

Denae Spiering with The Sugar Shack

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager Podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with Denae Spiering. But first, are you building an email list for your business yet? If not, you really should be collecting customers email addresses and emailing them on a regular basis. Even these days, email continues to be better than social media for generating consistent sales and the best part is that you own it.

[00:00:26] Once you build an email list, nobody can take it away from you. I personally use ConvertKit to manage email for my fudge business and I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a free email marketing system for your business in less than one hour.

[00:00:40] So, to learn more, you can go to forrager.com/email. Alright, so I have Denae Spiering on the show today. Denae lives in Bridgeville, Delaware and sells baked goods with her cottage food business, The Sugar Shack. Denae started her bakery almost a decade ago and she has now grown it to the point where she has an impressive storefront on her property and has many regular customers.

[00:01:03] But it wasn't a smooth ride to get to this point. In 2016, she stopped her business for a year and a half due to work, and then in 2018, when she had her sights set on a storefront, she broke her hip and shut down her bakery for almost two years. but shortly after the pandemic began in 2020, she refocused on her longtime dream of running a brick and mortar bakery, and in just three short years, she has made it a reality. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Danae. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:35] **Denae Spiering:** Hi, thank you. Thanks for asking me to be here.

[00:01:38] **David Crabill:** So, Danae, can you take me back to the beginning of this journey? How did it all get started?

[00:01:43] **Denae Spiering:** Oh, well I've been baking. From my home since 2013 but it was just on the side. I had a full time career. So it's something that I've just always, it started as a stress relief. If I was upset or stressed out about

something, I would bake. But that's been my whole life that I've done that. I didn't start actually doing it.

[00:02:00] As a side job till 2013.

[00:02:03] **David Crabill:** So, what was your career before this?

[00:02:06] **Denae Spiering:** I have a degree in human services and drug and alcohol counseling,, but I've done that in the field as well as for a little while I was a journalist specializing in addictions and cops and courts, things that was related to my field. And then I went back to the mental health field and in 2020, when the pandemic came along and... My career at the time, I was doing outreach like community organization type work and that changed everything. So, I couldn't no longer do outreach. I couldn't go door to door and I couldn't find out what the needs of the community were and how, best to serve them.

[00:02:38] You know, instead it was a lot of online meetings or a lot more marketing is kind of where my role started becoming. And, I'd lost some family members and some close friends due to COVID. And I just kind of realized, you know, this I'm not happy and life is really short. And what makes me happy is creating things with my hands and with my heart that make others happy as well.

[00:02:59] So it's not just about baking. It's for me. It's when someone eats something that I make the sounds and the joy that they feel even in why they're eating it, or when I give it to them or whatever it is, that That is what, what they say fills my cup and I just decided it was, that's what I wanted to do with my life from that point on.

[00:03:17] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I wanted to ask you kind of what brought you back into baking, because I noticed you've been pretty active on social media when you're doing the business, but I saw a couple hiatuses in there Going back through your Facebook feed I think between like fall of 2016 and April of 2018, there wasn't any activity.

[00:03:36] And then between, July, I think of 2018 and then mid 2020, there wasn't any So what kind of happened there that caused you to stop the business and what brought you back to it?

[00:03:48] **Denae Spiering:** so 2016, 2017, prior to that, I worked at the health department. I dealt with what they call medical assisted transportation. I had a lot of methadone clients. It was very taxing on my heart. I'm the kind of person

that, I'm quick to bring people home, you know, I want to fix everything in their world.

[00:04:07] And so that was very hard for me. So I left the health department and I actually became a journalist using my skills from that field. Focusing mainly on addiction cases everything from the opioid epidemic, heroin, to even porn addiction. I've done stories on and community as well. And that's sort of where I started building my community outreach background.

[00:04:27] I'm still baking on the side and sometimes in journalism, your biggest advertisers kind of get a pull in what your stories are. and I just didn't like that, dark side to journalism. So I began full time baking again just for a short period. And I thought I'm gonna. You know, see what this does and see if I can make something out of it.

[00:04:48] So 2018, I started actually looking for a storefront like a commercial space to rent. I'd met with a couple of people locally. And then um, my 40th birthday was June of 2018. I went skydiving with my son who turned 18 in June as well. And I. crash landed and completely shattered my hip, so it kind of put becoming a full time baker on hold.

[00:05:12] So then I had to go back into the workforce again and that's when I started doing outreach for a mental health facility.

[00:05:19] **David Crabill:** Yeah. Looking back at some of your posts from that time in 2018 you're a very open person and looked like you, you didn't know that it was just that you shattered your hip. It looked like you thought it might be cancer or something, like there was a pretty big concern there.

[00:05:33] **Denaë Spiering:** Yeah, so actually what had happened I couldn't walk and I was in a lot of pain and I went to the emergency room and they did a bunch of tests and the doctor came into the room with my husband and I and said we're not really concerned about your hip. We think you have sciatica, but we also think you have lymphoma.

[00:05:51] And I was like, that's impossible. Like, I can't walk. I fell out of an airplane. I broke my hip. I don't have cancer. Like, I can't walk. And they were like, well, we understand and, but we're pretty sure it's sciatica because part of the problem was it was so much inflammation in my hip that they actually couldn't see the fracture.

[00:06:09] So for about eight weeks, I went through PET scans and biopsies and, Eventually, I mean, even when I had the PET scan, they said, well, we don't see anything, but your hip really lit up. And I'm like, yeah, I know. I keep telling you it's broke. And so finally, once the I had a procedure where they do a CAT scan and they're trying to sort of aspirate things from the bone under a CAT scan.

[00:06:33] And right before they did it, they said under the CAT scan that they could see the fracture and that they did not need to follow through with that. So

[00:06:40] when all that occurred, I kind of had to reset opening a bakery and figure out, okay, what do I do now with my life?

[00:06:48] **David Crabill:** Yeah, but you obviously always kept getting pulled back towards the bakery thing. Was this a long time dream of yours?

[00:06:56] **Denae Spiering:** Yeah. Since I would say since at least 10 years, at least 2013. I just have a love of feeding people, even if we did this at my house today, I would have prepared a meal for you. Like that's just who I am. I, I love feeding people and it's not just about full bellies or it's, you know, it's more, for me, food is love.

[00:07:13] So that's really why I'm drawn to it and why it's just, it's just a part of who I am.

[00:07:19] **David Crabill:** So you kind of have this unique perspective because you stepped away from your bakery for a year and a half to two years on two different occasions and kind of came back to it with a different perspective. So when you came back to it, what was it like? Was it like picking right up where you left off or did it feel like you had to start over?

[00:07:36] **Denae Spiering:** No. So during 2020 so from 2018 to 2020 in 2018, I had

[00:07:42] posted on Facebook that, look, I just need to volunteer. I need to do something with my time. I've got to get out of the house. And a friend of mine who was the executive director of the mental health facility, she reached out to me and said, come see me, you know, even if you just volunteer, I might have a position for you.

[00:07:58] Come see if you like us. So I volunteered with her for a couple of weeks and then, I had a kind of a God moment. So I was feeling better, you

know, and I could, I could walk again. I knew it wasn't lymphoma and I'm driving into, into work and I go over this, the bridge and I just said, you know, if this is what I'm supposed to be doing with my life, if I'm not supposed to go back to pursuing a bakery and I'm supposed to continue on this path.

[00:08:22] Give me a

[00:08:22] sign. and I was kind of talking to God, but I was also talking to my father who he passed away in 2012, you know, and it's kind of like, tell me what I'm supposed to do, you know, show me something. So we get to work that morning and I follow another coworker into the building. We have a meeting like a big staff meeting that morning.

[00:08:39] She goes to the back door and I said, Oh, I didn't know we could use that door. And she says, yeah, you just have to know the code. And I said, Oh, okay. So I followed her and the code was actually swim. So it's the four letters you know, on a numeric keypad though, but with the letters and it was swim. So I don't know if you've probably seen them through my social media.

[00:08:57] I have a tattoo that says swim on my arm. My, Dad, years ago, I had posted on Facebook that I was tired of treading water, you know, always trying to keep your head above water sort of thing. And he just said swim. So for me, that, that's who my dad was. You just keep going, you power through, you know, nothing.

[00:09:13] He was a very positive person. So when I got to work that day and it said swim, I was like, okay, then I'm supposed to be on this path. and I did, and it was, wonderful. It filled. Many parts of me and, I was, being utilized by the community and helping people and it was wonderful.

[00:09:28] But then, like I said, when the pandemic happened and we're all forced to go home, you can't really do outreach. You can't gather your community. You can't throw block parties. You can't, you know, you can't do all the things that you have loved for the last two years. And it started taking on a more of a marketing role, more of a social media type role.

[00:09:45] And I was like, that's just not what makes me happy. I'm not a person that wants to sit at a desk 24 seven. So I said, well, maybe I'll just start baking on the side. So the first thing I did was I made a bunch of cupcakes and I just did what they call grace bombing. I dropped them all to people in their driveway.

[00:10:02] I rang their doorbell. And, you know, cause we weren't, we all had a social distance, so I left it on their porch. And just so that way, just random people, friends of mine, or family, or... just to bring a little bit of happiness and to make me happy because I was baking and, you know, making others happy.

[00:10:17] And then people kept commenting like, I wish you'd go back to baking. We miss it. And I thought, well, maybe, you know, I'm working from home. I'm not exerting myself physically. So maybe, you know, when I'm done work, I can make a couple of dozen cupcakes and sell them on, on the weekend.

[00:10:30] that's pretty much how it started. And then, So I lost my cousin. She was very close to me. We're only three years apart. We our mothers are sisters and we grew up like sisters. And she was one of the very first COVID cases. She'd passed away March of 2020. And that was very hard.

[00:10:45] And then the whole pandemic was hard. I lost a couple other people, community members that were close to me as well. I just kind of, with everything and then work, I just kind of realized like, This is what I want to do. this is who I want to be. This is what makes me happy.

[00:10:58] And it also allows me time to be with my family, to help my family, I do seem to gravitate back towards that because I think it is what I love doing.

[00:11:07] **David Crabill:** Yeah, and if I'm reading this right, kind of the other aspect of this, it sounds like you're pretty close with your community, like you're a pretty social person.

[00:11:15] **Denae Spiering:** Yeah, I'm very much an extrovert, so you can imagine the pandemic was very hard on me.

[00:11:21] **David Crabill:** Now, what was the reception like? Were you as busy as you wanted to be? Was it just a very, very slow growth process? What was that like?

[00:11:28] **Denae Spiering:** when I started it in 2020, I only did like slots, I would call them, and it would be like maybe ten dozen cupcakes, and that's all I would take. Like, I didn't want to do a lot of things, so, you know, because I also had Life going on and work going on. I was just doing it very limited more, not really as a business type, but more to just have something to do, I wasn't going to depend on it financially for anything. So I was only doing possibly about 10 dozen cupcakes a week, or, occasionally a birthday cake here or there,

I really wasn't pushing it. Or, I did not think at the time when I started it, I would be where I am today. When I started back up,

[00:12:02] **David Crabill:** So where did it really start to take off?

[00:12:07] **Denae Spiering:** So my husband and I, we bought a very old house in 2015. And it was. We joking, but you know, my, my kids were teenagers at the time and that we essentially bought would look like a crack house. And we decided to, you know, we were going to renovate this house, HDTV style and completely, you know, That was going to be our forever home and we learned that what you think will take two weeks, take more like six months and takes a lot of money and I like to say Chip and Joanna lie and we kind of put all our work into it and even on the weekends it sort of was robbing us of Other things and financially things that we wanted to do in life too.

[00:12:50] Especially my husband, he's, we're complete opposite people. So I wake up on Saturday morning and I'm like, what can we get into? You know, and my husband's like, Oh, here she goes, you know? Like, so when 2020, you know, came along and, my husband and I were both sort of just kind of reflecting on what we wanted our life to look like.

[00:13:06] And the market was doing really well. And my husband says, let's sell the house. And that was not something I ever thought was ever going to be something that I would ever do. prior to that, I'd moved 23 times in my life. This was what I wanted my forever home to be. So it was sort of hard.

[00:13:22] I had a lot of hard conversations with my husband over it, but he just wasn't happy and it wasn't his idea of a future that he wanted. so we agreed. If we're going to have other goals in life and we're going to want to achieve these goals and then this is one thing that we need to cut from our, our life.

[00:13:39] So we listed the house. I actually cried for the first two weeks and then we bought the house we have now because it's on a very busy road. It's on what they call route 404 and it is the main throughway from where people from Maryland go to the Delaware seashore. So we knew buying this house I would be able to have we would open this bakery. Where we would, you know, if that's what our end goal would be, we thought about a food truck. We've thought about all different ways to just make this the thing we're going to go for. like I said, we found this house and we, we figured this is perfect.

[00:14:15] And we bought the house and I just kept telling my husband how glad I was that he pushed me and how happy I was to not have to worry that our

house is going to fall apart all the time because it needed so much work. You know, an old house always needs work and that it really was the best thing for us.

[00:14:31] And it made the shop possible. It made the shack possible.

[00:14:35] **David Crabill:** So if I'm reading this right, sort of what was holding you back from moving your bakery forward wasn't... Finding customers. It was more just finding the time or having the space in your own life to do it.

[00:14:46] **Denae Spiering:** Yeah, I would say I've never really had trouble finding customers. I've never really thought about it as being a hill I had to climb.

[00:14:55] **David Crabill:** And why do you think that is?

[00:14:57] **Denae Spiering:** I guess because of, I am an extrovert. I do love talking to people and meeting people. so therefore, you know, I know a lot of people. A lot of that came from working as a journalist in the community and then working as a community outreach person and just, of course, social media, and word of mouth, whether I lived in Maryland or whether I live in Delaware, we're, it's still all very small knit communities, and, You know, once someone comes to a party, then they, they ask the next person, you know, where'd you get your, where'd you get the stuff from?

[00:15:24] And it just sort of grows from there. And I don't, mean, it's not like I don't have slow days. I would be crazy to say I didn't have slow periods, but it's not something that I'm ever really, I guess it's not a hill I've had to climb.

[00:15:34] **David Crabill:** Now as you were growing your business since 2013, were you aware of the laws? It looks like you didn't get really licensed until 2022, which I know Delaware is one of the hardest states to get licensed in as a cottage food business, but Did you know that you were operating under the table or

[00:15:53] **Denae Spiering:** So Maryland's a bit different. You just pretty much have to tell them that you're doing it and have labels. There's really not much, but you don't get licensed in Maryland.

[00:16:01] **David Crabill:** Yeah, so I didn't realize that. I didn't... Catch that you had started in Maryland first. That makes a lot more sense. So. So when you move to Delaware, obviously you're moving into a state that's much more

difficult from the cottage food licensing perspective. So what was that like to actually get yourself all set up and approved?

[00:16:19] **Denaë Spiering:** Oh, it was very nerve wracking. it is a lot different than Maryland. And there is no guidelines. There's no guidance for you to follow. When you email the health department, they say, check the regulations and they email you the regulations. Well. That doesn't tell you if you could make, cream cheese.

[00:16:39] It doesn't tell you if you can, doesn't break it down for you like that. And there's no real communication they, didn't answer the phone, but they would email you back, but it was very short. as you can tell, I like to talk. I want clarity. I want to have, you know, I have 10 questions. I don't want you just to answer one. So changes to the industry are very important to me.

[00:16:59] Getting people licensed and in our area is very important to me because. We can't grow and make changes if we do not unite and know who is, also a licensed cottage baker, or a lot of people don't even know that they have to have a license to do this, So want to be a very big advocate for our industry and making it easier because the process is not easy at all. There's specific things you have to do in Delaware. We, I had to take an eight hour ServSafe class. I had to have a floor plan of my home written up. I had to have proof that I have a valid legal septic system, have to have my water tested.

[00:17:34] I had to have submit every single recipe that I make including sub ingredients, you know, ingredients, sub ingredients and There's so much to that and it's so overwhelming when you first start doing it and you just sort of are like, I don't know how to do any of this. Like there's no guideline, there's no book for you to read.

[00:17:52] There's no, you know, so I've helped two other people get licensed just simply by answering their questions or giving them any part of my application that they want to go over. But I really wish that we could all come together to, Do that for others to help get us all licensed. I mean, the one woman that I helped get licensed, she's right in the same town I am, it doesn't bother me because I look at it like not everybody's going to like what I make, not everybody's going to like what you make, there's enough customers for us to go around and I think that we could do so much more together

[00:18:20] than we could ever do the way it is right now. and we could also teach people on how to get licensed and how this process that we have to go

through, wouldn't be as challenging and as daunting as it is if we had others to help us through it.

[00:18:35] **David Crabill:** A pretty unique situation you were in, right? Because you already had your business pretty well up and running and humming for many years before you actually went through this inspection and licensing process. What if you had lived in Delaware from the beginning? Do you feel like you would have been compelled to get licensed from the beginning and maybe been overwhelmed?

[00:18:54] Or do you think you would have just maybe operated under the table for a while because, you know, you probably wouldn't have submitted 58 recipes from the beginning.

[00:19:01] **Denae Spiering:** that's a hard question to answer because it depends on what I was going through in my life at the time. Sometimes baking was a safe place to have some extra income. Sometimes it was because there was things going through in life and this made me happy to do this on the side.

[00:19:17] So it all depends. Like 2013 when I'm starting to do it and people are ordering, things like that and I'm... I'm working or I'm not working. It really just depends. I, I don't know, like I probably would not have been as invested to make it my full time thing. Because I always had a job.

[00:19:33] Only when I wanted to become, Hey, I, I want to own a bakery. That's when I would have worried about it. And the first time that really was more of an attainable dream. I guess that's the answer. When it's actually an attainable dream is when I probably would have worried about becoming a legit business. When it's just something I'm doing on the side to make ends meet or to fill my time or to feed my soul, then that's not probably something that I would have even considered. But then when I want, like I said, in 2018, when I want to open a bakery, or I want to have a food truck or I want to have, you know, whatever it is, I'm figuring out how do I do this? then again, when I moved to Delaware, I knew, what our goal was, how do I do this? it's not really a question of whether or not the application process would have stopped me. it was more of a, what's my driving force behind what I'm doing?

[00:20:18] **David Crabill:** Now what was the kitchen inspection process like?

[00:20:23] **Denae Spiering:** I learned that it's not as scary as you think it is. I learned that they are more to help you than they are to shut you down or not

approve you. If you want to talk technical things I have a separate kitchen for cottage, my baking and a separate kitchen for my home.

[00:20:38] He tested things in my home fridge, just out of curiosity. little things like that making sure that I had thermometers and everything and thermometers in my oven. And you know, it kind of looked under the sink and there were things I already knew to expect But then there were some things that were unexpected, but overall, the experience was great.

[00:20:57] **David Crabill:** So, how does it work with uh, your kitchen setup? Because I know you have this separate building now that you're in your new house. Like, you have a whole separate building for the Sugar Shack, right? But do you actually bake in there or is everything done in your home?

[00:21:10] **Denae Spiering:** No, everything's done in my home. If I wanted to bake in there. That would have to be a commercial kitchen. for cottage industry in Delaware It has to be in your home or attached to your home.

[00:21:21] **David Crabill:** So, before you moved into your new home and have this, pretty nice building now when you were just selling out of your house, where were you selling? Were you selling directly out of your house? Were you doing deliveries? Were you going to events?

[00:21:34] **Denae Spiering:** Mostly out of my home people would come and pick up or sometimes I would go and do meets where people could meet me and pick up things. But We built the building and the building was, as you can see, was unfinished at first. It was simply just basically an empty shell. It looked like a garage and we started doing a farmer's market and the farmer's market's probably about 40 minutes away.

[00:21:55] And we did it for a couple of weeks and we had people coming from my town to this farmer's market just for my stuff. And it's not people I know it's, it's people, you know, in the community here in Bridgeville that were interested. So they're driving all the way to the farmer's market. And that made me realize, well, if they'll buy from me with a tent and a table, they'll buy from me from an empty shell of a building.

[00:22:16] So that's why we started selling out of. The building at first, and then we had never anticipated selling out of the building until we had walls, insulation, electric, heating, and air because of that sort of epiphany that this is silly, you know, we're driving and, and selling to a community we're not in when people are wanting us right here.

[00:22:34] we had opened up. Last July, I believe, when um, we've stayed open for a year until April when we actually closed down from April to August to do the renovation inside.

[00:22:44] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So you're, you're basically selling out of a garage and you know, didn't have any of the insulation in or anything like that. I can see what it looks like now. Super nice. I was wondering, you do this big renovation to make it all polished on the inside? Did you find that That has led to more sales uh, because, you know, of how nice it looks. would say it's probably about the same. But I do know that prior when it was just a garage, well, when it appeared to look like just a garage, Some people would say, Oh, you know, this looks like someone's garage. I did have a couple of people that would kind of be like, you know, that you could tell they weren't, they kind of snub us and, and, and they left, they weren't comfortable.

[00:23:27] **Denae Spiering:** And so I think that now. As a finished space, it appeals to people of both worlds. And I have had lots of my regular customers that I've had for the past year say, well, I liked it before it was cute before, you know? But to me, it wasn't what my dream was and I, I still had that goal in mind to achieve.

[00:23:45] So I wasn't, I wouldn't say I was embarrassed by the way it looked, I wasn't satisfied and I didn't want others to think that this was my end goal either.

[00:23:54] **David Crabill:** I could also understand that, like, you know, if people are coming into a facility, they, they want to know the food is safe and everything. And, you know, if it, if it looks like a garage, I mean, they might not realize you're producing all this in your, your own home kitchen, you know, but.

[00:24:07] It's just that feeling. I could definitely understand that. And now with the renovation like how long did that take?

[00:24:14] **Denae Spiering:** So from April to August.

[00:24:15] **David Crabill:** Well, it's a quite a while. And was that, I mean, it sounds like you guys did it a lot yourself.

[00:24:22] **Denae Spiering:** Yeah, we did.

[00:24:23] **David Crabill:** yeah. Do you know what, what it costs you to kind of get it up? I guess you didn't really have to work with the health department at all, right?

[00:24:31] **Denae Spiering:** No, no, because they are only concerned about where the food is prepared, which is my kitchen. And like I said, they, we did that inspection last year. So from the building finished renovation so far, we have spent close to \$50,000.

[00:24:45] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I could believe it. It looks super nice. I mean, it looks like a full on bakery and I guess you guys are on a main thoroughfare, so you don't have to worry about attracting people over to you, right?

[00:24:55] **Denae Spiering:** So yes and no is a busy road It is lined with lots of farm stands and a very popular ice cream parlor, but those are all about three miles up the road from us. So when you get to the stretch that we're on, it's more of a residential type area and farming. So I have flags out and have a sign out, but I think a lot of people are not.

[00:25:15] They're not looking for that anymore. You know, they've passed that area of businesses and they're sort of focused on getting to the beach or their destination. So most of my customers are actually locals. I've had a few coming through you know, that are either leaving the beach and going back across the bridge to, the Western shore of Maryland, and I've had, some that are just happened to see the signs in the, and they came through.

[00:25:36] But most of my customers are locals. Which is the opposite of what I thought would happen when I bought this house. I thought it would be the traffic that would be our main, customers, but it's actually not.

[00:25:46] **David Crabill:** Has that disappointed you at all?

[00:25:50] **Denae Spiering:** No, not at all. I I actually love it a lot more because I have regulars. I see the same people that, you know, every week. And I am very community oriented. So to me, that's, think it is perfect.

[00:26:02] **David Crabill:** Now, I noticed that, you know, you're closed for, what, about four months while you did this renovation and it looked like you weren't selling during that time. Why don't you just keep on selling out of your house?

[00:26:15] **Denae Spiering:** So, it was a discussion I had with my husband and we decided, because we were doing the renovations ourselves that... I take on too much a lot of times just recently I had a discussion with my husband that he needs to learn to tell me no because if it was up to me, we'd have, we'd have goats and you know, all kinds of stuff.

[00:26:33] So just like this past week I had the wedding. I'm sure you saw that on my post and I had to decide, should I have the shop open while I'm doing this, wedding? Like, can I do both? And then it's like. Yep. I can do it. I'm going to do it. And then, by the time it comes and it's here and it's like, Oh my gosh, I'm going to die.

[00:26:51] I'm tired. But you know, even Saturday after I delivered everything, I still did not settle down to the following day, cause it's, I've been running. On full speed all week. So for me, it was more about if I would have done that, I would have probably been burning my candle at both ends and we decided not do that.

[00:27:10] And it was probably a really good decision to not not try to do both. And it was something I wrestled with even during that process because I knew customers were waiting and I didn't want. To disappoint anybody. and I, every time I had to delay our opening cause I really thought it would take a month or two months and it ended up taking four, you know, I kind of thought I was letting people down and that was a big thing for me.

[00:27:31] I had a lot of anxiety over that. So I could have done it from my home in order to appease that. But wouldn't have done anybody any good. It wouldn't have done me any good physically or mentally, I don't think. So that's why we decided to, you know, flat out wait till we're completely done with the renovating.

[00:27:47] **David Crabill:** And then when you reopened in August what was that opening day like?

[00:27:52] **Denae Spiering:** It was amazing. It was wonderful. A lot of regulars came to see us. it was a very busy day. it filled my cup. it was wonderful.

[00:28:01] **David Crabill:** Now, if you think back, I know you, you thought that you were living in your forever home before you moved into this home. So, what if you had stayed in that home? Where do you think your business would be today?

[00:28:14] **Denae Spiering:** It would not be anywhere where it is now. So where we lived, we lived on the river. We lived in a very small town called the Village of Chop Tank. We lived down a really long dirt road. There was no place to put in a kitchen or have a storefront for people to buy things. It, just would be totally, totally different.

[00:28:31] It probably would not be what it is now.

[00:28:34] **David Crabill:** Do you think you would have tried to buy a brick and mortar or something in town?

[00:28:39] **Denae Spiering:** Yes. that's exactly what I was trying to do in 2018 and that's probably the route I would have tried again.

[00:28:45] **David Crabill:** So we haven't actually talked about what you sell. I know we know you run a bakery, but can you just run over some of the things that you sell and what are the most popular?

[00:28:54] **Denae Spiering:** Predominantly I do cookies, cupcakes, pies, sweetbreads, full size buns. Those are pretty much the standard I have every week, along with braided breads, dinner rolls white bread, wheat bread. And then on Saturdays we do focaccia and donuts and cinnamon rolls. So cinnamon rolls are a very big, very big draw and cupcakes.

[00:29:15] So like I mentioned before, three miles up the road, there's probably at least maybe, you know, five or six produce stands all in a row. They all sell baked goods. every one of them sells pies and sweetbreads and cinnamon rolls and doughnuts. But they're mostly shipped in from Dutch country, Pennsylvania.

[00:29:32] So I do have that to compete with. But so I would say cupcakes are a big draw because I have those and they don't.

[00:29:39] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like the cinnamon rolls are popular, the cupcakes are popular. Are there certain items that you're particularly known for or certain flavors are unique or that you're known for?

[00:29:49] **Denae Spiering:** I would probably say the focaccia bread. Most people love that or they come for that. and cupcakes. I don't really know of a certain flavor they prefer. My biggest seller is vanilla. it's called Very Vanilla and it's just vanilla cake filled on top of vanilla buttercream. And I have it every week because it is the most popular one.

[00:30:07] Which, a gentleman a couple of years tell me, people probably come to you for the gourmet flavors and not for a basic cupcake for that. They go to Walmart and I'm like, no, actually vanilla is my top seller. So I don't really know other than maybe, like I said, the focaccia bread that people do love and know that they can get that here.

[00:30:23] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like quite a lot of different bakery items that you sell. Do you have most of those in stock every week? do you, bring things in stock seasonally?

[00:30:33] **Denae Spiering:** So the only thing that changes seasonally is the flavors. fall flavors is more pumpkin, apple, spice. Pretty soon I'll start doing more gingerbread. Gingerdoodle, snickerdoodles, fall type things. Summer, of course, is always berries, strawberry. People love strawberry cupcakes.

[00:30:48] But I do always have the same items. The only thing that changes seasonally

[00:30:52] is the flavors.

[00:30:55] **David Crabill:** And I saw that. Your donut recipe was from your great great grandmother.

[00:31:01] **Denae Spiering:** Yes. Yeah. Lena.

[00:31:02] my mom found the recipe and she said, we should, you know, you should try making these. So I, I made them, this was before I had opened. so I made them for the family and everybody loved them. So it was really important to my mom for me to make them. And. For me to have them on the menu.

[00:31:18] It was her great grandmother and my great great grandmother. the recipe I have is handwritten. And it's handwritten by her daughter, which is my great grandmother. And it hangs on the wall in the shop and I have. pictures of Lena and George, that was her husband as well as her daughter, which was Tona So I have a little section in the back by the big chalkboard of, my family. the generations there.

[00:31:39] **David Crabill:** It looked like your mom is pretty involved in the business.

[00:31:43] **Denae Spiering:** She is, she comes on Thursdays. So Thursdays are my crazy day because that is when I do everything sweet. So cupcakes, cookies,

brownies, pies, cakes, all that is made Thursday. So by the time two o'clock rolls around and the shops open. I'm not always ready. My kitchen might still be a mess or I might still be a mess.

[00:32:02] So my mom comes probably, you know, around noon on Thursdays and she'll wrap things for me and label things for me. And she'll open the shop and meet customers and things like that until I'm cleaned up and ready to go. But she is a very big supporter of it.

[00:32:15] **David Crabill:** And I saw a post about your mom on your social media and saw that she owned a business for over 30 years, I think you said. So is this kind of like in your blood, like she was an entrepreneur? Did you always know you were going to be an entrepreneur?

[00:32:31] **Denae Spiering:** I don't know so much about it. If it's being an entrepreneur, it's more about the lifestyle that we have and enjoy being able to be available for family. Of course, self employment makes that easier. As well as not following, I don't like to follow, structure as much. We're sort of kind of more of a free spirit sort of thing.

[00:32:50] So we do better as our own boss, you know, and it's just like my mom, she reupholstered furniture for 30 years. She didn't know how to do it. She started doing it when I was. In middle school I mean, she still has phone calls today, people calling her to reupholster furniture.

[00:33:05] And she's like, no, I'm sorry. I'm retired, you know, because it's hard work, but it's not about the thing that we're doing. It's about the feeling that comes from what we're doing. So I do get that from my mom.

[00:33:15] I, and I don't necessarily know it's an entrepreneurial spirit. It's more. I guess it's, it's, a lot of ADHD probably doesn't do it, but it's just kind of who we are.

[00:33:27] **David Crabill:** It looked like you have had family members involved in a lot of different aspects of this business. Seems like even though most of it falls on you, kind of a family business in a lot of ways.

[00:33:38] **Denae Spiering:** My niece actually is Riley. She's on there a lot. She is 11 years old. She is my sister's oldest child. She spends a lot of her time with us. She's very good at making focaccia. She can actually do it by herself now. She runs the register like a champ. Her little brother is actually ran the register. they love helping out in the shop and they love being a part of it.

[00:34:04] And they love Riley especially loves the social media aspect. she loves her fans as she calls them. And I have had a couple come in and tease her that they want her autograph, you know, cause she's on our, our social media so much.

[00:34:15] Um, my husband of course is always, always a helper. He comes in just last week when I had the wedding on Friday night, you know, he's out running the shop and I'm in the house. making a wedding cake. It very much is a family business in that aspect is that they're all supportive in what I do and they all enjoy it as well.

[00:34:32] **David Crabill:** I also see that you do some non baked items too honeys, jams, is there other things that you sell?

[00:34:40] **Denae Spiering:** So I do the jams and jellies. My mom and I actually do, she's, she's been canning her whole life. Her family's from West Virginia. So she's taught me canning and she comes and helps me do it. Some of the things, you know my stepfather either grows or, you know, we're buying locally from a friend of my husband's that has a farm.

[00:34:59] So. The other things, I, I always joke with my customers and say, if it's edible, I made it. If it's not edible, somebody else made it. Because even as far back as 2013, when I did dream of maybe someday owning a bakery, I always wanted to have artwork that my friends make. I have, a lot of my friends are very talented, and I wanted to be able to... Just sort of support them too and have this space that, you know, showcases everybody's talents. So I have, I believe there's nine different vendors in there right now. They're all local. And they have to make it themselves. If they don't make it themselves, I, you know, I'm not interested in, carrying it.

[00:35:35] I don't want, you know, something that's mass marketed.

[00:35:37] Um, Even Riley has her own little section where she makes bracelets.

[00:35:42] We call her Butterbean. So her bracelets are called Butterbean's Beads and she makes them herself. She bought it with her own money. And it's so funny to see other, it's always kids that are buying her bracelets. So it's like kids buying something from another kid, which is, I think is pretty cool.

[00:35:56] I guess it's, that's the community part of me too.

[00:35:58] You know, I think it's, and other people like it. They like coming in and see the other local things are here too. And, and that's from our community.

[00:36:06] **David Crabill:** I get the sense that this is not a money making endeavor, right? Like having all these things is really just... To be a support to the community.

[00:36:13] **Denae Spiering:** Well, that's just not who I am. that doesn't drive me. So whether it does or not is great. It's great. Like if it pays for itself and we make a little extra, and it is a profitable thing, that is wonderful. But that is not. it's not who I am. I it's not what it's about for me.

[00:36:31] **David Crabill:** So along those lines, you know, we haven't talked about pricing, you know, it might not be a part of you, but you obviously have to think about making sure the business is sustainable. So how do you price your items right now?

[00:36:43] **Denae Spiering:** Well, they've sort of grown with the economy based on, you know, what I'm spending on products are dictates whether or not I have to raise the prices because it does have to pay for itself, but just because I'm not driven. By, a profit margin doesn't mean my husband doesn't want to see that, wants to see that we're, that we're being successful.

[00:37:02] but I still do, like, my cupcakes and my cookies both. If you buy them by the dozen, You only pay for 10. The last two are free. Pies are probably the hardest thing to price because I feel like most times I probably do lose money on pies even though they are \$20 a piece. But when you buy fruit along with your time that profit margin's pretty slim.

[00:37:20] But it's one of the things people do love, they come to our shop for. it does have to change with... what we're putting out. we at least may have to put that back in. And guess the biggest thing when it comes to is what I'm left with. I don't, at the end, I'm only open three days a week.

[00:37:35] So on Saturday at one o'clock, what I'm left with is not only products that I have to figure out what to do with, I look at it like a deficit, and I kind of look at it more like, okay, you know, that's money that went out, the money that didn't come in. But also, why not? why weren't we busy this weekend?

[00:37:51] Or why didn't, I make usually 12 dozen cupcakes a week. This past week I had two dozen left. Why? like, did I not post enough on social media?

You know, so those are more the things that I focus about more, I guess, with when it comes to that, the business end of it is sort of what I have left.

[00:38:06] The dictates, you know, and I do wonder, like, okay, is it my prices? Can I up my prices? Should I lower my prices? You know, I mean, I guess that's something that everybody thinks about but they've been pretty much the same since I opened and I, I don't plan on changing them anytime soon.

[00:38:18] **David Crabill:** What do you do with your extra inventory if you have it?

[00:38:22] **Denaë Spiering:** depends on what I have. so most of the times I will post it and say, these are the things I have left. You know, if you'd like to meet me out in the shop, I'll meet you and usually things will go right away and I'll kind of update the list as it goes on because sometimes people do have other things on Saturday and they can't get here by one o'clock, you know, they have kids soccer games or whatever.

[00:38:41] So they, you know, they can come Saturday evening or, you know, even Sunday afternoon. So sometimes I'll do that, but like this past weekend I was tired and I, I was kind of like, I don't, I don't want to be attached to my phone. so we will take them and we take, them over to the police station.

[00:38:55] a lot of time is given to the fire department in our town and to the next town over. You know, with a little thank you note my mom, she will always take any leftover bread. and my grandmother, she likes certain things too, so if I have something left, and if there's focaccia left, they will...

[00:39:10] They will fight for it.. I mean, most of the time I just, I, I give it away unless there's, unless there's a substantial amount.

[00:39:20] **David Crabill:** And what are the actual prices that you're charging currently?

[00:39:23] **Denaë Spiering:** So cupcakes are three 50 a piece and it's 36 for the dozen. Cookies are two 50 a piece. It's 25 for the dozen pies are 20 full-sized bun cakes. They are 25. Donuts are a dollar a piece if donut holes are three for a dollar. Small sweetbreads are 6. Large sweetbreads, I used to have them for 10, but I actually lowered them to 8 and they seem to do better.

[00:39:45] I rarely have the large ones because a lot of my, I would say majority of my customers are retired. And they're just, couples and they, that's too much

for them. So I, I started out making the large ones and they said, can you make these smaller? So now I, predominantly make the smaller sweetbreads, the one pound size.

[00:40:02] And like I said, they're 6. Most of my breads are 10, focaccia is 12. hand pies are five small items like brownies, Rice Krispie treats things like that are three dollars, oh, cinnamon rolls are five dollars a piece and they're pretty big and then I do a personal pan of cinnamon rolls, which are smaller than The giant ones that I sell, but you get six in the pan and they're 12 for the pan.

[00:40:25] **David Crabill:** Now, in terms of what ingredients you use, like, I could tell that's pretty important to you, like what goes into it, like where you source your products from.

[00:40:36] **Denae Spiering:** Yes. I'm a big stickler for artificial colors. I used to do, the colored cupcakes and the sprinkles. And I mean, I started doing this business making cakes, custom cakes and, and cupcakes. but I think it's really important that we start paying attention to what we're putting in our bodies.

[00:40:52] Especially our kids and a reason that some of these things are illegal in other countries that they're not, in the United States. So just being healthier overall is important to me and I just had the same discussion with my husband over the weekend because I would love to switch to everything organic, organic flour but I don't think. The prices you have to charge in order to make that profitable, I don't think it's as important to the world as it is to me. I don't think that's a business model that would actually do well. I hate saying that and I think that's kind of sad, but I think a lot of people don't read labels.

[00:41:26] they don't mind what they're eating. And. I would love that that was the case that I could switch everything to organic that didn't have any bioengineered materials in it. But I don't, I don't know if that model would, do well in my area.

[00:41:38] **David Crabill:** And I see you also have biodegradable packaging for the most part.

[00:41:43] **Denae Spiering:** Yeah, I, try to stay away from plastic as much as possible. It's really hard. It is very hard to package things and not use plastic, but I do try. I do try as much as I can.

[00:41:53] **David Crabill:** I imagine it's quite a bit more costly for you to be making these choices, right? And they probably don't necessarily have a return on them,

[00:42:03] **Denae Spiering:** Again, that would be where the pies come in. I could easily go get canned pie filling and dump it into a pie plate with pre made dough. But I like supporting the local farmers and then having the fresh fruit, knowing what's in it. I mean, that's, it's just important to me and the world is changing, So. I mentioned that, you know, my mom and I, we have some ADHD going on and my son as well. My, son has, you know, it affects him daily. My brother is 32 and actually he lives in LA, he lives in Sherman Oaks and he has ADHD. We've all seen the way it affects our lives and my mom. Even as we were kids, she did not allow any artificial colors.

[00:42:41] what they used to call the KP diet. So when you have ADHD and ADD, you know, you're supposed to stay away from these types of chemicals because they, can react with the chemicals in your brain and kind of set you off. And I followed the same thing with my son, you know, like it was hard and challenging to not give him things that were, you know, a popsicle that's got red and blue colors in it.

[00:42:59] yet his sister can have it, or you're at a birthday party and, even my nieces and nephews, you know, it's, their mom did the same thing where it's like, you can't have these things. But the world is changing and the world is, there's a lot more things now available that are colored naturally and flavored naturally than there was, 20 years ago.

[00:43:17] So, It's moving that way and where it will be, not just a couple people here and there that find it important. I think that eventually it will. it's just not here yet.

[00:43:26] **David Crabill:** I had noticed when I looked at your social media feed that you, you did used to do a lot more cakes, especially before 2018. So has that shift been because you want to steer away from the artificial colors or is that just because there isn't as much demand for them anymore?

[00:43:43] **Denae Spiering:** Oh no, there's a huge demand for them. I turn away people probably every week. So part of it is the colors. But part of it is also I just don't have time. I don't have time to spend 16 to 30 hours on a 3D cake when I'm doing everything that I make for the bakery every week, There's just no way to do both. People do like them. So I've been sharing kind of my old posts, you know, I'm going to do once a week here and I have thought, well,

maybe I could take on one or two here or there. But it would be very limited and I'm not sure how that would work out because like I said, I just, the wedding I did This past weekend she grew up with my daughter, so I've watched these kids grow up, and when she first got engaged, I was the first person she reached out to for a wedding cake. How could I say no to that? You know, so, so it's like, I don't do cakes anymore, but I will, I got you, you know, and if her brothers and sisters get married, I'll probably do one for them too.

[00:44:37] There's just some people you can't say no to and you don't want to, you know, you want to be a part of their special day. So to me, that's, I'm honored to have been asked when they could have went anywhere else. I don't know if doing those 3D birthday cakes is something that I do want to take on.

[00:44:54] They are fun and it feeds that creative soul. But there's no time in them and, The money's not really in them either. if you go time for what you put into them, but there's not, there's definitely a demand. I do get asked all the time, but I always, I turn them down.

[00:45:07] **David Crabill:** So what does your weekly schedule look like? You know, your production schedule. How do you make it all work?

[00:45:14] **Denae Spiering:** so on Sundays my husband and I go to church. Then we go to Sam's club sometimes I only buy minimal stuff of, just what I need. And sometimes I buy bigger in bulk so I don't have to keep coming every week. But usually we go every week regardless because there's something I always need, especially confectionery sugar.

[00:45:30] So so Mondays is what I call my free day. Mondays is when I, clean the house or I answer a lot of messages on Facebook or I help family do things or you know, when we were canning, me and my mom would do the jams and jellies then so it's kind of a day that I can fill in X, Y, Z with Tuesdays, I start planning what my week's going to be I work on social media posts Sort of kind of the behind the scenes type sort of thing.

[00:45:55] I do cookie dough and buttercream and make that ahead of time. I freeze the cookie dough. It's all portioned out and then I freeze it on trays and then pop them off and put them in Ziploc baggies. sometimes I do that on Tuesday, sometimes I do that on Wednesday. Thursday morning, that's when I, I wake up and I start, turn the oven on, and the first thing that goes in is cookies. And while the cookies are baking, you know, and they're coming out of the oven, I'm doing cupcakes. I try very hard. To never have the oven running with nothing in it. So if the cookies are coming out, cupcakes should be going in.

[00:46:25] When cupcakes are coming out, sweetbreads should be going in, muffins, etc. There should be a steady rotation. And then I like to have all that done and out the door by one o'clock. So I have that last hour before I open To change, kind of clean myself up, get the flour off my nose, you know, sort of thing and be ready to open print labels.

[00:46:44] I also do a lot of that on Tuesday, too, I'll print labels. Wednesday is usually when I put the menu out, and I probably could do it a little sooner, but I'm, kind of a procrastinator on that sometimes I like having a menu because then I'm like, I know what I'm doing, but other times I'm like, Well, I could be more creative if I wouldn't have locked myself into what I'm supposed to make this week.

[00:47:00] or I don't get something done and I'm like, Oh, I was supposed to do that, you know, and I, I said I was going to have that on the menu and I forgot it, you know, sort of thing. And then Fridays is, bread day. So it's a, it's a much slower paced day than Thursday. I get up and I, you know, start the dough, and I work on other things while it's rising, and then, you know, I make the bread, and it's a more relaxing day.

[00:47:20] It's not like it's not busy, because usually bread day, about 1:45, people start pulling in, and they're kind of lined up waiting for bread. it's not necessarily a slower day, but it's a slower paced day, I guess. You're not really worrying about the oven changing over as much, you know.

[00:47:35] And then we run the shop until six o'clock. I bring in dirty dishes, wash all them every night clean the floor if it needs it, you know, from people coming in and out sort of run the vacuum cleaner, mop if I have to. And then... On Saturday mornings, we get up, pretty early. I get up around five and I take the focaccia out of the fridge cause it's I let it do the rise over.

[00:47:55] I start the focaccia on Friday and it sits in the fridge overnight. And then on Saturday morning, I get up at five. I put it in the oven with, you know, the light's been on all night. So that way the oven's nice and warm. I put it in the oven and let it do its things for, you know, for an hour before I have to dimple it and why that's going on.

[00:48:10] We're making donuts. So I'm, got my big bowl and I'm making the donuts and we hand, I hand make them like bread and then I roll them out and, we cut them. My husband fries them in our, cast iron skillet. So they're very much like my great, great grandmother used to make them.

[00:48:23] And then we just get ready for the shop to open and that's pretty much, and then when the shop closes at one o'clock, I deal with if there's anything left. And then we go about our, our weekend, whatever we have planned for the rest of our Saturday. And it starts all over again on Sunday.

[00:48:36] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I know you, you do all these different things. You wear so many hats and you're still pretty active on social media. Do you have a strategy there? Like, how do you keep that all up?

[00:48:48] **Denae Spiering:** I think that's pretty much how my brain goes. My brain works. I'm just a hyper person. I get it from my mother. My grandmother is in her eighties. Uh, She fell and broke her hip and within, coming out of the hospital a week later, she's climbing the stairs doing laundry. Like it's sort of who we are.

[00:49:03] We can wear many different hats and do many different things. the flip side of that is. we don't know how to rest. She doesn't know how to rest. My mom doesn't know how to rest. I don't know how to rest. And I think I put on there the other day on one of the comments.

[00:49:16] I, Desire to be a person that can read a book, that could curl up in a chair with a cup of coffee and a book and read. I would love to be that person and I try so hard to be that person. But I can't because it's like, what should I be doing right now? I could be doing something else. And one of the things from when my role in 2020 did shift from doing community outreach to marketing, I learned a lot of social media.

[00:49:39] I did a lot of webinars and I was in charge of our social media. So I learned a lot of things. I learned a lot of tricks. I learned about the insights. I learned about how posting every day is important. And. Even when, being a journalist, I learned, the human aspect of things is what draws people in.

[00:49:55] And it's no different than on social media. The human aspect really helps in marketing and really helps in social media. And I'm also an open book. have no problem telling you my life story or, sitting down and having a conversation with anybody. and I think that is important to me. I'm sure you've seen the post that's pinned at the top of my page, like about, who you are is your business card. that really stuck out to me because grew up watching Cheers when, you know, Hey Norm, you know, he comes in the door.

[00:50:21] I, I want that. I want my customers to enjoy my space as much as I do. I joke and I tell my husband, you know, I'm going to be the soup Nazi, you

know, from Seinfeld, be like, no cupcakes for you, you know, when people get mad, when I get mad at people, but that probably will never happen because that's just not who I am.

[00:50:39] But sometimes you do feel that way,

[00:50:41] **David Crabill:** I'm just thinking about this dream of yours to create this bakery, and, it's come so far, do you feel like you're living that dream now? Like, is it where you want it to be?

[00:50:52] **Denae Spiering:** almost. I have a couple more things I'd like to accomplish. I'd like to have a bathroom out there and a sink so I can wash my hands and wash the pans. I would like to grow it, to have a commercial kitchen in the back. There's a, good space that we left for that purpose. So those are business goals I'd like to achieve.

[00:51:08] if you look at the shop I have two tables four chairs that sometimes people do sit at. I have a little loveseat in a chair. I have a record player in the back. So business wise, my goal is to expand the kitchen for, I guess, the heart of my business. I want it to be the Hangout. I want it to have people come and play records and hang out and drink their cup of coffee and have a donut or have a cookie.

[00:51:31] And I always joke and say, I want to be the old man hangout. I want to be where the old men come in and have the town gossip and, eat their donuts on Saturday mornings. I, I want that community aspect. I have that as far as my customers and, you know, we all know each other. I have one customer who his wife calls and orders, her name's Peggy, and the very first time I said, can I have a name for the order?

[00:51:52] And she says, Peggy. So he comes in and tells me he's here to pick it, you know, up what it was. And I said, Oh, you must be Peggy. And he kind of got a kick out of that. And so then I said, okay, Peggy. So his name is Phil. But I call him Peggy and he jokes back and he says, okay, George.

[00:52:08] Well, the funny thing to that is that's my maiden name. And he had no way of knowing that. So even when we, we ran into each other at Applebee's recently and you know, he's, I'm like, Hey Peggy. He's like, Hey George, you know? So that part of the community, that kind of heart of the business I do have started, but I would really like to see that.

[00:52:25] piece grow. I kind of want it to be where, the little hangout spot.

[00:52:29] **David Crabill:** As you think back over the past decade or so, are there any stories that really jump out to you?

[00:52:37] **Denae Spiering:** I do have one. That was pretty heartfelt. I don't know if you saw that we got hit by the tornado in April. A tornado came through our area, which is super rare. It came right through our yard and we had an Easter bunny event planned and we had to cancel it. And I had had a customer a couple of weeks before that come in he had an Eagles jacket on and my dad was a big Eagles fan.

[00:52:54] And we were just kind of talking about that and, my dad and just, we started talking about chickens and all kinds of stuff and his name ended up being Cliff and that was my dad's name. So I was kind of like, well, that's kind of weird. So after the tornado hit we didn't have power and we had ran over to our daughter's house the next morning to get cleaned up and get coffee before we started cleaning up the yard and sort of the chaos that had happened.

[00:53:14] And there was a note on my door that said basically like wanted to see if you needed any help. I guess your dad sent me Cliff and that just made me cry because he'd only been in my shop once, but, it was just sort of, like a God moment kind of thing for me.

[00:53:28] and we did have several other customers that stopped and offered to help us clean up and they don't know me other than buying goods from me, you know, but I have so many customers that become friends and I guess that's. That's an overall story of, what my shop is for me.

[00:53:41] **David Crabill:** So, you said you're trying to eventually build a commercial kitchen into the back of your shop? And... why are you wanting to do that? Is that... For wholesale, is that to just be able to sell more types of products?

[00:53:53] **Denae Spiering:** Well, it is the wholesale and that's one of the things like I would love to change in Delaware's cottage industry is that we're not allowed to wholesale. And like I mentioned, all these produce stands, they've all asked, if they could sell my goods there, even the antique store in town has asked.

[00:54:07] So wholesale, yes, would be a great aspect, but. It's also the most frustrating thing for me as a cottage baker in Delaware is that if I decide, you know, this week that I'm gonna put sage on my focaccia you know, instead of rosemary or I'm gonna do both. That's considered a whole another recipe.

[00:54:27] That's considered something I have to submit and in Delaware we have to submit it in March. So we have to know in March what we're going to make for the entire year. So when March, when I turn in any new additions or when I turned in my original application, it had to have everything I planned on making for the whole year. As a first year person, Starting out, you don't know what your community is going to want. You don't know what they're looking for. So when they come in and they say, you know, do you make hot cross buns? Well, yeah, I can, but I'm not licensed for them. a customer of mine just stopped by and brought me pears from his tree.

[00:54:59] I don't have anything on my, In my application or in my recipes, I submitted that I do anything with pears and guess what I can't use as pears because I have to make things that we've submitted in March for the entire year, like I said, If I had a commercial kitchen, I don't have to do that. I can. Come up with a new recipe and Make it and I get it. Okay, because I don't have a three compartment sink or you know, all that stuff But here's the thing. They are ServSafe trained. Their managers of their kitchen are serve safe trained. Just like I am I'm required to have the same training you come into my kitchen inspect my home just like you do a commercial kitchen and if you want to do that yearly I'm open to it.

[00:55:35] I have no problem letting you in my house do it every year. In fact, I wish they did because then I could tell my customers, I am inspected every year by the health department. I welcome it, but to limit me when I have the same training as someone running a commercial kitchen is not fair and that is.

[00:55:50] Probably the main goal in connecting all of us cottage bakers so we can make changes because if I know for a fact that I can't serve certain items, I can't make a cheesecake, I'm not going to make a cheesecake. But if I want to... Maybe make an almond flavored buttercream by using almond extract.

[00:56:08] But I didn't submit that in March. I mean, that's kind of crappy, you know? So a commercial kitchen for me would alleviate a lot of that. And we do have the occasional person that comes in and says, so you bake in your home, you know, and, and they sort of have expectations of how my business should grow as well.

[00:56:26] I do take their criticisms or not necessarily criticisms, but feedback, and I do understand that people probably would like that a little better. And then the last reason why that would be a goal for me is because I could be open more.

[00:56:39] So if I'm in the back of my space and I'm cooking and baking, I can come out and wait on customers. I can, you know, have bread in the oven and come out and, you know, it, it just makes...

[00:56:49] And the amount of products I could do would probably be a lot better. And it wouldn't be in my home. I wouldn't have to, could have a separate space and just kind of close it and then have my home as my home.

[00:57:02] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like it's kind of taken over your home?

[00:57:05] **Denae Spiering:** no, because I is chaotic as I, as, as I, my thoughts are and my brain works. My. baking things are very organized. And I'm the kind of person that I don't even like magnets on my refrigerator. I don't like anything on my counters. the toaster even goes under the cabinets for me.

[00:57:20] So whether I have a cottage bakery or not, I have a standard which my house is always. that makes me happy. So no, don't think it's taken over. have things in places they're organized and they're hidden and they're need to be they're filed away sort of thing.

[00:57:34] **David Crabill:** So why do you love running this business so much?

[00:57:38] **Denae Spiering:** Because I love feeding people. I mean, that's what it boils down to. that's it for me. I just, food is love. It's something that I can do and something that I'm good at and it makes other people happy. And that in turn makes me happy.

[00:57:52] **David Crabill:** Well, Denae, thanks so much for sharing all of that with us. Now if somebody would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:01] **Denae Spiering:** the Sugar Shack on Facebook is always the best way. My phone number is listed there. They can always call. I would say if they are in Delaware and they want to become a cottage baker or they want to learn more, please reach out to me because I really think that we should have be, have classes.

[00:58:15] I would love to have people sit in my shop and we all teach each other how to apply, what the application process looks like, what your application should look like, the things you need, because nobody was there to do that for me. And there are changes to our industry we need to make. And if we're not doing that together, we'll never make the changes.

[00:58:34] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:58:38] **Denaë Spiering:** Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:58:42] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

[00:58:45] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/102.

[00:58:51] 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.

[00:59:02] 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.

[00:59:13] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.