Crabill: [00:41:53] Do you feel like going through that stress? Well, I don't know how much stress you've gone through as a nurse, but I know that the hospital is an intense

environment, especially at some times, but do you feel like that in a way prepared you for running this business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:42:13] I think it did nursing, you have to really think fast. A lot of the time, things change very quickly. And I think that also has helped me in the baking business also orders get canceled. People need things right away. So My work as a nurse really helped me to be able to pivot rather quickly and change plans.

David Crabill: [00:42:39] I would also say that the cookie work can be pretty redundant, right? Like if I don't know how many cookies you're making at once, like what's the largest cookie order you've made

Beverly Clutter: [00:42:53] The largest order I had was 20 dozen. All of the same thing.

David Crabill: [00:42:59] okay. That's over 200 cookies of all the same thing. So, that redundancy, I don't know if, that relates in any way to the nursing. But I feel like nursing requires a lot of patience and maybe the cookie work does too.

Beverly Clutter: [00:43:16] It does. Unlike within nursing though, when I am doing a redundant order of cookies, I can kind of zone out, you know, I can listen to books or podcasts So it's, it's redundant, but relaxing at the same time.

David Crabill: [00:43:31] And so I know you do Royal icing cookies. Is that pretty much The only style of decorated cookie that you do?

Beverly Clutter: [00:43:42] Yes.

David Crabill: [00:43:42] And what have you learned or like what techniques have you adopted over time from the first cookies you made a couple of years ago to now?

Beverly Clutter: [00:43:52] The first cookies I made uh, or just pretty much flat Royal icing. What we call flooded into like an outline and then flooded in the center. Maybe a little design in the wet icing. And now I use like do flowers and textures and names and writing and gold and just all kinds of different techniques now

David Crabill: [00:44:16] Do you feel like you're constantly buying more supplies to do more types of things with your cookies?

Beverly Clutter: [00:44:22] I am pretty set on supplies after two years. I always am buying new cookie cutters though.

David Crabill: [00:44:32] And what do you feel like is your busiest time of the year? Over the past couple of years?

Beverly Clutter: [00:44:38] Christmas is always a big one. And then the summer months are really big because we have graduations going on. Lots of weddings, lots of baby showers. School's out kids' parties summer just seems to really be busy.

David Crabill: [00:44:56] so what would you say now, now that you've, you know, kind of transitioned did to running this business part time, what would you say in terms of who you

think should consider starting a cottage who business, like what type of person would you recommend look into starting a cottage for business.

Beverly Clutter: [00:45:17] I think you need to be self-disciplined. I mean, there's nobody, that's gonna tell you. You know, it's time to get up and do this. So you have to be a self-starter self-disciplined you have to make sure you have a product that the public wants, not just family. You have to take the time and know that if we really are going to do a cottage food business, that it's, it takes a lot of time. Even if you're not baking or cooking, you're doing research, you're doing the business part. You're, you know, you're taking pictures, you're editing. There's just a lot of time that goes into it.

David Crabill: [00:45:57] Is there any other advice you can think of that you'd give to someone who has decided to jump in and start their business.

Beverly Clutter: [00:46:05] Perfect those recipes before you start um, know that even if you're an introvert, you've got to get yourself out there. And people want to see a face with the product and not just the product research, packaging, talk to other people get online, join the groups, Facebook groups uh, people are so willing and helpful. Just do a lot of research before you really dive into it.

David Crabill: [00:46:36] we talked a little about where your business is heading into the future. But where do you see this business in say a year or two?

Beverly Clutter: [00:46:44] I think in a year or two, I will have gotten even. Better with cakes because in my own eyes, I'm, I'm okay with cakes, but I, I, there's so much room for improvement and I think that'll happen. I think that I will also have the business side down a little bit more and not struggle so much with that aspect of it.

David Crabill: [00:47:11] And do you ever see yourself moving out of your home kitchen?

Beverly Clutter: [00:47:16] I don't. At first, when I first really started and it was a true business, I thought that I would love to have a brick and mortar and have a storefront, but the more I think about it, the more I think I'm happy with. What I can do at home and not have the additional costs of the overhead and taxes from a building and employees and all of on that side of an actual brick and mortar.

as I'm doing it now in home, I can just stop. And when I want to, I don't have to keep a store open. You know, if I, if I want to stop and rest or go somewhere, I can do that now. Where if I had a brick and mortar, I wouldn't be, I wouldn't have as much flexibility.

David Crabill: [00:48:08] Yeah, that makes sense. And I think, especially with you being in a fairly small town, it does also make sense to stay at home. But um, last question. Why do you love running your business?

Beverly Clutter: [00:48:24] I love the freedom. It gives me it, it gives my family extra money. it's the freedom to honestly, just be part of such good celebrations. it's just so touching that I get to be part of a wedding or a birthday or first birthday or a baby shower. And then the next year, the first part day I just love it.

David Crabill: [00:48:52] Well, I can tell that you are offering an amazing service to your local area that needs it. But if somebody is listening to this and wants to reach out to you, how can they find you?

Beverly Clutter: [00:49:05] I'm on Facebook, it's wvcookiejar. I'm on Instagram wv_cookie_jar. I just started a web page. It's wvcookiejar.wordpress.com and my email and phone number on all of those sites. I'm easy to get ahold of.

David Crabill: [00:49:28] Great. Well, thank you so much for jumping on here and sharing with us today. It's been a pleasure.

Beverly Clutter: [00:49:35] Thank you David it's been a good pleasure.

David Crabill: [00:49:37] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. Beverly clearly loves to serve other people. And I think that trait along with her very impressive products has naturally propelled her to the success she's seen with this side business.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/36

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And finally, if you are thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course, where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

Thanks for listening. And I'll see you in the next episode.