

Chocolate is Therapy with Gary Knight

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 Gary Knight who has a very unique startup story, but real quick, first I wanted to check, have you created a website for your business yet?

And if you have, do you pay for it? A lot of entrepreneurs still think they need to spend money to get a good website. And that is simply not true anymore. I am a really big fan of Square Online. That's what I use for my fudge business website. And I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a totally free website in less than an hour.

And in case you think free also means cheap, it's actually quite the opposite. I think Square Online is hands down the very best website tool out there for cottage food businesses, and it's even better than any of the paid services. So if you wanna learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to forrager.com/website. All right, so I have Gary Knight on the show today. Gary lives in Gardnerville, Nevada and sells beautiful hand decorated chocolates with his cottage food business Knight's Candy Shop. Gary has a really interesting story that starts with overcoming his alcohol addiction.

He actually started making and consuming chocolate to stay sober. And then a couple years later, he was in a serious car accident that left him with a traumatic brain injury. Well, amazingly enough, not only did making chocolate help him overcome his alcohol addiction, but it also became a form of therapy that helped him recover from his brain injury.

And as a result, he became an expert in making beautiful and delicious chocolates. And people started to say, "Hey, you should sell these." And that's exactly what he's been doing. As I said, it's a fascinating story. And today I get to hear what Gary has learned on his very unusual path to starting a cottage food business.

And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Gary. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:06] **Gary Knight:** Awesome! Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

[00:02:08] **David Crabill:** Gary, can you take me back to the beginning of this journey? How did it all get started?

[00:02:12] **Gary Knight:** Well as a former drinker, I started eating a lot of chocolate as you know, or may not know alcohol in your bloodstream turns into sugar. So when I quit drinking, we started eating a lot of chocolate, my wife and I both. Just little bits and pieces. We go to the fridge and, you know, get a piece of chocolate instead of going out to the garage and taking a shot of whiskey, just over time holidays would come about. We'd do a lot of hors d'oeuvre type situations like on New Year's day, hors d'oeuvres all day long. And, in addition to all of the different food stuff, we'd also would put out some chocolates and little by little just started, you making more for the holidays.

But when it really got to be a thing was when I figured out how to do it, right.. For a very long time, you'd pick up a piece of my chocolate would melt all over your fingers. It always tasted good, but it never looked good. It never had any kind of stability to it. And then I got hurt. Got into an auto accident and got a brain injury.

And for about seven months everything was avoiding light cause it would cause headaches avoid Sounds. I had balance issues. I had visual tracking issues where everything looked like it was coming at me too fast. All kinds of different things that I had to recover from.

But for the first seven months, all the doctors would tell me was to avoid everything that caused the headaches. So I did that. So I lived in darkness basically for about seven months, uh, I had a broken wrist also at the time and uh, a neck injury. Gave myself a little bit of guilty screen time. And just for whatever reason, started looking at chocolates and started delving into well they're shiny and mine aren't and that sort of thing.

And uh, during that seven months darkness, I was also extremely bored. And the only thing that had ever really kept me busy was making chocolates during my free time was one of the ways that I kept from wanting to drink. And so I started practicing what I was reading cause that wasn't screen time and I didn't have to be under bright lights or anything. So I was able to make chocolates and, have a little bit of joy in my life during that those dark months. When I finally got into therapy, turns out that therapy's exactly the opposite of what the doctors were telling me.

And it was, you know, get into the bright light and turn up the volume. And so for about three months I was in 24/7 therapy at this clinic. And one of the things

that they allowed me to do was to make my chocolates as a form of therapy. Little, did they know that leading up to that? I had been doing it you know, just to remain sane.

I taught myself to do everything left-handed including the digital art that I was creating for. I'm a big hockey fan. So for the San Jose Sharks, I would promote, just for fun. who are they playing against?

And I'd do some kind of a digital art with Sharks versus the opponent. And that translated into doing digital art from my chocolates. So it all kind of came, full circle, but basically I ended up having to do every single thing that I was doing left handed opposite side of the brain which again became therapy.

So my hashtag on everything that I post the very first one is chocolate is my therapy because that's what it's really been to me.

[00:05:20] **David Crabill:** Wow. So like, can you little bit of a timeline of how this all went down. Like I know that you said you got sober And then you stirred, getting better at the chocolates. It sounded like that happened before you got injured. Is that right?

[00:05:34] **Gary Knight:** No, not getting better at it. I'm just making it a lot. I was making it a lot, probably starting around 2017. When you're an addict, if you're, you know, in a bad place as an addict, it's a constant battle within your brain throughout the day to not do that thing that, you know, you're addicted to and making chocolates is a very long time consuming process, especially when you're first learning how, and it just kept me busy.

Kept me sane kept me from drinking, kept me out of trouble. For a couple of years, you know, I was making, I think I've got pictures going back to 2017, a very rudimentary molded chocolate. So I was using a silicon mold back then and putting in some basic flavors. I think I was making peanut butter.

Probably some mints, things like that. But again, it never had any shine to it. it wouldn't hold up to any temperatures. You couldn't pick it up without getting chocolate over your fingers, things like that. It wasn't until the brain injury where I really started learning how, and that was November, 2019 was the brain injury.

And by February, 2020, I had figured it out. And I actually made my wife a box of Valentine's chocolates that were shiny, that were crisp, that were the way that a chocolate should be made. And starting from then, I made probably a hundred

batches of different designs. Mostly the exterior was what I was focusing on at the time, trying to get it shiny, trying to figure out new techniques, new designs gave away a hundred batches of chocolates to friends, family, whoever would stop by if we had a service person at the house, they'd get chocolates.

If I could catch the mail person, I'd give them chocolates. I mean, just anybody. And it wasn't fun to make it unless somebody was eating it. And I would, you know, I didn't wanna be the only one eating it. I wanted other people to experience what, what I was doing. Cause I was really enjoying it. I said, as soon as I learned how to do it, right, I just went crazy with it.

So when I was at the therapy clinic, everybody was trying it and they had me do a class on how to do it again as a form of therapy for myself, as well as the other patients that were there. And they mentioned, you know, you should really sell this stuff. And so, while I was there, I created what is now the name of my shop Knight's candy shop and solely came out of trying to find a name that was available on Instagram, Facebook, and Gmail.

I wanted it to be the same in all three formats. So I started out looking at for Knight's Treats, Knights this, ended up being Knight's Candy Shop. And from there I created a logo and then just started posting all the pictures that I had taken of everything that I had made. Just teasing everybody. I think I teased everybody for about a year.

You know, little by little, you know, Hey, do you ship? Sure. I do not knowing about any laws or anything. So I was shipping my candies all over the country. And then when we retired December 20, 21, it's been a year now almost. We move out to Nevada and that's when I started looking up the laws and how do we do this?

Right. And so now we're a cottage food business here in Nevada.

[00:08:41] **David Crabill:** if I caught that, right you know, you really started to improve your skills when you're trying to recover from this brain injury. I mean, would you say that like in a weird way, the brain injury was needed to get you to the point of selling? Or do you think that would've happened over time, regardless since you were already, you know, busy making chocolates?

[00:09:02] **Gary Knight:** It might have happened organically. Anyhow, I think it was accelerated because I don't know that I would've spent the time and energy perfecting it the way I did without. I mean, I, I couldn't work for a year

because of the injury. So that's what I did during that year. Other than, you know, recovery was chocolates.

I mean, I became very less conversational since the injury. And I can tell you that 90% of the time when I wasn't saying anything, my mind was racing about chocolates, about a design, about flavors, about how to, you know, increase shelf life. All of it. My mind is constantly thinking about it.

[00:09:40] **David Crabill:** So you obviously learned a lot from experience. You were making a lot of chocolates. Were, was there other places you were looking to to learn how to improve your chocolates?

[00:09:50] **Gary Knight:** I've never taken a class or anything. Just Google YouTube videos. Uh, I follow probably 200, some odd chocolatiers on Instagram from all over the world. So I get to see their designs. Uh, sometimes they'll share a recipe. anytime I see a design, I always wanna learn, how did they do it?

And then how can I make it mine? I do the same thing with a recipe. You know, you'll find somebody else's recipe. And then once we try it out, we change ingredients for flavor, for mouth feel, there's all kinds of different things that are involved in creating what goes in. But yeah, it's all very time consuming, which is what I like about it.

[00:10:27] **David Crabill:** I saw a post where you said that you were given a gift holiday or something of the Pralinarium 4 book. And I, had not been familiar with that book, but it seemed like a pretty expensive book. Like, can you talk a little bit about that?

[00:10:41] **Gary Knight:** Yeah, I believe it's about a \$300, \$200 or \$300 book. It literally brought me to tears. I had asked for it and I should kind of go backwards by saying that my wife did not support my chocolate adventure early on. I tend to not stick with things. So, here I'm putting less money into all these things and she just didn't think I was gonna stick with it.

But when her and the family got together and bought me that book, it literally just brought me to tears because it was acceptance. It was them saying that they believe that I'm really gonna go after this, really gonna stick with it. And that was huge for me. There's a lot of techniques in the book.

That's where I wanted it. He goes into, properly tempering chocolate had a mold chocolate, and then he's got, you know, his signature designs that he teaches and

each of his book volumes has just fantastic artwork in it and everything else. And, and Andrey Dubovik is his name.

He's been one of the, the chocolatiers that I've been following and trying to mimic designs and then kind of make them my own. But yeah, that was huge. That was a, a really big moment in my life to have the family chip in and buy that for me. It meant a lot.

[00:11:52] **David Crabill:** Going back to when you were in the recovery period. And obviously the pandemic happened right at that time. Right after it sounds like you really started get the hang of the candy. Did that affect anything? Um, as you move forward

[00:12:08] **Gary Knight:** I will say that first of all, I was in seclusion probably about three to four months before the rest of the world was. So when the pandemic happened, it, it really had almost no effect on me except that now all of a sudden I'm wearing a mask to the doctor's office. I wasn't going anywhere. The only place that I went during those first seven months was to doctors.

Other than that, I was home. So yeah, I was very unaffected by the pandemic in a lot of ways that other people were affected

[00:12:40] **David Crabill:** Well, I don't know if you've thought about this, but uh, I noticed you started posting on Instagram, right at the beginning of the pandemic, and that also was a time when people were spending a lot more time on.

Instagram because they were home. So do you think that kind of helped boost interest in your Instagram feed?

[00:12:58] **Gary Knight:** quite possibly. I mean, that was right when I got into that was probably the first month of therapy when that, when I started doing all of that. Yeah. Yeah. I think it all coincided you know, people were, on the internet more. I was on the internet more you know, cause in between my therapy, I was either.

Trying to figure out what to I had all these pictures saved up from that year's worth of making chocolates. Right. So uh, I just was kind of like spreading them out every few days I would post something. So that occupied my time trying to decide what to post, how to post it. And then other thing I was doing was just taking notes on all of my therapy.

I wrote down every single thing they did all day, because I never knew what the therapy looked like. So I wanted other people to know what it looked like. So I've got a book that I could probably publish on what my therapy looked like, but I think just the fact that people had more time.

Absolutely. I think was able to build quite a following there and then I lost everybody because I can't ship my chocolates. So now that I got here, I'm trying that again. And I've built up a following of about 95 local folks here just since December.

[00:14:03] **David Crabill:** One thing I noticed when you're starting to sell your chocolates. I don't know if that was getting closer to the end of 2020, but you had been posting chocolates on your Instagram feed for quite some time. And then you posted like an announcement post announcing that you were selling chocolates and that got like 2000 views or something like that.

It was like that post did so much better than all of your previous posts and you'd been posting every single day. Was there anything that you did to like, get that much attention to that one post?

[00:14:42] **Gary Knight:** Think I might have done an ad on that one. But I will say that even though it got attention, it didn't get interaction. That's one thing I I've noticed about when I've tried running a Facebook ad or an Instagram ad, it gets you followers. It gets you likes, but they're not the people that are interacting with you on a day to day basis.

[00:15:02] **David Crabill:** you feel like Instagram hasn't really affected, your business that much? Like how have you uh, found success in getting the word out about your business?

[00:15:11] **Gary Knight:** Well, I think it has been successful just in different ways. When I was in California and shipping all over the country, those people found me through Instagram. Now that we've been here in Nevada, I'm you know, liking and hash tagging all the small town, things that are happening here and commenting and.

and reaching out to other makers, that's what we call ourselves, I guess. And the community, you know, we're doing farmer's markets now and the community's, everybody's just super willing to help each other. So as much as people helped me, when we got here, I'm also helping people that are, just trying to get into the farmer's market as well.

So it's just, uh, the Instagram lets people know we're here. That's really what it's about. I'm trying to get people to follow me so that they know that, you know, when I post, Hey, we're gonna be at the farmer's market on Tuesday. They know we're there. that's really what I'm using Instagram for is just to let people know where we're gonna be.

[00:16:06] **David Crabill:** So you know, you're obviously getting support from people saying you should sell these um, you started selling them. What was the reception like? Did your business grow very quickly or was it pretty slow? Like, take me through those first few months.

[00:16:22] **Gary Knight:** It's been about as slow as I want it to be. I, I have a fear of success. I, I think you might say, try not to do too much too soon. So what it has done is it has paid for me to be able to keep doing it, I guess, is the best way that I can put it right now. We're not making profit yet. We're still buying equipment.

When we got out here and started doing farmer's markets, now, all of a sudden you need some big fancy coolers that really work and you know, some display cases and this and that. So we put a lot of, not a lot, but. For us a lot money up front that we're still recouping in sales. So I can't say it's profitable per se.

You know, there's no, I'm not getting a salary or anything. I'm retired, so I don't care. But it's been successful enough in my opinion, because it's allowed me to keep doing it. That's really all I'm interested in at this point. It'll grow we're getting people to taste it, which was the key, you know, online, it only looks good.

And most people will say it's too pretty to eat. So some of them will hesitate to even buy it. Right. But once you get people tasting it and they take a step back and they're like, wow. And literally are saying that to me. That's awesome. First of all, just the feedback right away. But also once they're tasting it, now they know, okay, this is worth buying.

And so going to a farmer's market in 90 degree weather, Is difficult to sell chocolates, but as soon as you know, we're given away as many as we're selling, we're, we're bringing probably 30 pieces of like \$2 chocolates and we're handing them out to people just to get, them to taste it. And as soon as they do now, they're interested in, so now I'm getting, instead of me passing out my card, people are coming to me and saying, we might be doing an event soon.

I'm giving you my card. We'll be contacting you. So we're getting a little bit of that happening now. So it's, it's doing what I want it to do. Probably about as fast as I'm ready for it to be, I guess is the best way to put it.

[00:18:17] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I noticed that. I mean, you started in San Jose and then, you know, you moved and it kind of. Even though you've been doing this for over two years, you kind had a reset to your business. So you're still, you know, feel like you just did your first farmer's market recently. And so there's still a lot of like newness to where you are in your journey.

And I, and I really like that. I mean we will get into like what you're going through as you're kind of building this, but it seems like you're on an upward path towards something that could be pretty big. So speaking of the taste the flavors that you make I found were very unique like flavors you wouldn't think would be in chocolates, like balsamic vinegar, cayenne pepper, rosemary, smoked cinnamon.

I mean, they're just very unique flavors and Like, how did you, how did you go in that direction with the chocolates?

[00:19:11] **Gary Knight:** when I decided on these outside designs, right, it's very. Looking chocolate, if you will. I decided, I mean, I've had no offense to the mass marketers out there, seasoned and you know, all those, I love them, but sometimes you'll bite into a, piece like a fruit flavor, and you're not quite sure what that fruit is.

And I decided that when we were gonna do this, we were gonna make sure that the, the flavors were super potent. So when you bite into my raspberry, I mean, it literally tastes like raspberry. So, or literally just the raspberry itself. We just decided we were gonna go with really both. I should say. I decided it's all been me mostly.

I'm saying we, because I'm trying to get my wife involved in it more. As much as she resisted, I also, while I was learning, it didn't want. Involved in it, if that makes any sense. I, I wanna perfect it first, before I share with you, what I'm doing, I guess, is the best way to put it. So it's kind of been a separation of the two of us when I make it she's in the other room bored but now she's in support of me.

While I am doing it of course. I know that she knows I'm sticking with it, but uh, yeah, the bold flavors I just wanted, I didn't want people to bite into my chocolates and not know what they were getting as far as the creativity of it that

I think that comes from my wife and I have always just loved to cook and she's been through, I'm not eating wheat this month.

I'm not eating sugar this month kind of thing. And so we've had to adapt how we cook in work with a lot of different types of ingredients that you wouldn't maybe normally cook with. And so I think that's kind of sparked my creativity a little bit. I'll hear somebody, you know, they've baked a muffin and it's lemon and blueberry and I'm going home and making lemon blueberry chocolates.

You know what I mean? It'll just kind of come from that sometimes.

[00:20:57] **David Crabill:** So, can you overview kind of what some of your most popular flavors are?

[00:21:03] **Gary Knight:** Yeah. Some of the ones that you wouldn't expect lemon basil is, is a really popular, it's a ganache. I could also do it as a jelly, but that one is mostly lemon with just the hint of basil. You wouldn't expect it, but it's super, super good that one's really popular. Do island spice, pineapple, apple, which is a pineapple that's kinda macerated and some spices and brown sugar.

And then broil. And then turned into a puree and that's mixed into, you know, the chocolate and turned into ganache. That's a really popular flavor. The cayenne, when I keep the heat level down has pretty jar as a spice. I should have known when I was grinding it up. Cause I don't leave the spice alone. I grinded into a super, super fine powder and I could smell it, but I didn't adjust the recipe for it.

And it came out too hot. But typically my cayenne chocolate's a very popular flavor. What else that Rosemary that you mentioned was actually an accident? I don't know that I would make that unless somebody requested it, we were trying to do Rosemary apricot, the apricot got muted, but the Rosemary came through really, really nice with the chocolate.

So I found out that Rosemary and chocolate goes together who knew that was kind of almost an accident, but it worked. Let's see what else I'm known for my fruit flavors, my raspberry, my strawberry, my blueberry. I do those both in ganaches and in jellies. Mango's pretty good. Just mango isn't a real strong flavor, but the way I make it, it's kind of nice thing too. It's really nice. What else would you salted caramel? I've done an apple caramel that was really popular.

I've had to kind of alter my recipes since I've been to Nevada. So there's a lot of flavors that I haven't retried and just because the cottage food. Yeah.

[00:22:45] **David Crabill:** I did notice that it seems like you experiment a lot with the designs. You have so many new designs coming out all the time. And I was just wondering, is that like, just because you like creating the designs like, or is there is actually turning into new business for you? Cause I don't know. I would just think that you would hone in on your best sellers instead of creating so many new designs all the time.

[00:23:16] **Gary Knight:** I like challenging myself. when I see some of those fancier designs that you're referring to, when I see them, when other chocolate chairs are doing them, they're doing them as show pieces. They're not putting those in their store and selling them. These are like show pieces. And I decided that I was gonna try to do some show pieces and somewhat mass produce them.

It's difficult. The stripes and the splashes are, are relatively easy. Anything beyond that, it's pretty time consuming. So I just like challenging myself. I like to see if I can, you know, learn a new design and then take it to the next level.

[00:23:49] **David Crabill:** Have you noticed that there is time of year when your chocolates sell much better than others?

[00:23:56] **Gary Knight:** yeah, we're trying to do it in the summer right now. It's not working. Yeah. Typically like probably what you would expect for the most part. Christmas Valentine's mother's day pretty much is the gist of it. Everybody wants you to make the fancy Halloween designs, but nobody buys them.

Finding that out. Although at the farmer's market, we've had some success, so, you know, it's gonna be different out here because you almost can't do an event during the winter because of the snow here. we're hearing there's very few winter type activities for us to be, you know, putting up our little popup tent for, so it's gonna be different, but I mean, we sold, you know, a hundred plus dollars worth of chocolates in 90 to a hundred degree weather in these farmer's markets the last few weeks.

So I think they'll sell, it's just a matter of getting it out there to people.

[00:24:47] **David Crabill:** One thing I noticed that you do, that's great is that you will post a picture of a design that you made and, you know, obviously you can't see the inside and you, ask people like, What do you think the flavor

would be? And I just thought that was really cool, cause you're really getting your uh, fans involved in the process of making these.

[00:25:09] **Gary Knight:** Yeah, well, I've, I've noticed other people asking questions on your posts tends to get a little bit more responses. I'm also finding out that showing your process tends to get a little bit more attention. You know, I'm, I've learned just over the last couple of days, listening to some of your podcasts, some, some new tips, so those will be taken into consideration, but one of the biggest things that I've done that that's, I think been helpful is posting hashtags or ads of other local businesses that are also just trying to make it and we're doing that for each other and it's really been helpful.

There's a local baker in town and I bought some of her sourdough and then I took, you know, took some pictures of it and posted it for her. You know, I was a leather guy. I bought a wallet from, and so I've been promoting his stuff and, and he's doing the same for me. And, and with this type of a community, it, that just snowballs and it's been really awesome.

[00:25:58] **David Crabill:** So you've got, you know, obviously all the chocolates that you're making, but then you also like started a spice company too. Right? I guess it's part of the same thing, but can you talk a little bit about that?

[00:26:11] **Gary Knight:** Yeah, that's, I'm gonna call that one a failure. I, I tried, I actually shut that down. Um, Yeah, I was just looking for something, you know, that would spell during the summer to be quite honest with you because chocolates typically don't um, that was a couple years back. I was blending spices, smoking spices.

I, the one that worked the best was smoked pepper. So if anybody wants to start a spice, smoking company takes the spice the best. But yeah, we, we put together some spice blends. I had a, like an island spice blend. I had a Cajun spice blend, a couple others, but be quite honest with you, zero. Nothing.

And I think if I was to try it again and do it at the farmer's market, it might work. But that's not something for me. Anyhow, people were not buying that side unseen. I think if they'd just smelled it and tasted it, maybe they'd bought it. But yeah, that one didn't work.

[00:27:06] **David Crabill:** Well, Were you doing to try to sell it?

[00:27:10] **Gary Knight:** Same thing I'm doing with the chocolates posting it on, on Instagram.

[00:27:14] **David Crabill:** Okay. So yeah, just trying to post a spice online and get people to buy it on your website or something.

[00:27:20] **Gary Knight:** Yeah. I mean, you'd make a meal, you'd use the spice in the meal. You'd take a picture of, the food, right? Yeah. It just, it wasn't working. I, really believe that's one of those things. Just kind of like my chocolates really. I mean, you look at it, you think you want it, as soon as you taste it, now you want. And I think the spice might be the same thing. They might like the container. Maybe they didn't like, I mean, it could be anything, but once they're tasting it, that's when you know, they're really gonna be. They like it, or they.

[00:27:47] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I could definitely see how people could see your chocolates online, which look amazing. And they'd be like, okay, I'm gonna buy that. But a spice now that you're selling it farmers markets, and I think just in the past month you know, you just started doing that.

You could bring the spices back. I mean, they might sell well, once people can actually try them.

[00:28:07] **Gary Knight:** Yeah, I think so too. It was just something, I just, the way we were doing it, it wasn't working. But now that we are doing farmer's markets, yeah, I can totally see bringing that back. It's it's a possibility.

[00:28:17] **David Crabill:** So let's talk about the uh, chocolates themselves. I know that you've improved your techniques quite a bit, but can you describe a little bit about the process of actually making these very unique chocolates?

[00:28:28] **Gary Knight:** everything is uh, very time and temperature sensitive. I'll start with that. So just the mere fact of tempering chocolate. If, if your folks aren't familiar with tempering chocolate, it's bringing it up to a certain temperature, bringing it down to a certain temperature, bringing it back up a little bit.

And that's what makes it shiny and crisp. If you get those, if you hit all of those numbers just right, but while you're bringing it up and down to those temperatures, you also have to keep the chocolate moving. The um, crystals have to be moving. While they're warming and cooling or they don't set.

Right. So there's a lot to it. So when I first started, I was microwaving it every like 30 seconds. You'd take the chocolate out, try to stir it, put it back in 30 seconds, take it out, try to stir it, that one on for, I'd say a good five, 10 minutes before your chocolate's tempered. And you're stirring that crazy by hand.

And yeah, I don't do it that way anymore, but that was how I'd begun. So I would make anywhere between three and 24 pieces of chocolate. Cause that's something the molds hold just to practice, I was using the cheapest chocolate I could find. I, you know, it was just about how do you do it? And I was given it away, so I wasn't really worried about, but it still tasted good.

It just, wasn't the fancy chocolates that I'm using now. I'm using chocolate from Belgium uh, brand called It's just a superior chocolate. take a bite of my chocolates and, you know, there's a difference sets better. It melts much slower when you're handling it. Just everything about it, just the flavors better.

As far as making it so you're tempering the chocolate. You're tempering the cocoa butter. That's the colored part that goes on the outside of the chocolate. Once you get everything to temperature putting the cocoa butter in the shell, whether you're doing that with a paint brush, whether you're doing that, splashing it, whether you're doing it with a speckle brush, whether you're doing it with an airbrush that you have an airbrush set up with a compressor that I use one way or another, you're getting that colored cocoa butter into the mold, unless you're just doing a blank chocolate.

Once the cocoa butter's in the mold, then that has to set up for a certain period of time. Then you're getting your tempered chocolate into the mold. The weird part about the whole process is almost as soon as you get that chocolate into the mold, you're taking it right back out, literally dumping it over, making chocolate rain and basically creating just a really thin Shell's probably less than a millimeter on the top part of the chocolate, the shell that has to set.

Literally everything has to be at a perfect temperature. The room has to be at the right temperature. The mold has to be at the right temperature, the cocoa butter, the chocolate, when you get time filling, which is after you make that shell. Now you're piping in a filling that also has to be at a certain temperature and everything is a lot of hurry and wait.

You're doing this and then you're waiting for temp. Then you're doing this and you're waiting for temp for me. I know some people will, some chocolatiers do their shells and then they set them overnight. I have not had luck with that. So I

make mine all in the same day, but it is probably about a six to eight hour process.

Start to finish.

[00:31:26] **David Crabill:** Wow. So you mentioned that you did a tempering in the microwave for a long time. You're not doing that anymore. What are you doing now to temper the chocolate?

[00:31:35] **Gary Knight:** I invested about \$700 in a machine that is called Chocovision. And it's a machine that rotates the chocolate in a bowl while it heats it and cools it and hits those. And it's pre-programmed, although you can change it. But it's pre-programmed to hit those temperatures. So like, if you were tempering cocoa butter, you'd go up to one 11 degrees, then you'd bring it down to 80 degrees.

Then you'd bring it back up to 86 degrees. This machine does all of that for me while it stirs.

[00:32:04] **David Crabill:** And you're saying without the tempering process, like if you're just to melt chocolate over a double boiler, it wouldn't be shiny at all. Basically.

[00:32:13] **Gary Knight:** Yes and no, there's a cheat. When I was first starting, I wasn't tempering my own chocolate. When you buy a chocolate bar, if it's shiny and crisp right now, you can melt that down as long as you don't heat it to beyond probably like a hundred degrees. But if you keep it within a certain temperature zone, you can melt it, pour it, it'll set, and it will become shiny and crisp again.

So because it will stay in temper, but in general, yeah, you're gonna take it through those three temperature zones to temper it.

[00:32:45] **David Crabill:** Now you talked about the chocolate you use Callebaut chocolate what is that costing you compared to like a, you know, a more lower end chocolate?

[00:32:57] **Gary Knight:** It's about \$10 a pound. If you go to trader Joe's buy their pound plus bar, I think they're selling them for about \$5. So yeah, about twice as much.

[00:33:08] **David Crabill:** Where are you sourcing the chocolate from?

[00:33:11] **Gary Knight:** I'm buying it through Amazon. I believe it's coming probably through Bake Deco, which is a local company. Well, not local the USA company out of new.

[00:33:23] **David Crabill:** And I know you're also putting cocoa butter in colored cocoa butter. where are you getting that from?

[00:33:31] **Gary Knight:** Basically I'm buying almost everything through Amazon, but that's coming from a company called Roxy and Rich. I also use Chef Rubber. I've had success with, with the way they set those two brands.

[00:33:44] **David Crabill:** And then a third aspect of course, is the molds. And that's a big part of it. So what are you using for molds?

[00:33:52] **Gary Knight:** So when I started out, I was using Silicon molds. And again, I wasn't tempering the chocolate back then, so I don't trust Silicon molds. I just didn't like the shininess that they gave, even when I finally did figure out how to do it. Uh, So I'm using polycarbonate. So it's a hard plastic. Polish, like you Polish your car the shinier, you Polish it, the shinier, the chocolates are the better you temper it, the shinier they are as well.

So, yeah, I have I don't even know how many, probably 20 different designs. But once we got here and started doing the farmer's markets, I now have to do designs where I have multiple molds, just have one of each design. And now anything we're doing for the farmer's market, I won't do it unless I have at least three molds, which means that we're making about 63 pieces at a minimum for each flavor that we're bringing to the market.

[00:34:40] **David Crabill:** You said the process is like a six to eight hour process, but. How many actual chocolates can you make in that six to eight hour timeframe?

[00:34:49] **Gary Knight:** Depends on how hurried I am. I guess I should say. I like it to take a long time. That's part of why I make the chocolates. It is literally still therapy for me. So typically I'm doing one flavor. Three sheets, which is about 63 pieces, unless they have one design the sheet has 24. So it'd be 72 pieces, but typically three sheets of chocolate, one flavor I'll start between seven and nine in the morning and typically get finished around three o'clock

[00:35:16] **David Crabill:** That's, that's a lot of time but then again, you, you know, you got 63 piece of chocolate and you're, would you say you're selling in for like \$2 a piece? Is that right?

[00:35:25] **Gary Knight:** When I sell them individually, yes. At the farmer's market, we lower the price slightly. So I'm selling a six pack for \$10.

[00:35:33] **David Crabill:** but still, I mean, even if you sold every single one individually, you know, you're looking at \$120 of revenue for quite a lot of work. That's that sounds right. Right.

[00:35:46] **Gary Knight:** Yeah, no, that's about right.

[00:35:48] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So I can see why you said you're not turning a profit yet, but the upside is that as you invest in more equipment that has the potential to scale.

[00:35:58] **Gary Knight:** And I mean, like I said, I, I like it to take a long time. The, the real answer is if I really needed to pump it out quick, I could probably shorten that process. think I tried to surprise my wife, while she was on a shopping trip one day. And I think I made her a batch in about three hours.

So I mean, if I wanted to, you know, I could certainly make more, it would just be you know, would have to be different designs cause I only have three of each mold of the ones that I'm working with. Yeah, I mean I could scale it up. I'm just not in a hurry to do that, to be quite honest with you.

I'm just kind of what I'm really trying to do is, is I'm liking that the people are getting to taste it at the farmer's market. I think eventually it's gonna morph into more of a make to order situation. Whereas farmer's market, we have to make a whole bunch of product up front and hope it sells. And I don't think that's gonna be my long term model.

[00:36:48] **David Crabill:** It did seem like you've more recently beginning, a lot more special orders. you feel like that's uptick in the recent times?

[00:36:57] **Gary Knight:** Uh, Yes. And the potential is definitely uh, up ticking. And like I said, people are handing me business cards now saying we're having an event coming up. We'll be reaching out to you. So yeah, it's that's definitely, and that's what I wanted it to do. I was hoping that we, you know, getting some little orders here and there.

I never expected the farmer's markets to be quite honest with you, but we're having fun with it. It, I love the person to person contact.

[00:37:22] **David Crabill:** What was your first farmer's market day like?

[00:37:25] **Gary Knight:** Well, it takes about right now because like I said, we're slow, it takes about four days to prepare for it. So there was a lot of that. Um, it was two days of making chocolates. We decided that because there's gonna be kids around, we probably should do something for the kids. So we did some chocolate covered Oreos, and then we did a half dipped chocolate chip cookie and.

For our first event, not knowing what to do. We brought out a pop-up tip. We had a table out there didn't have any display cases. It was 90 something degrees. So we couldn't put anything out on the table. I put some digital photos in a, in a photo frame and put it out there on the table. People couldn't see it cause the sun was too bright.

It was interesting, but we kept samples flowing and we ended up selling a little over a hundred dollars worth of chocolate that day.

Basically it paid for what we paid for the booth, what we paid to make the stuff, plus maybe

[00:38:23] **David Crabill:** So your business is definitely still growing. And there's a lot of reasons why you do your business, right. As you said, it's therapy for you and that's, that's awesome. probably the real question is, do you think that somebody who is just trying to start a business, do you, would you recommend this as a potentially lucrative cottage food business for them?

[00:38:45] **Gary Knight:** I think the cottage food part of it makes it a little bit difficult in terms of the lucrative. I think if you were able to scale it to a professional kitchen, then you can put it in some stores and things, then you get that going. For us, I think it's gonna be a semi profitable side business, which is really all we want it to be.

We're out here where there's a bunch of lakes and things like that. And I don't wanna be busy every week making chocolates, but I do wanna be busy maybe every other week making chocolates. Right. So, yeah, I think for us, it's fun. We're able to play around with it, you know, kind of take it as it comes.

If I get too busy, I don't know what I will do to be quite honest with you. I'm kind of enjoying the pace right now. I hope it picks up a little. And I certainly expect that what we'll end up finding is that the farmer's market just gets us out to the people. And from there, the special orders will kind of just come organically.

I believe.

[00:39:33] **David Crabill:** So you said when you moved to Nevada, that's when you got. Set up legally and I believe you're the first guest I've had. That's from Nevada. Can you talk a little bit about what it took to get set up as a legal cottage food business in Nevada?

[00:39:48] **Gary Knight:** Yeah. Uh, Scott, uh, Scott Oblong is his name from the health department. He makes it super easy. The guy is super approachable. returns phone calls. He'll sit down with you face to face. You know, we did all of that. He knows food, so it was refreshing for me to be able to pick apart a recipe with him and talk about different ingredients and what would work and what wouldn't work.

And I'm pretty much able to make just about everything that I was making before with very minor modifications. and it didn't cost much. I think maybe \$35 for his permit. I had to get a business license. Of course, I'd forget what that was. Not a lot less than a hundred. I think. I took the food handlers course in Nevada, even though I've already done it in California.

So there's, I don't know, \$25 or \$30 for that really? That was about it. Most of it for us was just equipment. We had to buy coolers. We had to buy the popup. We, you know, a banner, that sort of thing. Now I've got display cases special ice that we're using that lasts longer. Just little, little investments like that.

[00:40:53] **David Crabill:** What kind of ice do you buy that lasts longer?

[00:40:56] **Gary Knight:** Don't remember what it's called, but there's a special ice that you buy. They send you it's like a packet with chemicals in it. Nope, no uh, liquid, you add water to it, seal it permanently. And when it melts ice melts at 32 degrees, right. This stuff melts at 18 degrees and it stays at 18 degrees the entire time that it's melting, it'll stay in a cooler for two, three days.

If you don't open it and, and you take it out, it'll still be cold.

[00:41:24] **David Crabill:** So I noticed that at one point you were trying to sell merchandise on your website as well. Like I, saw like a coffee mug or something with your logo on it. What was the motive for trying to sell the merchandise and did it work

[00:41:40] **Gary Knight:** I was the only purchaser of the merchandise. No, it didn't work. I think I was just trying to have more things in my store. I think

when you open up my store back then there was maybe three products and it just didn't look good to me. So I just wanted some things to fill the page. but no, it did not work.

Nobody bought anything from that.

[00:41:58] **David Crabill:** I've only heard of people being successful at doing that when they have it, like at a booth, like now that you're at a market and sometimes you get those sales.

[00:42:07] **Gary Knight:** Yeah. If you had the actual product sitting out there, somebody might pick up a t-shirt to buy it or something, but yeah, no, it was literally, it was just to fill the page. I didn't like how empty my store looked on the webpage.

[00:42:17] **David Crabill:** Now you said that you also added some products for the farmer's markets, like chocolate covered Oreos. Did those actually sell well, like you kind of added a different product line?

[00:42:30] **Gary Knight:** Yeah, they're actually, they're doing really well. Most people that are selling chocolate covered Oreos are dipping them. So you get this thin little layer of chocolate on them. Mine look like a hockey puck. I tell people it eats like a meal. It's just a really heavy cookie is a lot of chocolate around that.

Oreo. It actually, that is the most chocolate consuming product that I make. I can make bon bons, you know, 60 pieces and use maybe a pound of chocolate and make those Oreos. And we go through two, three pounds for like 24 cookies. It's crazy.

[00:43:04] **David Crabill:** And you're still using the Callebaut chocolate for those

[00:43:07] **Gary Knight:** Yes. sell. They're very popular.

[00:43:12] **David Crabill:** doesn't sound like they're, they're probably not profitable.

[00:43:15] **Gary Knight:** if you consider that they're a lot faster to make. There is a profit there. Believe it or not. I mean, like I said, I'm buying the chocolate for \$50 a pound, I'm sorry. \$50, \$55 for five pounds. So \$10 a pound when I'm

doing those cookies, we're making 20 for 'em, we're selling them in bags of three of those for \$5.

So we're making about \$40 when we sell the eight bags. And as far as how much chocolate I'm using, it's maybe half that. I mean, there's a little bit of a profit, not a lot. But we needed it for a variety. I've also got a gumball machine sitting on the table.. Brings the kids over. They bring their parents over the parents try the chocolates.

yeah, it's just, you try what you can to, please the crowd. So to speak there with a lot of kids coming to the booth, and we looked at each other after the first one that we gotta keep doing this. You gotta come up with something for the kids. So we tried dipped, marshmallow didn't sell well, but the few that tried it really liked them.

So we might do that again. I would love to do cotton candy cause I know kids love it, but you gotta have electricity for that. We haven't figured out a, a good way to do that consistently without having to pay somebody extra for it. You know? So, but yeah, I'm always bon bons is what I really wanna make.

But if having to come up with other products alongside those is what it takes to do it, then we're gonna do that. So yeah. It's customer-driven more than anything? I think,

[00:44:46] **David Crabill:** So we're coming up on Halloween. And you said something interesting earlier where you said that people want you to make the Halloween designs, but nobody buys them. You didn't list out the Halloween as one of your big holidays that you sell at. So these chocolates sell at, you would think that chocolate, you know, Halloween would be like one of your biggest seasons if you're selling candy?

[00:45:09] **Gary Knight:** No, I think it's quite the opposite. I think people have got a lot of chocolate in the house and I don't think they wanna spend money on it for a fancy box that time of year. but they like the designs. Right? So for, for optics, you know, you're making the pumpkin designs, you're making the eyeball, you're making the ghosts.

But I've not had a lot of luck. Specifically, just for those types of designs we may do better. There's a, wine walk coming up in town the third Thursday of October. So maybe we'll do better then because it's face to face, right? So people are actually gonna see them and try them, but we put some out last week uh, was real slow cause of the weather though.

But sold very few. my experience is there's so much candy in the house. They don't wanna buy more.

[00:45:54] **David Crabill:** You know, that makes sense now that you say it, but it just isn't what I would've expected. So that's, that's really interesting. I'd imagine that your products are just like, do really well as gifts, right? I mean, it's a very giftable product. Do you find that a lot of people are buying them for other people?

[00:46:10] **Gary Knight:** That happens quite a bit. I mean, you know, one of, one of the challenges, like I said is the farmer's market. these folks are going there for vegetables. I've, I mean, in California, you go to a farmer's market and everybody's, you know, at all of the booths right here, the lying is at the vegetables and fruits, and then they trickle around to the rest of the booths.

So it's, it's a little bit of a different atmosphere out here. So kind of breaking through that shell is, you know, new and different, but there's starting to become, you know, a few other booths. They're doing sweets, not chocolates like I'm doing, but. The more, you know, bakers that are out there. I think the more people will start buying more of that stuff.

Whereas right now they're just used to go in there for fruits and vegetables. You'll see them walk by. They won't even glance at you.

[00:47:00] **David Crabill:** Well, no, you know, I sell fudge with my business and I've noticed that for sure. Like during the summertime there, people aren't gonna be buying the chocolates, but I, I mentioned this cause you just started doing events. So you, you might, you don't have the experience of holiday season. I think you're gonna notice a big change in shift, especially, and maybe not even the farmer's market, but there's potentially could be holiday events coming up.

If you get into those. And you're selling at those I'd imagine these chocolates gonna be doing pretty well over the holidays.

[00:47:30] **Gary Knight:** Yeah, well, especially because in the cooler weather we can display everything a big difference when people can actually see stuff on your table as they're walking by.

[00:47:38] **David Crabill:** So as you think back obviously you know, the whole experience of, getting this off the ground was quite memorable, but has there

been any kind of stories or experiences that stick out in your mind as being really memorable as you built this business that we haven't already discussed?

[00:47:56] **Gary Knight:** For me, it's just been the reaction. I mean, to literally get somebody to take a bite out of your chocolate and say, "Wow!" And that's happened quite a few times and it's just really fun. We were at the farmer's market last Tuesday and this gal says, "What are these chocolates?" And I started describing them and she's says, "Where do you get your chocolate from?"

I said, "Well, it comes from Belgium." And she's, "Oh, I went to Belgium and I went to all their chocolate shops. And she was just going on and on about the chocolate at Belgium. And she took a bite of mine and she literally said to me, "This is A plus compared to what I had in Belgium." And I was just like, that's it. This is why I do it. To have somebody enjoy it like that. That's what it's about for me. You know, when you mention why all the different flavors, cause I'm trying to hit that one that's gonna make somebody just really smile.

[00:48:48] **David Crabill:** You've done this for a little while. Is there any advice that you would give to somebody who's trying to start out a chocolate business on their own?

[00:48:59] **Gary Knight:** Probably take out a loan. It's for us it's I mean, I don't think people have the patience to do it the way I'm doing. And literally as I sell a box of chocolates that pays for the next mold, I mean, that's how we've been doing it. And it's paid for the chocolate machine, you know, little by little, but it hasn't paid for, you know, us to go out to dinner or anything.

Right. So I would, yeah, I, it may be an investment upfront. Might be the best way to go that way you get all your equipment, you can be efficient from the get go. But I would recommend probably for most folks, a chocolate class, the stuff that I've gleaned from other folks has been a, a long, hard climb.

There's a lot of secrets. People don't wanna tell you how they make their chocolates shiny. They want you to take class and charge you a thousand dollars for it. And then they'll tell you how so for me to be able. Pick, although those pieces out and put it together was quite a challenge. So I, I would recommend taking a class from a, a recognized chocolatier and definitely just study.

I studied. shelf life of the interior. I studied how to make the outside better. What works, what doesn't work, you know, read about people's failures. I think I've heard some of the podcast folks that you've talked to say this, but your

family is not your only tester., I'm working on a cheesecake ganache recipe right now.

Everybody says you can't make a shelf stable cheesecake. When I'm working on creating a shelf, stable cheesecake ganache. And yesterday I had my wife taste it and she says, all I taste is white chocolate. I'm like, yes, it has a white chocolate base, but I put all of this other stuff in it. You should be tasting cheesecake and she just can't taste it.

Right. And I'm getting all frustrated. And then I had to remind. Other people need to taste it. so yeah, you definitely need a lot of tasters to refine a flavor or a product for sure. And yeah, I think having only family members who are on your side is not the way to go. You need critics.

[00:51:05] **David Crabill:** So knowing all that, you know, now if you were to go back and try to, you know, fast track your process a little bit more, which chocolate class would you take or who would you learn from?

[00:51:16] **Gary Knight:** I've been trying to take a class from uh, Luis Amado. I just can't afford it, but he's probably the best. But in terms of what you need to know how to temper chocolate, so you take a class on that, for sure. All the different tempering techniques and then shelf life of the interior. Those are the two most important.

[00:51:33] **David Crabill:** And do you ha like, what is Luis's class cost?

[00:51:37] **Gary Knight:** It's probably about \$1,500, I believe. He does them all over the world. Uh, He's based in Detroit. So that's where I want to go. He's doing one in, in New York. I think actually this week he does them in Barcelona. He does them in Turkey all over the place. But he's, I've learned a lot from him. Again, just looking at the pictures, kind of wrapped your head around how they do it once in a while, they'll show just a, a flash of behind the scenes.

And I just like do a screenshot and just look at everything in it. so one of the things I learned from him he calls it mise en place, which is everything in its place. And what that means is before you get started, you need it, all your tools, all your, everything that you're gonna use needs to be out where you can see it, or you can reach it.

That's probably the biggest thing I've learned from.

[00:52:25] **David Crabill:** So, is that a goal of yours in the future to, you know, like earn enough money to be able to take one of these classes?

[00:52:32] **Gary Knight:** Absolutely. Yeah,

[00:52:33] **David Crabill:** You said that you're definitely like liking the slowness of it and that it's providing a lot of value to you as it is. You don't want it to grow too much. I mean, are there any goals that you have for this business as, as you look into the future?

[00:52:48] **Gary Knight:** I think I just, you know, I'm in a small town, there is a candy store here. I don't want to replace them or put them out of business by any means, but we're doing different things. I'd just like to be the, the go-to when the folks in town think of a fancy box of chocolates.

[00:53:02] **David Crabill:** Very good. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing a little bit about your business and your journey. And if people want to learn more about you where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:53:16] **Gary Knight:** Well, I'm on Instagram and Facebook, both as Knights Candy Shop with a K everything else, spelled normal candy shop. And you can certainly reach out by email as well, knightscandyshop@gmail.com and believe that'll get you to my phone number and address as well locally here in Gardnerville, Nevada.

I'm only able to sell in Douglas county, Nevada. So anybody reaching out, keep that in mind, but if you're looking for tips or help or anything like that, certainly reach out.

[00:53:47] **David Crabill:** Awesome. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:53:52] **Gary Knight:** Thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.

[00:53:55] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/72.

And if you're enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be a long review, but

it's truly the best way to support this show and will help others. Like you find this podcast.

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.