

The Competitive Cake Artist with Jewel Burgess

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where we 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 Jewel Burgess.

Jewel lives in Rancho Cordova, California, and sells custom sculpted cakes with her cottage food business Cake Jewel.

So she basically makes artwork using cake as her medium, and she specializes in realistic cakes. Often turning everyday objects into a cake. Now you might have already seen cakes like these on TV, and you might have seen Jewel's cakes on TV. She has already been on national television three times, including two appearances on Halloween wars. And she'll be on a fourth competition that hasn't aired yet.

But when she's not making cakes for the Food Network, she is making them for customers. In this episode, we talk about the evolution of her business over the last nine years, how she gained skills after starting with zero knowledge of cake making, why she's chosen to get super niched with her side business and what she's learned from the stress of multiple appearances on national television.

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

Welcome to the show, Jewel. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:16] **Jewel Burgess:** Hi, thank you for having me.

[00:01:18] **David Crabill:** Jewel, can you take us back to the beginning of this journey? How did it all get started?

[00:01:23] **Jewel Burgess:** I sure can. My journey started back in October of 2013. It all started, my son was about to turn one year old and of course, he's the youngest, so he's a little bit spoiled. So we wanted him to have the biggest and the best, everything.

So first birthday he loved Mickey Mouse. And so we are going to get him a Mickey Mouse cake, like a huge tiered Mickey Mouse cake. And so I started looking around online and things like that. And then all of a sudden it was just

like a light bulb that went off and said, I wonder if I could do this myself, never baked a cake.

From scratch. Like I think the most I've ever done was open a box sticking in the oven. That's it. But I never decorated, never did anything like that, but I just had this great idea that I wanted to try it. So I think it was a lot of Googling, a lot of YouTube and I came across how to make a cake from scratch and it started from there.

I made a cake which I call the cornbread cake because it was like so thin and, squished down, it looked like cornbread. It was so funny. But we had such a ball doing it because I did it with my daughter. From there I learned. About how to make frosting. And then the next big step I'm like, I wonder what this fondant is. Like. I've only seen fondant on all the cake shows that I used to watch. Like cake boss, food network, Halloween Wars, Cake Wars, they all talk about fondant. And I've never, ever tasted it, tried it or anything.

And I Googled it, YouTubed it, and there were how to make your own homemade fondant. So I tried it and it was like working with Play-Doh and I loved it because I work with my hands a lot. I like to create and I've always been the one that always was making something, was drawing, writing, singing., As a little kid, I would make things out of nature and whatever I could find outside. And then I'd go door to door and sell it. And I think all my friends and teachers and things just knew me as the creative one.

So working with cake is right up my alley, I would say.

So I decorated this cute little cornbread-looking cake. And I was so excited. From there, I think it was the very next month was October my son's birthday. And so that's when I took a stab at making him like a Mickey mouse clubhouse theme cake. And again, that cake was kind of corn breadish, but

It was fun. It was colorful, I bought some little figurines, put it on there and I was just so proud of that cake. Cause I've never done anything like that in my life. I took it to the party and everyone was like, "Whoa. Oh, wow. Where'd you get this cake? Who made this cake for you?" And I'm like, I made it.

My friends, they kind of know that I'm creative like that, but I've never made cakes, but they're like, oh yeah, of course, Jewel, you know, But when I put it on Facebook. I got lots of likes and comments. And then I think it was two months later I received a message from someone asking me if I would make their child's first birthday cake.

And so that would've been my first paying customer And that's how cake jewel started.

[00:05:06] **David Crabill:** And do you remember, what was the cake and how much did you charge?

[00:05:10] **Jewel Burgess:** Yes. It was a pink and purple, just cutesie little one-tiered cake with cupcakes to match with little flowers on it, cut-out fondant flowers. And I remember I made the number one and put it on top and the number one was backwards and I'll never forget that **I was so embarrassed**, but she still loved it.

And I think I only charged \$90, I believe for this cake.

[00:05:45] **David Crabill:** I'm sure you put in like 20 hours or something into the

[00:05:48] **Jewel Burgess:** Yeah, I probably did because I actually, you know, work a full-time job. So I did cakes on the side, so I would come home from work like the night before. I would come home from work and make the cake and the buttercream and the fondant and cut out and do everything all at one night.

So I wouldn't go to bed until, early, early in the morning. I mean, I used to being up, watching the sun come out and then being like sick from not sleeping all night. And that would, that happened for years, but yeah, that was how my first customer cakes went a lot.

[00:06:30] **David Crabill:** So you had this first birthday cake for your son, and then you had a couple of months later, someone requested a cake. Had you already been thinking about selling cakes and when did you like decide, you know, I'm gonna dedicate my time to try to do this as a business.

[00:06:45] **Jewel Burgess:** I think that it didn't really cross my mind until I got that first paying customer that was a year before I actually you know, went out and got my business license and all that.

So after that cake is when. I started getting referrals and it just kind of started from there. And that's when I said, okay, let's start making this into a business. So Then I went into business mode and started researching how to start a cake business.

[00:07:14] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like, you know, it's heading into 2014 and then, you know, at the end of 2014, you started to set everything up. Do you remember kind of what the trajectory of your business was like in 2014?

[00:07:27] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, yeah.

From there I just started practicing, I practiced cookies. I practiced cupcakes. I just Really started digging into all the online training that I could. 2015 is when I decided to put myself out there. Call myself Cake Jewel, because cake and then my name is Jewel, and cakejewel.com actually that website or that URL was available. So I took that as a sign and I've been doing it ever since.

[00:08:01] **David Crabill:** So, when did it start, like, you know, I know that you're practicing and getting an order here and there, but when do you feel like your business really took a turn and you started to become a real business?

[00:08:13] **Jewel Burgess:** I'm gonna say probably another year after that. In 2016, I was getting better at each of the different techniques that I was teaching myself. So I was posting more. That's when I started my Instagram and people started kind of seeing my work there. And then sometime in 2016 is when I got contacted by one of the Cake show producers saying, Hey, we've seen your work on Instagram, because by this time I was starting to do more of the sculpting type work.

I think my first sculpted cakes was I did a Fisher price telephone toy, telephone, a little toy piano, a Rubik's cube, and things like that. And I was putting those things out there and the show contacted me in 2016 to audition for a Halloween war special they were having.

And that blew my mind because I'm like, I'm just a newbie.

I'm still amazed. When I think about that because it was only two years after I started baking for the very first time. Never did it before. Never did any kind of cake decorating. And then I'm having like a major network call me and want me to audition and be with these super awesome cake designers and sugar artists and things that have been doing this for years.

So I was super nervous.

[00:09:42] **David Crabill:** What was the status of your business at that point, when they reached out to you? Like, do you know how many orders you're getting per month or per week?

[00:09:51] **Jewel Burgess:** Was probably getting about not so many, I'm gonna say probably about five orders a month and that's only because again, I work full time, so I could only do so many,

[00:10:05] **David Crabill:** Well, I know that they're following people all the time and they reach out to a lot of people. and it's one thing to be, you know, asked to audition. It's quite another to be able to get through the audition process on your first try and make it on the show.

like How do you feel like the interview process and the audition process went?

[00:10:28] **Jewel Burgess:** I think it went very well. I mean, I really think that they chose me based on one: my personality that I showed on camera, because, I kind of have an outgoing and big personality and I talk with my hands and all that.

And I showed confidence in my ability to work with a team and to learn and do different techniques. So I, I believe I was chosen. Because I was so new, I think they wanted to put me with other people to see if we would either clash heads and I would get so stressed out. And then I would just leave the show and it would be all this big drama or would I go in there and kick it in the overdrive and be someone that the rest of the experience team couldn't work with so I got up there, I showed him what I could do. It was very stressful. At one point my teammates, I think they were trying to get me sent home. My own teammates, but talk to the producers, the producer said, we need to see more from you. We need to see what we see on your website and things like that.

We need to re We really need to see what you can do, or, you know, if you feel like you're being, you're overwhelmed, that's fine. You can go. And I said, no, I'm gonna show you what I can do. So right after lunch, I remember going to where the kitchen was. I put on my headphones, blasted my music, and started working on a cake just right there.

And I ended up making this life-size boa constrictor cake that was like about to eat a dead mouse. It took me a few hours to do that. And the producers came over and They looked at it and I said, this is what I can do. And they said, well, we definitely want you to stay on the show.

So I stayed on the show, worked my tail off. And my team won. We won two of the three episodes. It was a three-episode special.

[00:12:33] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So you said that you like exuded confidence throughout the application or audition process. Did you actually feel confidence or?

[00:12:46] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, you caught that. Huh? I think I can be a bit of an actress when I know that I need to be, and actually, I used to be an actress, so I knew what they were looking for. And I knew that I couldn't get on camera and be like, well, you know, I'm gonna try my best and, and do this with the team and, you know, set.

I couldn't go on there. Sound and unsure, and unconfident. So, in the interview, I was like, yep, I'm very competitive. And this is what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna make this and do that. And, I kind of had to fake it until I made it. And so when I made it, I had to keep on being myself and being confident in myself the whole time I was there. Because there, it got really stressful. Those show what you see, the stress level that you see is real. And I just had to keep pushing myself, Jewel. Nope. You can't quit. You have to do this. Like what would Liz do?

Or what would Natalie Sideserf do? Like, I mean, I was channeling so many of my mentors at that point that I had watched on the shows. And so I pushed myself every single day not to let them see me sweat. And that's what I've been doing ever since, because there's times where you just want to throw up your hands and say, "I can't do this. This is too tough." But you can't quit.

You have to push yourself to make it to the next level because anything worth having is worth fighting for. So I fought to be there, I fought to stay, and I fought to win.

[00:14:21] **David Crabill:** Isn't there quite a long period of time that you just started in prep mode on the show before it actually goes live? Like you know, you made this boa constrictor like when did that come up? Was that before they even started recording or was this like, while the show was already going?

[00:14:40] **Jewel Burgess:** This was before the filming started. This was, they wanted to see what else I could do, the focus was really on the pumpkin carvers there. Like, I was one woman with four men that had big personalities and I kind of got pushed back to the wall a little bit.

So it was like their ideas, you know, we'll do this, you'll do this Jewel you could just do this over here and we'll do this Jewel you could just do that. And so I didn't really get a chance, in the beginning, to show what really I could do. And

that's when the producer said, let's see what you can do. And so I made the boa constrictor cake. It was actually in the show afterwards. But they didn't show me making it because I didn't make it on the show, but you could see it in one of the shots. But after that, then they're like, okay, yeah, we see your skill. We see your talent, but when you're with a team, you gotta work with the team.

And so that's what I was trying to do, you know, trying to be a good team player and do what the guys told me to do. so I think I held my own pretty well.

[00:15:50] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I know it's an extremely stressful experience, but you managed to pull out the win in two out of three episodes. What do you feel like you learned through that experience?

[00:16:01] **Jewel Burgess:** Number one, I learned that I could be pushed to the limit and I can keep going I literally wanted to drop everything and just walk away and say, forget it I'm done. But I felt something in me that said, no, keep going. And I pushed through and it was cold out there like during the filming of the show, it was freezing.

And so we were working outside. It was muddy, rainy and cold. And, then having to work with some guys that you know, we're big personalities and had done these shows for years. Trying to keep up with that. Finally, I was thinking like, you know, I don't have to put myself through this, but then I thought, no, you do.

If this is what you wanna do. And this is exactly what I decided I wanted to do. Like I wanna have my business, but I wanna show what I can do on television. Like, this is what I wanna do. So that means. I had to keep my head in the game. And that's what I learned was how to be stressed, but keep going

[00:17:05] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So you stuck with it and you learned a lot, but after that experience, obviously, it's like joyous. You're victorious. But after that exhausting experience, did you think you'd be back? Did you ever wanna come back on national TV again?

[00:17:22] **Jewel Burgess:** I did not. Being on the show was fun, but the rest of the experience wasn't that great. Just because I didn't really get to click that much with my teammates, again, I think it's because it was four guys and one girl, so they hung out a lot, and I kind of just stayed in my hotel room.

So I think that had a lot to do with it, and then the stress level. Was pretty intense because when four hours hit it was four hours a day. So when that timer

went off, it was four hours nonstop and then done. And then it's a lot of hurry up and wait and you know, the judging and the filming and all that kind of stuff.

So I didn't think that I would be doing another show for a while.

[00:18:09] **David Crabill:** Well, I get back to your business you know, but I do wanna hear about the rest of your TV adventures. So it's you did come back on and when was that?

[00:18:20] **Jewel Burgess:** I did I uh, let's see. The next show that I was on was called Cakealikes and that was February 2021 of last year, that show came on. And this time I actually went with a fellow baker, someone that I had met through social media the past couple of years before.

So you get to know people online, they just become your friends. when I got a call, again, they called me and asked if I would audition and who would I like to bring. I immediately knew it was a good friend of mine named Jill. And so they flew us out there to Los Angeles, two days of filming.

And then we went home and. That show was super stressful, but it was fun. I loved it.

[00:19:08] **David Crabill:** Well, it'd been, you know, almost four years since you'd been on the first one. So I'd imagine you had a bit more confidence with your skills this time.

[00:19:17] **Jewel Burgess:** I did. I had a ton more confidence. I worked with chocolate, you know, I started practicing with sugar. I started practicing sculpting faces. So yeah, my confidence level was definitely up for this next show.

[00:19:35] **David Crabill:** So, how did you do in that one?

[00:19:39] **Jewel Burgess:** I'm gonna say that we were the comic relief from that show. We didn't win, but we had a great time. And, I learned a lot of things that I would definitely do differently next time. And my mentor again Natalie Sideserf was there and she gave us a lot of encouragement and different tricks to try with our cake. So yeah, that show, I loved it.

[00:20:08] **David Crabill:** Oh yeah. Natalie Sideserf's like one of the most famous cake decorators in the country. So you must have been having a blast.

[00:20:16] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, my gosh. When I saw her name in the parking lot, when I walked up, I just went crazy. and she's as sweet as she is in person as she is online. So.

[00:20:27] **David Crabill:** Well, you said you were learning a lot of things in that show and preparing yourself for the next one, which didn't come too much later. Can you talk about that?

[00:20:39] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, the next show. Yeah. Was on October of the same year of 2021. And that was Halloween Wars. Season 11. I was actually called at the last minute to be on that show because it was a team of three, and one of their teammates said she couldn't do the show at the last minute.

So the producers called me and interviewed me very quickly and then said, would you like to be on a team that it's already been made, they've already been prepping. And I'm like, yeah, sure. And then they hooked me up with the other two ladies and we talked a lot on the phone before we actually met in person. and we got along great. I mean, we clicked like you wouldn't believe so that went really well. And now talk about stress. I think this show put the first Halloween War to shame because I was there for three and a half weeks and we were filming every other day and it was elimination.

So started with eight teams down to two, the finale and my team, we were called. The Ghosts with the most we made it to the finale. Just a huge honor and the show's been out. So I'm sure a lot of people have seen it, so we didn't win. We could have, but the judges just stay like the other cake better.

And you know that with these shows, you can do your very, very best, but it really is just up to the judges and what they like. I mean, they judge everything from, the look of the cake, the different techniques you used and the ingredients and the taste of the cake.

[00:22:25] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, I'd say if you've passed through what six elimination rounds on a show, like a big show, like the Halloween wars you've done pretty well.

[00:22:37] **Jewel Burgess:** Yeah, so, we knew it could go either way. We were very proud of our finale cake we all put in our all you know, and of course, by then I was known as the detail specialist, like I'm, my skills are now in the details. People know my work from the realism and the details. That's what I brought to the team.

[00:23:01] **David Crabill:** Yeah. You came back for a second round of Halloween Wars when you thought when you went out of the first one that you'd never come on TV again. You know, I know you learned a lot in the first round. It sounds like you had a much better experience this time, but did you learn anything new? What do you feel like you learned from the second time?

[00:23:20] **Jewel Burgess:** This time. As soon as I got home from the show, I started working with sugar. I went and bought all the equipment to start pulling and blowing sugar because that was one of the skills that I didn't have when I started. And so when I came back home I started working with sugar.

So I posted a few things that I made from sugar, like blowing up sugar and making sugar sculptures. And now I like incorporating sugar in a lot more of my cakes. Like I, I did. gigantic can of beer and I had you sugar, like the SUD splashing out and it looked so cool.

Looked really real. And so I've been using those for things like lights and eyes and things like that. So I came away with that, and then also wanting to work on sculpting faces more because I said the next time I go on a show, I wanna be the one that works on faces. Because in Cakealikes, the show that I did in February of that year my teammate did the face.

And so now I have more experience in doing faces. So the next time I'm on a show, I wanna do faces, which brings up another show that actually isn't out yet, but it should be out in October. That one's the big bake Canada.

[00:24:44] **David Crabill:** So you've already recorded this show.

[00:24:46] **Jewel Burgess:** Yes,

[00:24:47] **David Crabill:** All right. So you're, you're already on another show.

[00:24:50] **Jewel Burgess:** I am. I went to Canada this time. That show's gonna be fun. My teammates were two ladies that I met when I was filming the Halloween wars, they were actually doing cake wars and we met there on the show, and we had just been talking almost every day for the last year. So we are good friends now.

[00:25:11] **David Crabill:** So are you to just become a serial TV competitor, or.

[00:25:16] **Jewel Burgess:** Well, maybe until I win I know being in the finale is like, great, but it's nice to be able to say, oh yeah, I won. I won that show. Okay.

I did win a couple of years ago, but I guess I'm getting used to that stress level. The more I build up my skills, and then I'm able to come back and use these skills for cakes that I do for my customers.

And so they get bigger and better for my customers. Like I'm using more special effects, using more sound and light and smoke and things like that. And, I actually auditioned for another show. Now, this one, I can't really go into detail yet. But, I auditioned for another show yesterday and that went very well, so I'm really excited about that show. I can't wait to share that one

[00:26:05] **David Crabill:** now. So you've obviously been on multiple TV spots now and you know, you have a business, and these are, you know, connected, right? Like how has your TV appearances affected your business, you know, has it been a ton of publicity or how has it grown your customer base?

[00:26:27] **Jewel Burgess:** Being on the shows has started to grow my Instagram and Facebook followers. So It's not huge, but I mean, it jumped a couple to a few hundred after the last show that I did. It's my fault. It's not growing probably as much as it should because you have to post every single day.

And I'm busy doing cakes and sometimes I forget to post, but it has grown my following. I'm known as like, oh yeah, she does those weird cakes, those sculpted cakes. That's Why, I now tell people that I specialize in your sculpted and novelty-style cakes.

I don't typically do your traditional, regular, plain birthday cakes. And I can be confident and pick and choose because of everything that I've learned so far and what I know that I'm best at and what I know that makes me happy. Like I don't wanna do my business and not be happy with the type of orders that I have.

I don't wanna just do, oh, call me for some cupcakes or yeah, I could do that. You know, a cute little baby shower cake. No, that doesn't make me happy. I wanna do something creative and unique, and that has that wow factor. So like, I want my cakes to be an experience kind of like the cakes that I've been able to make on these shows.

[00:27:53] **David Crabill:** So do you still have a full-time job separate from this business?

[00:27:58] **Jewel Burgess:** I do. I still work a full-time job, which makes it. Very difficult. I work in an administrative business office of a healthcare organization.

And I've been doing that for 15 years. Monday through Friday, you know, your typical to five, whatever. And so I'm fortunate now since COVID started to be able to work from home. So that has allotted me more time to be able to take on more cakes because I'm not driving in traffic and taking two hours just to get home.

[00:28:40] **David Crabill:** have you ever thrown around the idea of giving that up and just going all in on the cakes?

[00:28:47] **Jewel Burgess:** I have, I actually had some college students, I guess they were, you know, in their last year of graduating, you know, and they kind of chose my business to do their end of the year project. And they did a marketing and a business plan for me and they actually showed me what I needed to do in order to take my business to, you know, be able to do cakes full time. It's a lot. And so I haven't kind of made that switch over yet, but it's definitely been sitting in the back of my head. I've been talking with my husband lately about, you know, one day having my own building. My own cake studio. And he was like, yeah, you know, now he's starting to see like, yeah, maybe you do need to have your own cake studio. And, one day I'd like to have my own bakery.

[00:29:41] **David Crabill:** So I know you're a lot more selective now about who you take. When did you start to have the confidence to start turning away potential customers?

[00:29:53] **Jewel Burgess:** I'm gonna say maybe two years ago, Is when I first started saying I actually specialize in this type of cake, but I know, you know, the best person, that would be really good for you, you know? And I recommend out, other cakes that I don't want to do or that just wouldn't bring me that much joy

And then, I get a lot of referrals especially, in my city not too many people at all do the types of cakes that I do, and maybe even the closest bakery that does is probably, two, three hours away.

I'm in Sacramento and they're in the bay area. So not too many people do what I do. And I've had customers actually drive down from Reno which is about a two and a half hour drive for me just to get the type of cakes that I do.

[00:30:45] **David Crabill:** So you've been turning away more potential customers by referring simpler cakes out. Has your business decreased since then?

[00:30:55] **Jewel Burgess:** It has decreased some yes. But that's twofold. I think it's decreasing right now overall with all of us. All the cake bakers in my area because of how the economy is now. But yes. My cake orders have declined some because I have such like a narrow type specialty, but at the same time, I can do one cake that would make the same money as if I did two or three cakes of a regular traditional cake. So I'm pretty happy with that.

[00:31:33] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I was just wondering, you know, sometimes when you niche down. On your specialty and you become known for that one thing, it ends up bringing you more business, which might eventually happen, cuz I know it's not been too long since you've been focusing solely on these super specialty dream cakes, I guess you'd call them.

[00:31:53] **Jewel Burgess:** I'm thinking that business will definitely start to increase. Now that I'm really honing in on what I wanna do, who I am as a cake artist. And now I'm starting to do classes again. I'm getting more out there on social media. I have a plan to actually start sending brochures to the larger corporations around to show them that this type of cake baker or decorator is out there, so they can get that novelty, sculpted style cakes for their company meetings or their employees and things like that.

So it's just taken time because I'm a one-person show. So I have to be, you know, the marketer and the baker and the advertiser and social media guru.

[00:32:46] **David Crabill:** And you have a full-time job.

[00:32:48] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh yeah. That too

[00:32:52] **David Crabill:** So I know you've mentioned that you can charge a lot more now for your cakes and make a lot more on these specialty cakes than you could from simpler cakes. But what's happened over the years in terms of pricing, and I know you sold your first cake for \$90? Where has it gone from there?

[00:33:10] **Jewel Burgess:** My sculpted cakes, you're going to pay probably on the low end, maybe low end \$450 normal, about \$650, \$700 per cake.

[00:33:24] **David Crabill:** And what was it before, like when, you know, 2015, 2016?

[00:33:31] **Jewel Burgess:** It was \$125, \$100. I remember I made this big, beautiful green designer purse cake that took me literally 24 hours. And again,

that cake was under a hundred bucks. And now that I look back on it, it's like, oh my gosh. Like, But I mean, I had to put in my dues, I didn't know what I was doing.

I was learning as I went. That same cake would probably be \$650, \$700 now. And people know that that's how much these cakes cost. because it's artwork and you can try to go to someone and say, well, I could probably get this done for, you know, well, go, go ahead and try. you kind of get what you pay for

[00:34:19] **David Crabill:** For sure. I mean, it is a piece of artwork and it is an experience. So, you know, that's what people are paying for, but obviously, you probably get inquiries from people who are very impressed but don't necessarily realize how much it's gonna cost. Like how do you weed those people out?

[00:34:38] **Jewel Burgess:** Yes. That was a huge deal. In the beginning, I would get so many inquiries and then when I would quote them, they would, oh, no, I'm sorry. You're too expensive or whatever. How I fixed that was before you can put in your quote. I have on the quote page that it actually says how much my cakes start out at.

So I actually just updated my frequently asked questions and put that Right on top, but now it says, you know, cakes start out at \$300, because I will take your normal regular cakes, I guess. So those are gonna start out at \$300 and then it says, sculpted cakes start at \$500.

And those are just base starts because I spend at least the minimum 10 hours on a cake. So 10 hours, 15 hours, 20 hours. But that's what they start out at. And so I put that on there. People can see before they even put in their order. And that helped weed out a lot of them.

Inquiries that were saying, "Oh no, you're too expensive." I had someone go on Yelp and give me a one-star review because my quote was too high. I was so mad, but people just, they don't know. So you have to teach people.

[00:35:59] **David Crabill:** Well, what has been your most expensive cake or most expensive order that you've done so far

[00:36:07] **Jewel Burgess:** The most expensive cake was a tails cake, maybe two feet, I don't know, 18, each two feet high from the movie Sonic the Hedgehog. And that cake was \$780. It was probably as big as the birthday boy.

[00:36:26] **David Crabill:** Do you have a cake that comes to mind that you would say was your most challenging cake?

[00:36:33] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, let's see. The car cakes are the most challenging because I have to, actually, Every time I get an order for a car cake, I look up the actual blueprint of the car and use that as my template. So it has to be exact, and those are a lot harder.

But let's see. Well, the tails cake was pretty challenging too. You know, any cake that I have to build a structure on, my zombie cake was pretty difficult because I had to get the anatomy.

All right. Even though it was a zombie, because I built a life-sized hand head, the body with the bones and all that kind of stuff. So that one was. Pretty challenging, but I always say every time I get an order, I like stress about it and go, I don't think I can do it and my daughter always has to remind me, "Mom," and then she'll always say the last cake that I did.

"Mom, you just made a Lamborghini cake", or "Mom, you just," and I'm like, "Yeah, you're right. You're right."

David Crabill: Even today you do that.

Even today I do. Yeah. And I think it's just because every cake I do almost is like the first cake.

of that, kind or whatever. And so I'll go, oh my God, I don't know if I can do this. You know, and my daughter always has to bring me back down. She's like, mom, you're Cake Jewel mom, you did Halloween wars. And so I need her to keep me straight sometimes.

[00:38:05] **David Crabill:** What's the strangest thing that you feel like you've made?

[00:38:09] **Jewel Burgess:** Broccoli for a little kid's birthday party last year, a mother ordered broccoli. Her son was I think turning three and he loved broccoli So I made her kid broccoli. So, yeah. I got some pretty weird cakes, the ball and chain cake.

I love that one, but that one was for someone getting out of debt. And so it was a ball and a chain and the chain was actually broken symbolizing. The chain of debt has been broken.

[00:38:44] **David Crabill:** Looking back. Is there any cake that you could call your favorite?

[00:38:51] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, there's so many of 'em oh my gosh. My favorite cakes are probably the food cakes. The paint can is definitely one of my favorites, and the T-bone steak with the glass of beer cake. is definitely one of my favorite cakes. I just love the food cakes, because those are the ones that really fool people. But again, I always say each time I do one, it becomes my favorite.

[00:39:23] **David Crabill:** Is there a, would you say a certain style that you have? I mean, if you look at the other. People out there: Is there something that sets you apart?

[00:39:34] **Jewel Burgess:** Yeah. I would say what sets me apart is my level of detail in realism. Like I don't do a lot of cartoony cakes. I do cakes that you have to kind of take a second look at to see if it's a cake. I do like gravity-defying cakes, like purses that you can pick up bottles that you can pick up. So that's what sets me apart from a lot of the other bakers in my area is that I do realistic-style cakes.

[00:40:03] **David Crabill:** I will tell you, I, I haven't seen all of your cakes, but I did scroll through your social media account and there is a picture of someone holding a handbag and it's like this brown leather

[00:40:16] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, that's one of my favorites.

[00:40:18] **David Crabill:** I like, you could take a second and a third look at that. It looks like a handbag. it's, it's like you just, you can't even tell looking at it closely that it's a cake.

[00:40:29] **Jewel Burgess:** Right now that one, yes. I love that cake. And that cake was for a lady. It was her birthday and she was actually able to put that cake on like a backpack. And I took some pictures of her and then, later on, she cut it and she just, oh, this was delicious. But yeah, **That cake was put on the table with other purses surrounding it.**

And no one there knew that it was a cake until they started trying to grab the purses. And I was like, "No, no, no, no, no. Don't touch that. That's a cake." And they wanna argue with me and say, "No, that's not a cake." I'm like, "I made it. I know that's a cake." So that's what I'm known for and that's what I wanna keep getting better at like, I know there's people out there.

Well, you know, Natalie, I learned so much from her and Liz., And Timbo. Okay. Gosh, there's so many. But I want to be one of the best at what I do. And so that's why I'll keep on pushing myself. I'll keep on doing shows. I'll take it to the next level.

[00:41:36] **David Crabill:** You mentioned a few very famous cake artists in there. And were these people that you're just taking courses from in the early days, or maybe still are?

[00:41:47] **Jewel Burgess:** Yes. I've been following them for years. I followed Liz before she even started her Sugar Geek show. Before she was like, as big as she is now. Basically, I've been a sugar geek for the last eight years, and Natalie Sideserf, I've been following her for so long.

I watch her videos over and over and over. And so it was really exciting to be able to meet her. And then Timbo, I followed him before he, you know, got to where he is now. And then I was able to meet him when I took a class that he did. So I kind of look at them as my motivation or if I just keep pushing myself, I can be one of those where.

Instead of being a competitor. Now I'm a judge on one of those shows. I'm doing classes, every other week or whatever, teaching people, which I'm doing in October. I'm gonna be teaching a pancakes and eggs class. So I'm really excited about that.

[00:42:50] **David Crabill:** So these classes, how many people do you have in a class and how much are you charging for them?

[00:42:56] **Jewel Burgess:** Right now, I've decided to do a class of 20, between 15 and 20. I'll have two assistants with me, but for this particular class, I'll be charging probably 199. I'm calling it a master design class. So it's more than just the baking class, cuz I'm gonna have the cakes already done, but I'm gonna show them from start to finish, how to feel stack, cover a cake and then how to decorate it with fondant and make it look, you know, a realistic pancake, a stack of pancakes with the eggs and things.

I'm gonna show them how to do, chocolate silverware and Melted butter and syrup and things like that.

[00:43:45] **David Crabill:** Let's talk about equipment a little bit. I think one of the interesting things about you is that you like to use, I don't know what you

call like special effects or, just some really interesting things that you put in your cakes, light music. Can you talk a little bit about that?

[00:44:03] **Jewel Burgess:** I try to figure out different things that I can use. So I like to use light like when I do my Jack-'o-lantern cakes, you know, have the eyes light up or I made a keyboard that actually had 6, 9 buttons that looked like they were lit up. So they had lights in them and then they had sugar on top to make 'em light up.

I also like to use little voice machines, I guess like the same type of machines you'd use in one of those singing Christmas cards. I've used those on a couple of cakes. I had a customer who ordered a cake who wanted a drum set and she sent me her husband's music. He's a drummer.

And so when he hit the top of the cymbals I think it played his music. And so he was really excited about that. And then the keyboard cake was for my daughter's birthday, she's a music producer. So when she pressed the button on the keyboard, it played her songs. On one of the cake shows that I was on, we actually used lights in the eyes we made like a head come up kind of like they were taking a selfie.

I like to use remote control lights where you can click it and the lights will come on. I just started using dry ice for smoke. I used that in one of the Halloween War shows and I was so excited cause I'm like, let's use dry ice and they're like, yeah, good idea. So I got to do that and it just, it worked perfectly, we were just screaming and hugging each other.

And so I took that idea home and used that in a couple of my cakes. My next cake I wanna do is remote control. I wanted to move like roll.

[00:45:50] **David Crabill:** Well, yeah, definitely the first time I've heard of someone wearing a cake or having a cake move. So there's definitely pushing the envelope here. Would you say it was a piece of equipment that you invested in and it made a big difference or, you know, pushed your cakes to the next level?

[00:46:09] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, I use my jigsaw. Maybe about a year ago, I bought a jigsaw and that has made all the difference to me because now when I make my structures I can make them using weird shapes of wood and things that normally I wouldn't have been able to make.

Like I made a tall cake and I needed like a special shape for someone's head or something. I was able to use that to make that. So that's made a big difference. And then, using PVC, I just learned how to heat up PVC and bend PVC pipe. So that made a big difference.

I have to thank Liz Marek for that idea. She was excited that I was able to use that. So, yeah, I use a lot of hand tools, I love going into the Depot or Lowe's. I just walk around. It's like Christmas to me. That's what I always tell people. If you wanna get me something, give me a gift certificate to Lowe's because there I'm gonna get all my pipe, and all my iron rods and all that kind of stuff.

All my wood. yeah, I, so I have as many tools as my husband now, if not more.

[00:47:29] **David Crabill:** Obviously, if you've learned a ton over the last eight years, what do you feel like you still need to learn? Like where do you feel like you're not where you want to be?

[00:47:42] **Jewel Burgess:** I am not where I wanna be in sculpting faces and hands. To me, I can't be the best if I'm not one of the best, never gonna be the best, but I wanna be able to sculpt faces really good.

So I've been practicing. I've been looking for actually some actual college courses, some clay sculpting classes cuz if you learn how to sculpt clay faces, you can make that same thing out of chocolate. So that's actually what I wanna do. I wanna sign up for this year.

[00:48:16] **David Crabill:** So it, it sounds like your business has kind of grown slowly, organically steadily. Obviously, you have a full-time job, but it seems like maybe aside from the TV spots, you haven't had a, like a major change, you just have kind of grown and accepted the orders that you have time for. Is that correct?

[00:48:37] **Jewel Burgess:** That would be correct. Yeah. It really has grown, like you said, organically and slowly. So I'm probably not doing all that I need to be doing to grow it to where I know it could be. But That's where I have to stop and really take an account of where I'm trying to go and what I really wanna do in terms of building Cake Jewel,

[00:49:02] **David Crabill:** And where is that? Where would you like to take it in the future?

[00:49:07] **Jewel Burgess:** I would love to have my own cake studio that specializes in the types of cakes that I do. And I would love to have employees, to be able to help me, so that I can do this full time. And I wanna go, travel the world doing cakes. I wanna do cake classes. I wanna teach people how to do the types of cakes that I do.

I just wanna keep having fun with what I'm doing and like encourage other people that wanna learn how to do it. I had so many people help me on my way to where I am now in the cake community. And it's a really great community. I just see myself giving back and teaching kids and teaching adults and traveling and doing these huge cakes, you know, somebody calling me, Hey, I'm going to call you out, bring you out to New York.

Can you do this cake for us? things like that. So it is growing very slowly. Because I think things are just going so fast that I haven't really. A lot of time to just sit down and plan things out. And that's actually what I've started doing in the last few days.

[00:50:22] **David Crabill:** So if someone were starting out, they wanted to pursue cake decorating or cake art, you know, like what, you are doing, what sort of resources would you point them to? I know you said the community is great. Like where should they get started?

[00:50:37] **Jewel Burgess:** If they want to start out in cake art how I started, you know, going online on, you know, YouTube, becoming like a member of, you know, I'll give her a shout out, like the sugar geek show I'm one of her elite members. I. Consider that membership a must-have, like, that's something that as long as you'll have it, I'm gonna be there because it's always best to learn and be under someone who's been there.

Who's done that? Who's where you wanna be and get under them and learn as much as you possibly can and practice, practice, practice. I mean, in the beginning for the first probably, I don't know, five years, I probably did cakes every single day and learned every technique that I could.

That's why I'm able to sit back and say, okay, this is what I wanna do. I don't wanna do cookies. I don't wanna do this. I wanna do that. But yeah, taking classes. Design classes, art classes, color classes. You have to love art, love creativity and to be able to push yourself. So you have to try new things, try techniques, some things won't work. I've tried different techniques and had to scrap like a whole cake.

I'm like, well, that fell apart. That didn't work. Well, let me try this, so you have to be a lifetime student.

[00:52:07] **David Crabill:** I know you've not only been doing tons of cakes for customers, but as you said, you practice over and over and you're just making cake all the time. What keeps you going? Like does it get old? Like, why are you so passionate about cake?

[00:52:24] **Jewel Burgess:** Oh, sometimes. it, I do ask myself cuz you can get burned out in everything. And I think what it is that keeps me going is the ability to create something that brings a smile to someone's face or like wow. Someone or like, "Wow. Look at that cake." You know, I think I do it as much for other people as I do it for myself.

Like it brings me joy. To create. So if, when I'm not making cakes, then I'm painting, I'm doing, you know, canvas painting or, so I think it's the whole nature of the creative lifestyle is everything that I look at can be in my mind is a cake. So I'll take a picture of it and I'll put it in my cake folder.

it's called future cakes, So when I start getting burned out, what keeps me going is just the love of the art.

[00:53:22] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much, Jewel for coming on the show and sharing with us. You summed it up nicely there. If people want to reach out to you or learn more about your business, how can they find you or how could they reach out?

[00:53:37] **Jewel Burgess:** Sure they can find me at cakejewel.com, @cake_jewel on Instagram. And I also started on TikTok now under cakejewel. So yeah, a couple of different places that people can find me. Just you can Google Cake Jewel and I should come right up.

[00:54:00] **David Crabill:** Well, great. Thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:54:04] **Jewel Burgess:** Thank you.

[00:54:06] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/69 and I have to ask, are you enjoying this podcast? And if so, have you left me a review yet? If not, please head over to Apple Podcast right now and leave me

a review. A review is truly the best way to support this show and will help others find it as well.

And finally, if you're 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.