

Can A Product Be Too Good? with Janna Paterno

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill. And today I'm talking with Janna Paterno.

Janna lives in Charleston, West Virginia, and used to sell custom decorated cookies with her cottage food business, Sweet Janna Lea.

And you did hear that right that she no longer sells her cookies. She shut down her business last year after running it for only two years.

Now, this is a special episode because I've long wanted to have someone on who struggled with their business and finally decided to close shop.

I think it's no secret that most new businesses in any realm struggle to get off the ground. Usually cottage food entrepreneurs have challenges, finding customers or maybe produce a product that doesn't meet the needs of their target market.

But it was the exact opposite with Janna. She always had more customers than she could handle, and that's because her cookies are literally some of the best custom decorated cookies you will ever see. You should check out her Instagram account to see what I mean.

A lot of, new entrepreneurs believe that if they have a great product, then they'll have a successful business. but of course there's a lot more to it than that.

There are a lot of lessons in this episode. You'll learn why a cottage food business wasn't the right fit for Janna and you'll also learn what someone should know, when trying to make and sell custom decorated cookies.

And with that, let's jump right into this episode

Welcome to the show. Janna Nice to have you here.

[00:01:25] **Janna Paterno:** Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

[00:01:28] **David Crabill:** So Janna, I know you did this as a hobby for a while before starting it as a business. Can you take me back to the starting point of when you started to decorate cookies?

[00:01:39] **Janna Paterno:** I started decorating cookies. It was at a whim. I saw a Martha Stewart article where she had done these gorgeous. cookies that she had decorated. And you can imagine they were just beautiful. And I thought I would love to do that.

so I was talking with a cousin And she said, I'll do it with you. Let's do this. so we thought we could do this over happy hour, not a good idea, they didn't turn out anything like Martha Stewart's, but we had fun. And that was the whole point.

[00:02:15] **David Crabill:** And about what year was that?

[00:02:18] **Janna Paterno:** Oh, my gosh, 2005, six,

[00:02:23] **David Crabill:** Okay, so you got like 15 years of experience now. I I've seen your work and it's just incredible work. your artistry is amazing. do you feel like you've always had creative knack or where does this artistic talent come from?

[00:02:37] **Janna Paterno:** Well, I do have a creative side. but when I was a young girl, it really has always been there, but I never did anything with it.

Um, even through school, it just wasn't something I pursued. what has been your career through.

my career has been in human resources. I am a people person. I love that aspect of being in human resources

[00:03:10] **David Crabill:** Well, I'm not surprised that you're a people pleaser because, before you started the business, you gave a lot of your cookies away, right? You you've always been doing the cookie decorating for other people.

[00:03:24] **Janna Paterno:** Yes. It's interesting. You brought that up because I still do that. I mean, it is just something I enjoy doing. I, and that's really how I got started. I started, you know, with my family and my friends, and I have six nieces and nephews. well, great nieces and nephews, and I would do cookies for their birthday parties or for their classes.

And then I've done it for nonprofits in the community to help with fundraising. I love it. it's a way of giving back. And I like that.

[00:04:03] **David Crabill:** what's one or two non-profits that really stand out to you that you've donated cookies.

[00:04:10] **Janna Paterno:** the very first one that I did was for West Virginia read aloud so they did a fundraiser and I did a Dr. Seuss, thing, I think it was one of the first cookies I posted on my Instagram account. and then another that I've been involved with is it's called West Virginia health.

Right. and they have at least an annual fundraiser. And so I would do a cookie thing, for their fundraiser and that along with a gift certificate that will allow people to get custom one to two dozen custom cookies.

[00:04:46] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I did see that one of your very first Instagram photos was of those Dr. Seuss cookies that you made for the read aloud program that was posted in 2016. So, you know, we're talking like when you're 10 years into cookie decorating, right. And those cookies are phenomenal. Amazingly your cookies are somehow even better now, but they were really exceptional back then.

So, did it take a while for you to, you know, get the confidence to start giving your cookies away, or when did you feel like you really started to, master some skills with your cookie decorating, since you said your first cookies, cookies you made weren't the best.

[00:05:23] **Janna Paterno:** it is so funny because even when you say I've mastered cookie decorating. Thank you for that, but I don't feel that I have, I am my well, they say that your own worst, critic and I certainly am. the read aloud cookies, I learned about a technique where you could use rice paper and you could print with an edible printer, the image one to the rice paper.

I thought, oh my gosh, that's so clever. And I was aware of a home baker who had a printer. So I asked her if she, if I would buy the supplies, will you print these images, And she said, I'd be happy to, because this is what we do as you, you know, and talking with bakers and especially cooks, we all work together. It's a community. And I love that, anyway, I was able to paint on the cookies because you know, a royal icing hardens onto a cookie. you know, it's a canvas, it becomes a canvas to, you know, an artist and And so I could free hand some of that. and I was also experimenting with an airbrush because I love the technique you know, the dimension that gave.

So when I did those cookies, I cheated, you know, I cheated with technique.

If that makes any sense.

[00:06:59] **David Crabill:** Well, I mean, you say that haven't mastered skills, but I've seen a fair amount of decorated cookies over the years, and I know that there are some exceptional and unbelievable cookie decorators out there, some of whom you've learned from, but legitimately Janna, like your cookies have got to be at least today, in the top 1% of all cookie decorators out there.

I mean, they truly are pretty much perfect. And the design that you have there is. it's really phenomenal. And it's one of the big reasons why I wanted to have you on the show because, I don't see too many people that have your skills and especially, don't see too many people that have your skills that don't take your business further.

But, um, yeah, I mean, you're definitely underselling yourself a little bit with your skillset. and I just want to let the audience know that you definitely have mastered cookies to a large degree, and I know maybe they're not perfect in your eyes, but most everyone else would say they're phenomenal.

But you. know, I've only seen your cookies since circa 2016. So this is when you've had, you know, decades worth of experience under your belt. So, can you take me through those first years, you know, when did you start to really feel comfortable decorating the cookies? Was it right from the beginning or did it take you a few years?

[00:08:15] **Janna Paterno:** I don't remember that. it does seem like so long ago and, this is going to sound so funny. But back in the day, we didn't have some of the videos and information streams that we have today. So predominantly it was like Pinterest I'm going to age myself, but you really had to search for information, which is so readily available to people today, the information. It is. Phenomenal, what information is being shared now that I wish I had when I first started, But, anyway, with all that said, the person that I really was able to tap into, there were two people and one she's referred to as Sweet Ambs. And the other actually there was two others Artie McGoo. And she was a little ahead of her time. She did a, what they called a McGoo University. And, then the other was Julia Usher and she's very, well-known in the cookie world.

And I studied their work. I went out and read a lot of blogs, because this is what I do. that perfectionism kicks in. I go into OCD mode and it was really with my family that I started feeling comfortable putting them out there. you know, I had

my nieces and nephew who would say, would you do cookies for our kids' birthday parties? And then people who came to the parties would say, oh gosh, these are so pretty.

then I would start doing them for family showers, And then it became, oh, would you do that for us? Because not only did they look good, but even they tasted good It wasn't just, how do they work? I also wanted, how do they taste? And so I had to play with recipes. And that's really kind of how things started evolving. They did it just snowballed.

[00:10:26] **David Crabill:** you learned from these three people who were maybe a little ahead of their time posting stuff online when there wasn't much available, but like you said, now there's so much information out there and I'm sure you're aware of most of it. So for someone starting today, or if you were starting today, knowing the resources that are out there. You know, which one or two, teachers would you start to follow?

[00:10:53] **Janna Paterno:** my go-to person, the person that I would recommend is sweet sugar bell. Her cookie cutters that she has come out with provides templates. So you don't have to create your own template. and she, she has a website resources for people who are just starting out the way she has structured her website.

Exactly what I would've done if I were going to create a website. and there is another website that's been created and it's called Cookie Connection. And it's one of those websites that Julia Usher, I believe, I think she is the one who developed this website and it is just full of information. And they do tutorials. blogs, interviews with other cookers. It's really just a great resource.

[00:11:55] **David Crabill:** So for someone who's just starting out. I mean, obviously, you know, so much about cookie decorating now, but for someone who's just starting now, there's all this information out there that can be overwhelming. What do they need to, learn first? What equipment do they need to have first?

[00:12:14] **Janna Paterno:** Oh my gosh, Don't go out and start buying a bunch of supplies. I have more cookie rollers, and cookie cutters I'm not going to list all these things that I have. But start with some standard cookie cutters. There is an Instagram site It's called, shape shifters. I will need to look at that. I wish I had prepared that.

[00:12:44] **David Crabill:** I'll put a link to it down the show.

[00:12:47] **Janna Paterno:** Okay. what happens is that you don't have to buy tons of cookie cutters. If you have an imagination or don't reinvent the wheel, somebody out there has an imagination of how they can take, for example, a heart and make it a puppy dog face.

or as I did recently, I took a heart shape and I made it a bee. But that, wasn't my idea. That was someone else's inspiration. And that inspired me. So don't buy a bunch of cookie cutters, That is one of the things I would definitely say, because I will tell you I'm overload. I have so many cookie cutters. It's just insane. And that's one thing about the sweet sugar bell. she has taken, cookie cutters which you can buy and she gives you two or three suggested designs,

along with a template that you can use an edible food marker. And you can trace that outline of that stencil. S o that's definitely one thing. And the other is don't buy a bunch of, cookie colors because you can buy your basic primary colors and you can Google, how to turn Uh, yellow and blue into a green, but you can do add a little bit more white to it and make it a different shade of green.

So definitely don't buy a lot of food coloring, and b ecause they've come out with what they call now tipless piping bags. Wow. What a great concept. because I bought all the, well, you know, these different size tips, the metal tips, Well, you don't have to buy those now. if you know how to cut the tip of a tipless bag People have really gotten creative in ways to save money and that that's definitely one of them.

[00:14:50] **David Crabill:** Now, I know there's just a ton of different ways that you could decorate a cookie, so many different techniques, what kind of cookies are like your go-to style?

[00:15:00] **Janna Paterno:** It varies because this is the one thing that I like so much with decorating cookies. There are so many, mediums that you can use when you are cookie decorating. And mediums, meaning, Royal icing, you can use a really thin Royal icing or a thick, Royal icing to making a really stiff Royal icing to pipe, a flower. you can paint when I cookie, and here's another one that I find really interesting and that is Uh, you can stamp on a cookie with, a rubber stamp. Now, obviously this has to be a clean stamp and one that you know, you've cleaned it, disinfected it, and now you are using, food coloring you can now use it as a stamp anything you, can do that you have seen an artist do. With acrylic paint or watercolors, you can do it on a cookie that's. What's so fascinating with this and same thing with, I can punch a butterfly flower with a stamping punch that people use in crafts.

I can do the same thing with rice paper. for, even if you've done and you really have gotten into modeling with chocolate or with, cream. You can do that now with cookies and you can give cookies, dimension. that's, what's so fascinating how all of these different baking techniques they now translate into not just cake decorating, but cookie decorating.

it is just fascinating what you can get into.

[00:16:49] **David Crabill:** now I'm just curious, this wouldn't be something that you'd recommend someone buy starting out, but I'm sure you've accumulated just so many different pieces of equipment. And I'm just curious about what's one of the more elaborate pieces of equipment you've invested in now.

[00:17:05] **Janna Paterno:** I'm going to say, definitely an airbrush, system. That's not recent, but If you want to get started selling cookies, it can really reduce your time and the dimension and artistic flair. And what have you, it can give to a cookie is phenomenal and it can save so much time.

That's one. The second is I have a Pico projector, that I use with my laptop and it projects an image on to a cookie. And it helps, especially if you're going to. I'm going to use the word mass produce, although I've never mass produced. Three dozen is the most I've ever done and whatever want to do, but if you are going to do the same design and it's going to be a repetitive cookie design really would make your life a lot easier, I'll just stop with that. That those are the two.

[00:18:06] **David Crabill:** So, I know you did this as a hobby for many, many years, you know, you gave your cookies away, you made cookies for your family and friends. You gave cookies away to non-profits. And I think you were even doing classes and starting to do classes and teach. But then at some point you stopped doing the classes so that you could turn this into a business. what caused you to, make that change and, uh, start to sell your cookies.

[00:18:37] **Janna Paterno:** Well, I retired, early, and you know, had the good fortune and that I could do that. so I was taking care of my oldest grandson, helping with childcare, and I got really bored, because I wasn't watching him five days a week and I just needed an outlet. And so, because I was doing the cookies and it just kept evolving, from a hobby to where I was doing them for family and friends, I was then being asked, would I do them beyond my family and friends. D oing that because of my business background and my husband.

He's a retired lawyer. We started thinking about the liability of selling cookies. And you really want to be structured as a business to protect yourself. that's what really sparked me getting more structured as a business.

[00:19:41] **David Crabill:** I mean, did you have ambitions, uh, when you started selling your cookies, were you wanting to take. To be kind of a big thing or potentially make a storefront out of it. Or did you just start selling because you're trying to appease the people who are asking you to sell your cookies.

[00:19:59] **Janna Paterno:** Well, I've never been one to set idle and it was looking to see, okay, what's my next chapter going to be. so I thought about doing the bricks and mortar thing, you know, where I'd have my own little shop and I would you know, sell decorated cookies, you know, maybe some other confections, if you will.

And there's a cookieer that I just love. Her name's Jill. She's known as Jill, the funky cookie studio. If you look her up on Instagram and Facebook, I believe it's jillfcs - funky cookie studio. She did an interview that I listened to through the cookie connection.

The website I had mentioned earlier, and she talked about it was just she and her husband, both retired, who established this cookie studio. And she did a shared space with another baker to help with overhead. first of all, I thought, wow, this sounds like a really great idea.

so thought, oh my God, let's do the numbers which, you know, I started doing and she talked about, she had to do six dozen cookies a day, seven days a week.

that's what they knew they needed to do in order to I guess I'm sure to make a profit, when she said she had to do six dozen cookies, I got this lump in my throat and I thought, oh no, no, that's not what I want. I can't do that. now she did say these weren't custom decorated cookies. she did eight to 10 varying designs, but bottom line, she did over 500 cookies.

And I'm like, there's no way. That really wasn't what I wanted to do. I knew that. So I thought I would do custom cookies. Well, when I was looking at this West Virginia laws, their cottage food laws, as you know, you had to have a commercial kitchen. So I really wanted to do it out of my home. And in order to do it out of my home, again, I couldn't do custom cookies. I could sell at a farmer's market, but I'm not doing custom cookies. Right. And because I couldn't do that at the time, you know, I kept researching and that's when I discovered there was some activity occurring to change our laws here in West

Virginia. and so I believe I'm saying this correctly, it was the Institute for justice. They wanted to expand the laws to allow people home bakers, to sell out of their, their, own kitchen without having to have that commercial kitchen so I got on the bandwagon and started, you know, writing to my representatives and, you know, when, the bill was being reviewed, you know, I went the day, you know, in support. So fortunately it did get passed in 2019.

[00:23:16] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So you, you started the business, I guess in 2019 then.

[00:23:21] **Janna Paterno:** Yes. June of 2019 was when I started publicly announcing that I was now taking custom orders,

[00:23:31] **David Crabill:** So this was in 2019. This is like three years after, you know, those 2016 cookies that, were, you know, phenomenal. So you're even better at this point. So did the cookie orders just start rolling in because your cookies seem like they would just sell themselves?

[00:23:49] **Janna Paterno:** Yes, and I thought, oh my gosh, what have I done? because When you look at my cookies, there's a lot of detail. And I know that, I never could find my balance with my cookie decorating, and again, it goes back to being a perfectionist, having a little bit of OCD and I really wanted to get into the details.

so I couldn't make any money. because I couldn't do a simple design. And when you're selling a cookie at \$5, my average cost was \$5. I'm not making any money.

I'm really not. you know, as a business and I structured myself as an LLC. You know, you have to set up, the checking account, you have to get the labeling, you have to get your business card. You know, you're setting up these accounts, I'm setting up a website, I'm buying food liability insurance and you know, I'm trying to function as a business.

So I'm spending time setting up an Excel spreadsheet so I can track my expenses and trying to look at, okay, here's my expenses and here's my income. And you start looking at the ratios and you're thinking, dear God, I'm not making any money. So I'm really doing this all for fun at a huge expense and husband who's very patient and understanding and indulging me in my hobby now, business. and the other is all my ingredients. Were, king Arthur flour, Kerrygold butter. these are really good ingredients. You know, they weren't generic ingredients and so not only am I giving quality, decorated cookies, but I

goes back to what I said earlier. I wanted to give a cookie that tastes really good. So, the orders started coming in and you know, when I start designing a cookie, I was spending so much time in the design phase.

then I have to put it to cookie and the time that goes into my cookie. And getting it to the customer because I was buying, you know, these really nice boxes, because again, I want perfection. I want someone to say, you know, they're giving this to someone as a gift, I wanted them to take pride in that I bought these, these are so special.

I wanted that to be conveyed. and yeah, the orders really did. They came in because of that quality. I'd like to think it was because of the quality. then I had to learn to say no. and I did, I learned to say no. but that didn't deter people, I will say.

[00:26:38] **David Crabill:** Well, so I mean, with the orders just coming in and obviously the quality is there all around, like not only are the designs amazing, but you also on top of that, have an amazing cookie underneath it. So why didn't you just, since it's such a high end cookie, why didn't you just start ramping up the price to sort of, charge what you're worth.

[00:26:58] **Janna Paterno:** David. That's a great question. It really is. And I don't have an answer for that. I guess I looked at it that As flattering as it was being referred to as you know, like the bougie cookie lady, I was flattered by that, but I also wanted to make it affordable for everybody, when you have, for example, a mother who, let's say a school teacher. and they have two or three children and they're wanting to do something really special for, you know, one of their child's birthday or whatever. I wanted to be a part of that. And the only way I could do that is to make it affordable. So I did it,

[00:27:47] **David Crabill:** So I'm gathering that this just became unsustainable, right? You ran it, for what? A couple years. And then you shut it down. Was it just because it became overwhelming?

[00:28:00] **Janna Paterno:** I think it was just a combination of a lot of things that it just brought it all to the surface. it did all the things you just mentioned then COVID, and I was definitely not going to be doing any cookies during what I'm hoping now is behind us, and it just seemed, okay, here we are. And I still have all this overhead and it just was a good time and doing some introspection and reflection and saying, what is my next chapter here?

I think I've tried this and it didn't work for me. And I couldn't find my balance So interestingly, last year I started substitute teaching. I got a certificate to become a substitute teacher because I thought, again, I can't be idle. I have to be doing something.

And I thought I will have that as an outlet. And in addition to doing my cookies as a hobby, I'm going to go back to that and I can do it for family and friends and for non-profits, but that will be my limit. And I will pass along what I can to people who really want to learn cookie decorating. I won't mind passing on that knowledge, but I won't do it as a business.

[00:29:20] **David Crabill:** You mentioned in there that you had overhead, you weren't selling during COVID you still had this overhead. And you mentioned earlier that you, you did everything right. You got your LLC, you got your insurance, you took all the steps. But you're working out of your home, right? So clearly the home kitchen.

Isn't part of your overhead. So what are we talking about in terms of like, how much money were you spending per month or per year to run your business without selling things?

[00:29:48] **Janna Paterno:** I loved learning new techniques, and so I found myself buying supplies and different materials that wasn't necessary if you just wanted to do a basic cookie decorating business, like, I found myself buying, what is called sugar veil, you can buy these rubber mats You can mix, make a mixture, you know, it's, it's almost like a paste and you can just rub it on to. Rubber mat it turns into lace or different, textures, you know, I'm buying all this stuff.

so I can make it that, you know, high-end cookie that I'm charging \$5 for. I bought a cricket so I can make my own templates, my own stencils instead of buying stencils, which I did. I bought tons of stencils. because I use it with my airbrush or I would use it for, taking Royal icing, which you can brush, through the stencil and give it some dimension on a cookie.

I'm doing all these things. ' So I can't say how much I spent because I buy all this stuff so I can make it that, you know, high-end cookie that I'm charging \$5 for, So it goes back to balance and I didn't have my balance with it.

[00:31:15] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, I can tell that you have this standard of perfection with your cookies and apparent all of your work. Right? I mean, usually I see a cookie decorator that might put that level of effort into like a

contest cookie. but it seemed like For all of your cookies. And, you know, you said \$5 as a, as a premium cookie, but I mean, really I'm looking at these cookies and I'm thinking bare minimum of \$10 for a cookie like this. you know, that wouldn't be unheard of these days.

[00:31:43] **Janna Paterno:** And David, who's going to, but who is going to buy. I mean, honestly would buy, I just

[00:31:50] **David Crabill:** people will, people will buy it. Maybe I don't know about your area in West Virginia, but I guarantee you that people will buy one cookie for \$10. The quality of cookie that you have.

[00:32:06] **Janna Paterno:** Maybe I underestimated myself.

[00:32:09] **David Crabill:** Well, just to just, a few episodes ago I had Jenny Gibson, she's been doing cake pops for over a decade. she sells her her highest end cake pops. She sells a cake pop for \$15 a piece

[00:32:22] **Janna Paterno:** No way

[00:32:23] **David Crabill:** and she'll sell a dozen of them,

[00:32:24] **Janna Paterno:** Oh, my gosh. I can't even imagine. I can't even get my head around that. Wow.

[00:32:30] **David Crabill:** Well, when you're talking about hot, you're going on the high end here, going high end. So you're really targeting the people that want something amazing for their wedding or something amazing for a corporate event. again, I don't know about your area of West Virginia, but I am saying that if you could put that level of effort into a cookie, you have to charge for, or else you get to find yourself in the position you're at, where you can't sustain it. So now no one has access to the cookies.

[00:32:58] **Janna Paterno:** right. I will say I had customers who They didn't even ask me how much. I But predominantly I just wanted, it goes back to, I wanted them to have that level of cookie that they would not have paid \$15 for, they just couldn't afford it, but they could pay \$5.

And even at that, it was a stretch. But I think because they wanted to make whatever event really special, they were willing to pay that \$5 and I was happy to do it for them.

[00:33:30] **David Crabill:** And that's not bad thing. Again, also in your area, West Virginia, you're selling very locally. So, you know, probably the right answer for you. If you really wanted to run it as a, a successful business. Was to, get over the perfection of the cookies and really, you know, find that happy medium where you still delivering a quality product, but you're not going to the effort you would for say a contest. You know, I did. see that you, you've done at least one contest, right.

[00:34:03] **Janna Paterno:** I did. Let me tell you, I was so nervous when I entered that contest. I found out about it through a cookie decorator who lives in the Southern part of West Virginia. So I went to the website and I thought, oh, this is really interesting. And I didn't even know we did that at our state fair. And so I thought, what the heck? this could be fun. so I did it I remember my sister went with me the day I to deliver the cookies. before I went in, I said, oh, I don't know if I could do.

she's like Janna she's my biggest cheerleader actually. Anyway, she's like, you've got to do this. She's like, nobody else is going to compare. And I'm like, oh no, no, no. So anyway, I did it and I won first place in the cookie decorating. I won \$5.

I never cashed that check, but I won \$5 and I blue ribbon. So that was fun.

[00:35:13] **David Crabill:** Why haven't you done any contest since.

[00:35:16] **Janna Paterno:** it gives me such anxiety, you know, if you can't enjoy what you're doing really enjoy and just not be so hard on yourself and, you know, get out of your head. I really wrestle with that with myself. so maybe I'll do another one someday, but, yeah, I will say this.

I have been thinking about approaching some people here locally in our city. Some city officials to talk about, maybe we should do a, like a gingerbread competition. And actually did my first gingerbread, cookie cottage, if you will, this past winter.

And I like to challenge myself. And so I did some, you know, researching and so I made my very first gingerbread house I was really pleased with it. it wasn't perfect by any means, but I was really.

I even put lights on the inside, those little fairy lights and made it come to life and I made it three dimensional. It was so fun.

[00:36:16] **David Crabill:** I saw that gingerbread house. That gingerbread house is ridiculous.

[00:36:23] **Janna Paterno:** Thank you. Thank you.

[00:36:26] **David Crabill:** I'm sure you would win that competition as well.

[00:36:29] **Janna Paterno:** Well, it was fun. It was a fun thing to do.

[00:36:33] **David Crabill:** so I'm just trying to get a sense. I mean, you talked about, you probably undercharged for your cookies. You spent a lot of time on your cookies, but I mean, with your, your skills today. I mean, this is with what 15 years of experience given how perfect your cookies are, how long does it actually take you to make those cookies?

I know it depends on design, but can you give me a sense for what it's really taking you to make an individual cookie.

[00:36:56] **Janna Paterno:** I had someone asked me the other day, forget which cookie they were looking at and they asked, did that take you eight hours to do just one cookie. and it really doesn't because I'm comfortable with it now. And, oh, geez. wish I had a cookie that we could cite as an example, but,

[00:37:18] **David Crabill:** Say like, your most recent Santa Claus cookie,

[00:37:21] **Janna Paterno:** okay.

[00:37:22] **David Crabill:** those are pretty impressive, but they're not, they're not super elaborate.

[00:37:26] **Janna Paterno:** No, they're not, I could probably do, let's say six of those and I could probably do them within four or five hours.

[00:37:38] **David Crabill:** Well, even still, I mean you're talking about almost an hour per cookie,

[00:37:43] **Janna Paterno:** and I say that because what doesn't get factored in, If I did those six and four to five hours, I probably could actually do a little bit more. But the reason I say that it is because I'm not factoring in, you know, you have to bait, you have to mix the dough, you have to, bake the dough, You have

to make your icing, you have to color your icing. I mean, there's all this prep that you have to do

[00:38:12] **David Crabill:** And clean up too.

[00:38:14] **Janna Paterno:** an Oh gosh, and the cleanup. Thank you.

[00:38:16] **David Crabill:** so let's just say you have the cookie made. It's ready to go. You've got the icing already mixed. how much time does it take you to pipe it?

[00:38:26] **Janna Paterno:** Okay. One cookie I could do with probably within 30 minutes.

[00:38:33] **David Crabill:** Yeah, that's a lot of time for one.

[00:38:36] **Janna Paterno:** It is. because what you also have to factor in to that is it has some dimension to it.

because you, you have to put some layers on top of it and I also, had to airbrush to give it a little bit of that dimension. and so you have to allow some things to crust. So I have it in front of a fan. And I have to allow it time to set up before I can put another layer on to it. So I'm saying 30 minutes, but while that's doing that, I can go into another cookie. So you see, it's really difficult to put a time around how long it takes to do a cookie, because while that's drying crusting, I'm already going to another,

[00:39:21] **David Crabill:** what was the most difficult? You ever made.

[00:39:26] **Janna Paterno:** Oh, okay. That would be my grandson's. I baked him a cake. this is my most challenging thing I've ever, ever done because it was the very first one I did. You can take cookies, decorate your cookies and you attach them to your cake. So I hand cut some of the cookies that I used to attach to the cake.

But my first grandson, Jack, he was really into, oh gosh, I forget what they call them. Power Rangers. It was the power Rangers.

So I did a cake and I did a two tier cake. I had to learn how to ice a cake. I mean, it was a process, but that aside. I'm learning how to do a cake. And I, you know, I was icing and I could use edible markers. I used my airbrush. But the very top cookie and I don't know the name of the power ranger, but it was the

one he really liked. it was a good size cookie. And I did it where you pipe a section, you have to let it dry after you do the basic, you know, the, the one layer.

Then I started doing the dimensions, making it come to life I would pipe, let it dry, and it was all white. And then I went back and painted. And painted it with food coloring, but I got it done. And you know, what it did? They cracked? I mean, it was done and it cracked into, and I thought, oh my God, I had to bake another cookie hand, cut another cookie.

And I thought, I'm not going to get this done. I'm not, it was just, but I did it. I made a two tier birthday cake and with a power ranger thing. I take great pride in that because it was my first attempt at doing anything like this. Not just from a cookie decorating standpoint, but even doing the cake that wasn't my thing, but I had to learn and I did it. And ever since that, my grandsons I have now two, tell me what kind of cake they want. They tell me the theme every year. I do their birthday cake which I decorate with cookies. That's my thing now.

[00:41:56] **David Crabill:** do you have a favorite cookie design over the years?

[00:42:01] **Janna Paterno:** I do. And this one was the one I did for my sister And it was Beatrix Potter's Peter rabbit. I did those I did was a set really love those, but I think the reason I liked them was because of my sister And when I did those for her, she froze those cookies I think they're still frozen she will bring them out at Easter and decorate with them, but then she wraps them back up and puts them in her freezer

because she's like, I can't eat these, these, these are not to be eaten. They're just for show. And I'm like, Aw, that's so sweet.

[00:42:46] **David Crabill:** So, I mean, I know that, you know, the orders just came in because your cookies are amazing. Did you do anything to try to kind of spread the word or did you really not need to.

[00:42:58] **Janna Paterno:** I really did need to. I didn't want to create a business where I was working full time. It, again, it was to feel a need on a part-time basis because I'm watching my grandson. you know, I still wanted to allow time for myself and for my husband and I to do things because, you know, we're both retired now, but yeah, I didn't have to, no, I got calls all the time I just, I think once I put it out there on Facebook, you know, people will start sharing, oh my gosh, look at these cookies.

And people would say, do you know of anyone that does cookies? And then before you know it, they're sharing cookies and they're messaging me and saying, I saw your cookies at a birthday party, or I heard you do cookies.

Would you have availability? Now here's the part that really was interesting. they would either call or message me to say, I am planning my son's birthday party. And I was wondering if you could do such and such cookie design for his birthday, which is this Saturday. And they had sent me a text on a Wednesday or Thursday Like I don't, I can't turn it around that quickly, but the other part was I probably had another birthday in the queue or another something cookie design I was working on or was already in the queue. I had no problem, you know, people wanting to order the cookies if they were willing to pay the \$5. you know, then when I would tell them it was \$5, sometimes they would back out or they would say, well, maybe I'll only take a dozen instead of the two or three dozen. Sometimes I would work with them, you know, and say, okay, well maybe I could do more simpler design. but then, you know what I would do, we would agree on a simpler design, but then I would add to it because I don't know when to stop. And so they're getting that \$10 cookie for \$5.

[00:45:03] **David Crabill:** So I know that you, you know, started this business for a variety of reasons you haven't continued it. you say that the business disappointed you in any way? I mean, was it not what you were expecting or hoping?

[00:45:18] **Janna Paterno:** I found myself getting overwhelmed not just with, you know, I talked about the details and getting caught up in being a perfectionist, but the other part Is that when you have a home-based business, what you have to factor in is that. Unless you have a second kitchen it can become a little bit challenging I have, again, one of the most supportive husbands during the day I would have my airbrush system set up in the kitchen, I would have, some cookie trays setting out with cookies on them. I have cleaned my counters. My kitchen, you know, I want it cleaned, sanitized. I'm using this now for my cookie business.

And then during the day, when he would need to come in and fix his lunch, he would have to take his lunch to some other place in the house because I'm in the kitchen.

I didn't want him in my workspace Then it meant now for dinner, it meant takeout on many occasions. And I just felt that was not fair to him. he never complained. like I said, he was just really good about it, but, became a challenge So that's something I think people do need to think about because I don't have

children that I had to work around. Yes. I have grandkids, but I can either say I can't watch them on that day or we need to alternate a day I had some flexibility. Some people don't have that luxury. I imagine that would be a challenge for people.

[00:47:08] **David Crabill:** so if we are actually, you know, coming out of COVID, for good, is there a point at which you would consider starting to sell your cookies again, maybe, you know, producing them in a commercial kitchen space or, or maybe on a more part-time basis? like one order a week or something like that.

[00:47:27] **Janna Paterno:** No, because I did go through the whole process of shutting down my LLC. I went ahead. I did, I made the decision, because you still have. Taxes that you have to pay as an LLC, you still have, city costs that you have to pay fees. There's still the cost of maintaining a website, There's the, cost of food liability insurance. I mean, at a minimum, you're paying about \$300 for that. So you still have that cost. And I think you would still have to weigh out how many cookies would I have to sell in order to maintain that.

so I'm yeah. That's where I am right now.

[00:48:14] **David Crabill:** But you did say that you're, starting to do classes again? Did I hear that, right.

[00:48:19] **Janna Paterno:** Well, I am doing one next month. And in order to do that, I am looking at having to do event insurance you know, that's a hundred dollars that I have to build into the cost so that's, you know, there's yeah, I've been doing, I've been running the numbers on that and I'm not sure that that's going to be very lucrative, but

[00:48:45] **David Crabill:** Well, I mean, let's be real, like, if you sell classes, they're going to sell.

[00:48:53] **Janna Paterno:** Well, yeah, so far, yes, I put it out there in the class is almost sold out. Yes.

[00:48:59] **David Crabill:** Well, and you're just doing it locally. I mean, if you did it virtually, it would even be more lucrative.

[00:49:06] **Janna Paterno:** I don't know. I think I see people doing that listen, I've taken online courses from cookie decorators to learn techniques And I've learned from that. But what I'm trying to offer are just for beginners and the

reason, I don't think a beginner's cookie decorating class works well it has to do with the Royal icing.

And what people don't know is if you don't perfect mixing your Royal icing and learning the different, oh gosh, what's the word consistencies. If you don't know how to mix to get those consistencies and when to use those consistencies, you are going, that is probably the most frustrating part about doing cookie decorating with Royal icing And I don't feel that you can do that effectively by learning that online. There's a lot of information out there, There's no one standard language out there. And what conveys a certain consistency that you might use in Royal icing other than. Stiff Royal icing.

I think everybody would understand what that means, but there's other degrees. And I don't think you can learn that very well. you do one-on-one, I think you would in person, and that's what I want to be able to teach in My beginners cookie decorating class.

[00:50:44] **David Crabill:** Why are you focusing on beginners or beginning basic techniques, because I mean, clearly with your skillset, you could just jump right into advanced decorating techniques. Cause a lot of people are teaching basic beginner techniques out there, but not too many people have the skill set that you do to be teaching the advanced classes.

[00:51:06] **Janna Paterno:** Oh gosh. I don't feel that way. don't get me wrong. I'm happy with my cookies. But to say, I think you have to have a degree of some may call it an ego. I call it confidence. Self-assurance I don't know how you want to label it, but that's the one thing I don't feel I possess enough to be able to confidently teach any form of an advanced level class? I take advanced level classes. So, I mean, I, I still learn every day. I, you know, I, I watched these videos and teach myself something all the time.

[00:51:50] **David Crabill:** Well, because you don't do it full time. There's always going to be people who are better than you,

[00:51:55] **Janna Paterno:** You know what? That's so true. Yes.

[00:51:58] **David Crabill:** but I do think that you're probably not giving yourself enough credit, I mean, there are people out there who would love to learn from you. I'm confident in that. And clearly you have a passion for teaching as well. So hope that you, you know, at least get started with the beginner classes and, um, be open to opportunities if they come your way and see where it leads you.

[00:52:19] **Janna Paterno:** Well, thank you. Yes, it'll be something to consider for sure.

[00:52:24] **David Crabill:** Why are you so passionate about cookies?

[00:52:29] **Janna Paterno:** It is an outlet for me to be creative. we, all, everybody has a gift I believe, I feel that I have a gift artistically creatively. I have, I do. And I, it allows me to get it out of my head. It allows me to do that and see it come to life.

And then the end result when I pass it on to others who are in all of it, because it brings them so much joy. it brings me joy to watch a child look at a cookie and go wow, I am not going to eat that. Even a child to say, I can't eat that because that's too pretty.

What a compliment Or to watch them take the first bite out of it. And as my grandson s do I either get a one thumbs up or I'll get a two thumbs up. And when I get that two thumbs up, I know I'm done. I've done pretty darn good.

[00:53:32] **David Crabill:** Well, Janna it's pretty amazing to see how far you've come in your cookie decorating skills. And I really, enjoyed having you come on the show and share like, kind of what you learned about trying to go the business route and maybe why that didn't work so well for you.

I think people can learn a lot from that. So I appreciate you coming on and sharing, you know, the ups and downs of that journey. And I look forward to seeing where this journey takes you in the future, you know, hopefully with the classes and You being able to impart your knowledge on others,

but, if people do want to reach out to you or find you, I know you've closed down your website, you've closed down your Facebook account, but how can people find you and how can they reach out?

[00:54:11] **Janna Paterno:** You can reach me through Facebook because I did reactivate my SweetJannaLea Facebook account because of offering this cookie class, in April. I also have my Instagram account, which is, sweetjannalea and I do have an email account. sweetjannalea@yahoo.com.

[00:54:35] **David Crabill:** Wonderful. Well, you mentioned a number of, teachers and cookie decorators. In this episode, I'll be putting links to all of them down below. And, um, yeah. Thank you so much for coming on and sharing with us.

[00:54:49] **Janna Paterno:** Thank you for having me.

[00:54:52] **David Crabill:** And that wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

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