

From Empty Nester to Cookie Business Explosion: How Tammy Brennan Transformed Her Life

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 Tammy Brennan, who has an amazing cottage food journey to share with us today.

But before we begin, I wanted to thank the sponsor of this episode, Cottage [CMS](#).

Cottage CMS is a newer platform for cottage food entrepreneurs, and I honestly was pretty skeptical of it at first, but I have checked it out and it is very impressive. Cottage CMS will be particularly helpful if you find yourself juggling a lot of different tools and find yourself frustrated with technology. I will talk more about them later in this episode, so you'll wanna stay tuned for that. And also a special offer for Forrager podcast listeners.

Also, remember that we're now doing video episodes, so if you're listening to this on a podcast player, know there is also a video version of this interview. You can go over to YouTube and check that out, and I'll put a link in the show notes so you can see that.

Alright, so let's talk more about my guest today, Tammy. She lives in Vancouver, Washington, and sells gourmet cookies with her cottage food business. Tammy's cookie company.

This interview is actually meaningful for me personally because Tammy reached out to me over three years ago when she was just thinking about starting a cottage food business. She signed up for my free mini course, watched all the lessons, and actually implemented the things I recommend in that course.

What's funny is that she says she botched my advice, which led to her having one of the craziest launches and starting points of any cottage food business I have ever seen, which was, I guess, an indication of the craziness that was to come. She has now had amazing success with her cottage food business.

She has hour-long lines at her booth at markets, and has now more recently started to move away from making cookies and started to become an online influencer in the cookie space. She has over 150,000 followers on Instagram. And it's now teaching people how to make cookies and also selling her recipes.

And what's amazing is that she started this business from absolutely nothing. She had no business experience. She was an empty nester in her mid fifties, and she also bootstrapped everything. She started with almost nothing, and she didn't even know how to make the kinds of cookies that she now sells. So. This is a really great story about kind of starting from nothing, and ultimately you'll hear how her cottage food business changed her life.

I especially recommend you stick around till the end of the episode because she talks about how this cottage food business has changed your life and what it's meant to her. It's pretty touching and it will kind of help you see how a cottage food business could change your life too. So we have a lot to get into.

Again, this is an amazing journey and let's jump into my interview with Tammy.

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

Tammy Brennan: It's nice to be here, David.

David Crabill: Tammy, I know you've built up this amazing cookie business, but I wanted to talk about what you did before that I know you've been selling or making baked goods for a very long time. So take me back to the very beginning of this journey.

Tammy Brennan: Well, it all started when I got an Easy bake oven as a child, and I was absolutely hooked. Mother was not a great baker, and so I would be watching television programs, uh, on how to cook. This was before the food channel came out. And then once the food channel came out, I was really hooked. I just loved learning information and, um,

The next thing I knew, I started making tiered cakes and next thing you know, people are asking me to make cakes for weddings. you know, special events, auctioning them off. And so I started doing that. However, I did not actually sell anything until I started my cookie business. It was all sort of volunteering and doing these things for friends.

David Crabill: When did you start doing that?

Tammy Brennan: I, uh, started when my daughter was around five years old and she, I'm now a grandmother. And so she, uh, gosh, that would be about 20, uh, 20 years ago, 22 years ago I started doing that. And um, and then I started doing things like, uh, being, uh, in charge of all the food for, uh, she was a swimmer for hospitality and feeding the coaches.

And all of a sudden I'm making food for selling at swim meets to people who would, you know, buy food from the concessions. So I started producing food like that, but again, never being paid for it. And everybody kept saying, you really need to open a bakery. You really need to open a, you know, bistro.

And it just wasn't a stage in my life that I had the time to do that. And then when my daughter moved out and, you know, an empty nest, I kind of thought, oh gosh, I'm a little lost without, you know, all that in my life. What do I need? You know, and know, during COVID I'm rolling my own pasta and, you know, I'm, I'm doing all these, filling my fridge, you know, freezer full of nochi and special treats and 'cause we couldn't go anywhere. And I sort of, I realized that I sort of needed to do something for myself now that, uh, that allowed me to express my creativity, learn some new skills.

I just didn't want to sit on the couch and sort of wait and for life to pass me by before I realize, you know what, I just wanna see what I can do, what, what I am capable of. And see if people are interested in that.

David Crabill: I saw that you mentioned somewhere that you had self-esteem issues. You actually like not doing great when you are stuck at home during COVID and you're an empty nester. So what was that period of your life like?

Tammy Brennan: It was difficult because, you know, I had just gone through some big changes in my life and then you just feel a little lost and you're hitting that point where you know, you, your body's changing. I, you know, I had a knee replacement. I, you know, life just was different for me and I didn't seem to have a goal, a reason to get up in the morning, just to be excited about something, to do, something to focus on.

And, you know, and then that's where anxiety sets and you start focusing on problems. And I just sort of felt like I, um, I needed something to prove to myself that I was capable and that, um, I was just, gosh, you know, I could do hard things. And, uh, and I just, after a time in my life where I just struggled so hard and I probably didn't rebound as well as I thought I should, you know, or as quickly as I should. And I just. I just really felt like, okay, here is something I can do I want to do, and that, you know, I have no idea if I'm gonna fail. I'm gonna flop if this is gonna be a disaster. And, uh, for a while there it was, but, uh, I just, just kept being me and I just kept putting myself out there and being vulnerable and saying, this is hard.

I messed up again. And then people just started, started tuning in and as that started happening, I started growing and gaining some self-esteem and realizing that I am much more capable than how I was feeling at the time.

David Crabill: So I know that you started this business around the beginning of 2023. Did you have any business experience before that?

Tammy Brennan: I did not, I had zero business experience. you know, I dabbled here and there. I made handmade jewelry and I sold that, um, probably illegally. I didn't know, didn't know I was supposed to have business licenses or anything like that. You know, I did some gardening and would pay me in gift cards and, you know, garden design, just everything that was very creative. But I didn't have any business experience. Um, married to a businessman, which is really funny, uh, because he kept saying to me, oh my gosh. Um, where's, you know, where's your business plan? Where's your business plan? I like it. Business plan. You know, I'm just gonna make it up as I go along. You know, I, I don't know.

And, uh, you know, I'm panicked. I don't know how to do any of these things. I don't, I don't even know where to start. And that's when I came across your website and I was like, oh my goodness. Because back then on social media, there really wasn't that information out there as well. And so you were the only person I, you know, that was out there that I could find, giving out where to start.

And I just sort of glommed onto you at that point as my savior to figure out how to do this. But, um, I really bumbled my way through it, so it's just, I'm just going to prove that you really don't need to know. You just need to be willing to figure it out and to move forward and keep moving even after mistakes and being clueless.

There's ways to find answers if you look

David Crabill: I, I was looking back at some of our emails back in the beginning of 2023, and, you know, you stood out to me as someone I, I think I even told you, I said, I, I, I'm almost positive you're gonna be successful just based on like

Tammy Brennan: I remember.

David Crabill: How you were communicating with me and, and what you were doing more importantly.

But, you know, it was kind of a crazy time. Right. Can you tell us a little bit about how you launched your business

Tammy Brennan: So, in one of your, uh, discussions on your website, you talk about how you got started and told everyone, you know, told people that you went on next door, or next door neighbor. I can't even remember the name of the app. And I'm terrible with technology, so I'm like, perfect. I'm gonna do that. I am going to go on and, uh, you know, find local people and see and bake some cookies, give them out as samples and see what people think about that. So I go on, and then when I sign up, I put my location down and within five miles. So when I put my first post up saying, you know, who wants to try some cookies?

I, I introduced myself, put a picture of myself, I, you know, buzz, nothing, nothing. And then you advise me, well, I'll try to do it again in a week, but this time post photos with it. So I post photos of my cookies. And the next thing I know is like, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. I'm getting all these requests, uh, with people's addresses. And I'm like, completely overwhelmed because I'm realizing I'm gonna have to make all these samples and deliver them. And I said, you can have like, it closes in a week. Well, I had to shut it down early because it was insane. And then I realized that when I made the post, I was supposed to post that only people within five miles were to get that message.

Well, that's not what happened. I was driving an hour away to, um, deliver these cookies, but first I had to make them. And you know, when you first start making cookies for a living, you bake for people. You don't make big batches. Now I'm having to make 120 cookies, which I laugh now because that's nothing.

But at the time, I remember the Super Bowl was going on and my husband's watching the Super Bowl with his daughter, and I thought, oh, this should take me about three hours to do. It took me all day to make all these cookies. It took me forever to package them. I'm up late at night. So I get up in the morning and I, and I'm panicked because I have to create my routes on how to drop these cookies off. And I leave at, you know, at the crack of dawn. I got 20 delivered. I am

going up into the mountains and, I'm going through dirt windy roads and I'm thinking, oh my gosh, I can't believe I'm doing this. And I'm sending the addresses where I'm going to my husband and telling him, if I do, you won't hear from me again.

Send the police this address. This is where I am. And I can see signs that say trespassers will be shot, beware of dogs. And I'm thinking, okay, I can deliver these because I said I would, or I could just do the whole thing and live. You know, I'm so determined that I'm, I'm gonna deliver these. If I come home in the dark, I'm gone all day.

I'm crying. I only had 20 delivered. I was forever and I still had 40 more to go. So the next morning I get back up and I go deliver again and again. Uh, on the third day, my husband took pity on me and was so concerned about my safety that he came with me on Valentine's Day. And that's how we spent our Valentine's Day cookies, uh, as samples.

And I thought, you know, most of these people will never be my customers, but I made a promise to do this and I needed to do this. I said, I was going to do this. So anyways. But the problem was people kept messaging me and, you know, you said you were gonna do, you know, give free cookies out, and I said, I've had to, you know, had enough and people wouldn't leave me alone.

And so I actually had to delete the app because I was being harassed so badly. Uh, within a few days I just deleted it. But I got that order out and I learned a lesson: this is just not gonna be easy. And this is, starting a business is not for the faint of heart. And, uh, if I can get past this, I can get past anything.

David Crabill: Okay, so let's just be clear. This is a very unusual amount of response to a giveaway launch. We, you're talking about a giveaway launch, which is something I teach in my mini course. It's also something I talk about in episode one of this podcast. And normally I'd say, you know, people give, might get about 20 people taking them up on their giveaway samples.

Now, I know you said you like, you broadcast this to extend neighborhoods, and I think most people, once they realize like, oh, well I didn't wanna do an hour long delivery, they would just be like, I'm so sorry. Like, I didn't realize I was sending this out to, you know, areas an hour away from me and they would've just canceled the whole thing.

So what caused you to, you know, just bite the bullet and be like, I am going to deliver a free sample an hour away from my house? I don't, I feel, I don't feel like most people would've done that.

Tammy Brennan: I just sort of felt like I don't want to start the business with broken promises. I'm the type of person who, if I say something, I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna do my very best to follow through. I don't, I don't like to cancel out at the last minute. Um. It is just not in my nature to just give up. Uh, just last week I actually gave myself a chemical burn in my eye by using the wrong contact solution, my eye was sealed shut and I had people coming to play tennis from 45 minutes away and I went with my eye sealed, shut in only one contact in to play tennis because I didn't want to be the person who canceled last minute or showed up and didn't show up out of

four people. So, you know, that's just my nature is just to be that reliable person that just keeps showing up. I do what I say and yeah, and I do it even when it's hard.

David Crabill: You're, you're a people pleaser, right?

Tammy Brennan: People pleaser and that can be a bad thing as well. 'cause it makes saying no difficult. And, that was actually a real struggle at the beginning of my business as well for me, is being a people pleaser.

David Crabill: Can you expand on that? Like, can you remember a time when, when you really had to say no and you resisted it, or maybe did say no.

Tammy Brennan: So actually I moved away from an ordering system just because I know it's not in my nature to, to say no. And I don't take orders unless they're, now, they're for like a wedding or like a large order. I only do popups and you know, of course I do things for my friends or, you know, I know once in a while, but I don't go out and deliver anymore.

Um. You know, the trauma from that first year of being lost people, you know, they don't give you the gate code. I'm climbing over gates to deliver cookies because people forgot to say that, you know, there's a code, uh, for the gated community, like just ridiculous things I had to do.

Or it's a new neighborhood, they're not on Google. Map. Maps and or Google sent me to the wrong area. I have so much trauma over that, that delivering actually makes me queasy now just thinking about it.

David Crabill: Well, you can look back and laugh at it now, right?

Tammy Brennan: there's some hilarious stories. Absolutely. You know, at the time, they're not so funny. I set myself on fire one time, and I had, uh, it was delivery day, it was a Friday, and I had to go out and deliver all these cookies. I burnt my eyelashes off. I had blisters all over my face. My lips were peeling, my hand was burnt. You know, I'm shaking because, you know, I had chunks of hair missing, from, uh, an explosion on my little micro torch. know, and, you know, I had to go deliver these cookies because people had paid for them. And I, you know, I have to hand deliver them according to cottage food laws. I can't just go to my daughter.

Can you deliver these for me? I'm burnt. Um, I'm freaking out. I'm crying, I'm shaking. And, uh, then once somebody, because I'm on Instagram, people like to meet you and, uh, you know, and they wanted to meet me. And so I had to, you know, I was delivering to a school teacher and, you know, I'm waiting 15 minutes and I'm shaking and I'm in pain and I have more deliveries to do and to, and then to smile and hug and take pictures with somebody and, [00:19:00] um, not say anything.

And even though, you know, I look like I'm completely sunburned, but, you know, they're funny stories now at the time, they're not so funny. But they're a growing experience.

David Crabill: So, you know, you talked about how it's not always the best thing to be a people pleaser. Obviously you're on the extreme end of the people pleasing spectrum. Right? Do you feel like there, that's part of what's made you successful, like that you are just going to do what you say you're gonna do no matter what.

Tammy Brennan: Yes, absolutely. It's a curse, but yet, you know, it's also a gift, um, because uh, I just want everybody to have the, the best cookies they and cookie experience they possibly can have. And you know, somebody will say, oh gosh, you know, my favorite flavor. And I'll be like, oh, you know what I could do with that. So I go to extreme measures to make the most, uh, over the top experiences that I can make, uh, for people so they can enjoy, um, you know, a favorite, uh, flavor or experience or something that they remember. So I go to extremes to make sure that can happen for them. And I think that has pushed me, uh, wanting to be the best I can.

I'm super competitive. and that really pushes me as well. I just always want to be the best. I want to know as much as possible. I don't like not knowing something that somebody else might not know how to do. I'm constantly researching on how to improve and how to be better. And I share that as part of my journey.

And, it's interesting. I mostly baked cakes, uh, before doing this. And I had to really learn how to be a better cookie baker. And I started sharing that. And, um, I didn't realize that there were a lot of professional bakers out there that didn't know a lot of these things and appreciated that.

And that's kind of how, um, I sort of took off on Instagram just by, I learned this today or, you know, I've been doing this for years and I love this. I don't know if anybody else knows how to do this, and to please my followers and people who would come across my reels as I wanted to give them something of value.

David Crabill: So, I mean, we've already said that the giveaway launch response was abnormally large for you, and you know, you do these cookies, you do kind of larger cookies. Do you think that it was like the cookie trend, because I feel like that was kind of at the beginning of this, you know, crumble cookie type trend.

Do you think that's what caused this thing to take off or at least the samples, uh, caused you to get that kind of response?

Tammy Brennan: I, I think it could be. And, um, definitely, you know, cupcakes were a big thing at the time. I, uh, before that, um, and there was the trend and yes, uh, I think, uh, crumble Cookies has launched the cookie craze. And, what I'm about is, um, you know, I didn't want just something that looked good. it has to taste better than it even looks for me. And, uh, I think that's where, um, differ, you know, then sometimes, you know, have you ever. something from a bakery and you go to bite into it and it's like, oh, well it looks beautiful and that's why you bought it. And then you go to bite into it and it's dry and it's disappointing.

You feel like you wasted your money and, and you know, after years of experiencing that, uh, you know, going to bakeries and stuff, I just, I wanted to change that experience and I think I, I,

I, I got lucky with, you know, what I wanted to do and that crumble experience kind of launched me, but at the same time, I think I took that and went in a slightly separate direction.

David Crabill: Why did you choose to go with cookies? 'cause your whole background was in cakes, right? I mean, you, you kind of would assume if you were gonna finally embark on this passion, this dream of yours, that you'd go with what you knew well.

Tammy Brennan: Well, thanks to you, David. I learned that I could not make cakes how I wanted to due to cottage food industry laws. I wanted to do the Italian meringues, the stabilized whipped cream, um, marsh cup ous. Um, all these things that I wanted to put in my cakes, that I always put in my cakes, I wasn't allowed to do. And I do not like to compromise, and I will not compromise on flavor and the quality. And so I'm just like, okay, that's a no go for me. I. I can't make it exactly to my standards, it's not going to happen. don't know if you've seen some of my posts, like I can make some pretty elaborate cookies and you can see that on a cake, you know, came up, you know, like my Elvis cookie and my Bahama mama with the dried flour, uh, pineapple flour with the, the glitter on the inside, you know, those were definitely inspired by my cake decorating.

Um, and I started unleashing that probably last spring after I got more comfortable with cookies. I'm like, know, oh, you know, I just, I really miss that playful aspect of it. And so I kind of started even pushing my cookies even further into what. We would expect from cookies,

David Crabill: so, you know, going back to the beginning, you had this giveaway launch that I know kind of turned into more of a nightmare than a dream come true. And, you know, but it was, it was obviously like, I guess a successful giveaway launch. I mean, you, I saw that you got 19 orders just from the giveaway and even a lot before you even gave anything away.

People were just starting to order from you right off the bat. So take me forward through the next few months. I mean, did that demand continue? Like did your business just take off?

Tammy Brennan: initially it did and, uh, but then, um, my co my cottage license did not come through for five months . I emailed them and called them for months and I couldn't really move forward with my business, at that point until I needed to get that licensing. Licensing so I can get insurance, um, all that.

And so I was kind of running sort of a side with this and, and so I kind of had to pause because I just really wanted to have that insurance going forward before I sort of too much. And with the public I was doing, you know, things that people that I knew and some strangers and stuff. But, it just made me nervous. and then once I got my license and I went to my first farmer's market, even though it was the tiniest little farmer's market, 'cause it was the end of farmer's market season, nobody was accepting applications, then everything changed for me. It was just like once I got out into the public, uh, that way it was just. Boom, my life changed, and then I couldn't keep up with the orders fast enough. I was turning down orders. I was overwhelmed. and learning to do social media because, you know, I'd never made a reel before. I didn't even know

how to get the words across the screen. It took me three months to figure out how to get the words to, to go across the screen, what trending music was.

So I'm learning all these other things. I'm not just baking, you know, I'm taking orders, your website, you know, you're figuring out all these other things. You're communicating, you, there's so many other things to learn that it's not just baking. And I, that's something I didn't even occur to me when I started this business. Wow, you know, I love to bake.

Well, there's a lot of things that maybe I don't love about, running a business that takes up so much time that's not necessarily creative and it's tedious, you know, the accounting part of everything, keeping track of everything. So, you know, but once my business took off, then I didn't, I didn't have any of this framework in place, you know, keeping track of, you know, my miles keeping, it was a disaster.

You know, my first year of, uh, doing taxes, it was like I'm pulling things out of a shoebox and, you know, scraping pieces of paper that I wrote, I wrote things down on it, you know? Because I wasn't prepared. I just wasn't prepared. I had no clue what was gonna happen.

David Crabill: Well, you know, speaking of being prepared or unprepared, like, I think that's. Kind of a notable thing about you, because, you know, I've had a lot of people take my mini course and, you know, I've had like over 10,000 people take this mini course. Right. And you know how many of them actually watch all seven lessons?

You know, like so few. I mean, I can see the numbers. I can't remember how many have gotten to lesson seven, but not very many. And then of the people that complete the course, very few actually implement what I recommend. And, and you did, and I know, like you reached out to me and it was right before Valentine's Day and said, Hey, Valentine's Day is a great time to run the giveaway launch, you know, take advantage of that holiday.

It was only like less than two weeks away and you did it, you know, you actually went for it. And you, you actually made that happen before Valentine's Day. Most people wouldn't have done that. You know, most people would've waited before all their stuff was figured out before they figured out that county, before they figured out the business plan.

The business license, you know, you just went for it and started and then just kind of caught up as you became overwhelmed. So what is it about you that allows you to, you know, be okay moving forward with this business even though you didn't feel ready?

Tammy Brennan: Well, I have to give some credit to my husband, who said, just go. Just go. Said, you'll never feel ready. It's like having your first baby.

You never, you, you know, you don't feel ready. You just do it. And I just thought, okay, this is what this is. This is my first baby. Um, you know, 'cause when I had my daughter, I hadn't really been around a newborn before. I didn't really know much. I'm reading books frantically trying to figure everything out. I just seem to be the type of person that it'll, it'll, it'll be okay. You know what I mean? I'll just bumble my way through it. And you have to be the type of person who

forgives yourself, you know? Oh, you know, you have your little cry, you move on. You, you like, you berate yourself and then you forget about it the next day. You know, because you can't be the person that holds onto that forever. Otherwise you'll be stuck and you'll be afraid to, to keep moving forward. And I'm the type of person that has made a lot of mistakes in my life, and I've made, now, a lot of bad decisions. and I just know that for the most part, if you try hard enough, you'll figure it out.

David Crabill: So I, I know it took you like five months to get this cottage food license, which is, uh, definitely way longer than almost ever. Also, Washington has an extremely restrictive cottage food law. I mean, they have one of the worst cottage food laws in the nation, which is part of, I think, what caused you to even move in the cookie direction in the first place.

But, you know, even though you didn't have a license in hand, even though you didn't have insurance, even though you couldn't get into an event, you still kept selling through that period of time. Right. You know, you still were, we were making orders. Correct.

Tammy Brennan: Yeah, I was still, taking orders. I had a website up, I had an order page. I, you know, was going hard on Instagram, learning as much as possible, I was dropping boxes off at businesses, so, you know, I just tried to make, community, connections and that was really important with me, is that I promoted other businesses in my stories and would always tag them and talk about them.

And you never know. Somebody might just tag you and you might be seen by tagging somebody. And realizing that it takes a community to make something work. And, working on your own is a whole lot harder than working with people with experience who want you to succeed.

David Crabill: Hey, real quick, earlier I mentioned our sponsor Cottage CMS, and I'll be honest with you, when I first heard about this platform, I was pretty skeptical. I have seen dozens of software platforms built for cottage food entrepreneurs over the years. But this one feels different. For one, Drew and his wife Kat run their own successful cottage food business, which was featured back in episode 165. And also Drew has a ton of experience building software tools like this. I personally set up a website for my fudge business on Cottage CMS in under an hour, and I was impressed and clearly I'm not the only one, even though it's been around for just a few months. Cottage CMS already powers over 1000 sites.

So I encourage you to check them out. And as I said at the beginning, we do have a special offer for Forrager podcast listeners. You can check that out by going to cottagecms.com/forrager. Again, that's cottagecms.com/forrager. When you sign up, you can sign up for a completely free website that is forever free.

And if you are wanting to check out the premium features, you can do that risk free. Drew offers a 30 day money back guarantee, and also if you face any hiccups with setting up your site, he provides incredible support. As anyone who has used Cottage CMS can attest to. So again, I encourage you to check them out. You can do that by going to cottagecms.com/forrager.

Now back to the show.

David Crabill: One thing I did see before you actually got your license, before you started your first event is you had, uh, like a period of time in July where you didn't get any orders and you talked about that, you know, kind of feeling like a failure or maybe like you were gonna be a failure during that period of time.

What was that like?

Tammy Brennan: Um, absolutely. I remember sitting on the couch and just feeling like the biggest loser. Like, what's wrong with me? Are my cookies not good enough? Um, how can I do this better? What am I gonna do? How am I gonna make this work? And I'm waiting for that cottage food license to [00:34:00] come in and I'm, I'm feeling panicked. a little bit like, just really hard on myself. I remember a baker reaching out to me. She. over a hundred thousand followers. Um, and she reached out to me and just said, I love your page. I think you're amazing. Um, I'm learning so, you know, I'm learning so much. I think you have so much to give to this community and you're gonna take off. And I had confessed to her that I hadn't had an order for three weeks. And she told me, you know what? I had the same thing when I started. and that happens. And soon will be as busy you want to be and probably busier Tammy. And you don't see it yet, but it's coming. If I know, I see it for you. And, um, I said, you know, I wish that I could ship because my social media was taking off, but my local orders were not. And people kept asking me to ship. And if I could ship, I mean, I would've been in, you know, my life would've been in a completely different situation, but I can't ship in Washington. I have to personally hand products over. So that was a huge barrier and sure enough, after I said that, I put it out to the world the next day, I got a whole bunch of orders and a corporate order, So it was just, the weirdest thing. I put it out to the universe, afraid I'm gonna fail, afraid I'm of failure. And it all changed the next day.

David Crabill: So you know, you were mentioning that like, you know, if you were able to ship then you things that would've been different 'cause your Instagram was blowing up. And then also, you know, obviously you said that you had initially wanted to make cakes, but the cottage food law in Washington doesn't allow it because Washington has like one of the worst cottage food laws in the country.

and then also you're doing all these deliveries 'cause you don't want to do porch pickup from home. And I always tell people, like, who reach out from Washington, I'm like, your cottage food law is literally so bad that there's not much of a difference between getting a cottage license and getting a commercial license.

So it seems like there's all these things that were kind of not going super easy or well, like with the cottage license thing, why didn't you explore or try to get into a commercial kitchen instead?

Tammy Brennan: yeah, you know, like I just sort of, that wasn't a direction I wanted to take and I know a lot of people probably would have, but I just really wanted it to be from my kitchen.

I don't know why. It was just important to me. And, um, I'm sure it would've been a little bit easier to do the commercial route, but, it just didn't feel right for me. I just sort of felt like I just wanted to be at home base and, my daughter stopped by and my grandson stopped by, I could stop what I was doing, you know, I could schedule around that.

I didn't need to schedule around my booked time at a commercial. I felt like if I went commercial that I would have to make a certain amount of money to, to, to pay for it. And that felt like pressure.

David Crabill: One of the things I love about you is like just how much you are willing to bootstrap. I'm thinking about the picture you sent me with your ironing board and the cookies on the ironing board.

Tammy Brennan: Yes.

David Crabill: Probably a lot of people would've been like, wow, I need to buy more, uh, racks or something for cooling off these cookies.

But you know, you figured it out.

Tammy Brennan: I just figured out what I have, you know what I mean? Like, I'm just an inexpensive way to do things. I don't start with the best equipment and I don't, I didn't start with all this. I only buy things I need. I just went up to a bigger KitchenAid now, you know, I had a 30-year-old KitchenAid I was using, and I'm mixing almost everything by hand. And people are like, wow, you're making 600 cookies like that. But yeah, yeah, I am. You know what I mean? Like, it's just, I, I don't have one of those bakery racks where you put the trays in, you wheel them in and out. I don't have a lot of space to do that and to store that stuff. And, um, so it's just figuring it out.

Make, do, um, you don't need to, to spend a fortune to start. And you only, my role for myself is I only buy as I need to. And, um, if something's not working, if something's more efficient, then I'll, uh, know, I, I'm a little stingy that way. I, I'm careful with what I spend and, um, I only buy what I absolutely need to, what I can't get by on otherwise without,

David Crabill: Alright, so let's kind of get into how your business expanded. You know, you finally got your cottage food license after five months, you're finally able to get into your first event, and where did your business go from there?

Tammy Brennan: Once people started trying the cookies and then actually more people that are strangers, not just friends or friends of friends, actual strangers started trying them. That's important. Uh, that's because that's how you grow your business by that way is, you know, as many strangers you can have tasting your product, the better.

And once that started happening, word of mouth got out and um, and then I got into, well, okay, I had a lesson here on this one too. I was, so, I cried over this one. I was so disheartened I thought. you just apply to a market, you're gonna get in. So there's, there's the big Saturday,

Sunday market here, and they weren't, they didn't even accept, they said, we're not taking any bakers at all.

They just sent back my money. They didn't even take my application. I'm like, what? You know, I was absolutely astounded. I had no idea that was actually a thing. Then I said, okay, well there's a Thursday market, so I want to get into that market. I take in cookies and samples and to the people who are running the farmer's market, and there's a pastry chef, thank goodness I didn't know that, who was on the tasting committee. And they were like, blown away. They're like, I can't just open the box and smell these cookies. And we were all like, oohing and awing over these cookies. Uh, yes, you can come into our market and, uh, the Thursday market, uh, which is part of the same, uh, farmer's market group. So once I got in there, of course it's a little bit bigger. And then again, just things just started growing and growing and building and, um, now.

David Crabill: hold on one second. 'cause I really want to touch on what you said there. You did not get into the market, right? But you did not give up and you decided to take your cookies to the market managers, right? I mean that's, I feel like most people would just be like, oh, maybe I'll try again later. You know, apply later.

So there's definitely something about you that's very persistent, you know, resilient. So, you know what, what, what caused you to like to fight for trying to get into this market?

Tammy Brennan: I knew there was nothing like this locally. the product I had, um, I felt confident that I had a superior product. Um, I don't wanna be like, obnoxious. I don't, I don't wanna be that person, but I felt that, they just tried them, they would see, they would be like, oh my gosh, we have to have these.

And that was my hope anyways. You know, maybe I was delusional, but that's the way it worked out. So, um, you know, I don't ever wanna come across as, you know, arrogant. Like I make the best cookies in the world. Like, I'm not that person. But I just feel like there was nothing here that was available that was like these,

David Crabill: Let's be clear that, you know, I, I know you've had pastry chefs say that, you know, your cookies are the best ever. But also like, you know, I saw a TV spot. I know you do these TV spots regularly now, and just the amount of knowledge you have on baking science is immense. Like, I've been making cookies for like 30 years and there are so many things that you said in that TV spot that I did not know, you know?

So you, you dug into the baking science a lot in creating this, right. Can you talk a little bit about that and like, you know what I mean? You, you try to be humble in some ways, but like you do legitimately have a superior product. Correct?

Tammy Brennan: Yes. It, it, you know, like, you know, that's weird for me to say 'cause I'm just not the type of person that goes on Instagram going, these are the best cookies you'll ever eat. You know, like everyone, you know, everybody says they have the best chocolate chip cookies. I'm not that person. I'll say, I'll describe them.

They're crispy on the outside, fudgy on the inside. Um, I have a love of research and I have a deep desire to be the best at anything I do. And, just experimenting, taking that science and spending hours and hours and hours in the kitchen, just tweaking and changing and minor adjustments and how I can possibly make this product better over, you know, over a year, over two years.

And I keep learning. And that's the thing is that I think a lot of people say, well, my, my product's great. i, you know, I know everything. I don't need to know anything else. Well, I'm always the person that's like, what else can I learn? What else can I do? What else don't I know? That's one thing I didn't realize when I went, uh, to teach the science of baking at the Bake Fest. who runs it, who runs the Cupcake project, um, said to me, Tammy, most bakers don't know what you know, and, so realized that a lot of people don't know why things work and why they don't work and proper technique. And even just creaming butter. I posted a reel, uh, on creaming butter, and people are arguing with me on Instagram that, now, the temperature of your butter doesn't matter.

That screaming, you know what I mean? Like, and it's, these are professional bakers and yes, it really does, it does make a difference, and they just don't know. You know, so I really take a scientific approach, but I also have a passion for flavors.

I just have always been that type of person that can put something together and, you know, create recipes like just cooking, always have done that. just, you just know what goes well with the, you know, and what works and is balanced and what needs. And so I'm the type of person that can figure that out.

And that's really important for me as well, is not just the cookie. Have the perfect texture that it also has all those background notes and subtle flavors and how to increase that. So you're, you're tasting something that you haven't really tasted before, but you don't know why, why is this different?

David Crabill: you know, it was interesting how you were saying that, you know, you're not the kind of person that's gonna say, my cookies are the best. Which I feel like there's a lot of people out there that would say the opposite of that. Like, you have to sell yourself, you know, you have to be confident at markets or on, on social media.

And you're essentially saying that, that, like, that's not you. You know, you're not going to like being in your face with your marketing. So, I mean, what do you think about that? Because there's a lot of people out there that would say, you, you have to sell yourself in order to be successful.

Tammy Brennan: I think I let my knowledge. And the cookies speak for me. And it's, and I will post things that other customers will say that have bought my tutorials and recipes, and customers who buy my cookies, I will post that. You know, these are the best cookies I've ever eaten. Or, you know, but I will never say that about myself because I haven't tried everybody else's cookies. I don't know. And I am sure there are a ton of amazing bakers out there. and I

just, I promote myself in different ways. I promote myself by being me, uh, by being honest. Um, expert, you know, my journey. Um, I promote myself by sharing my knowledge, people can get the idea that I know what I'm doing.

I know what I'm talking about. I'm showing up and being present and answering questions. I spend hours on Instagram a week just engaging with people like who message me. And people are always surprised that I message back and it's like, you know, I am going to message you back.

I am going to engage. So to promote myself is by being a real person. Uh, somebody has taken the trouble to ask a question and they're, they don't know the answer or say something. Of course, I'm gonna acknowledge them and try to give the best answer I possibly can to help them out as well.

I mean, people help me out on my journey. So, I really want to help people out on their journey as well. And I think coming across as a genuine person is marketing as well, even if I don't intend it to be marketing, maybe.

David Crabill: Say, I feel like you, even though maybe you're not super in your face with certain marketing aspects, you still like, are very aware of what works with marketing in particular, you know, with, with your flavors. Right. I saw a place where you said that you bring a limited amount of your most popular flavors to the market.

Tammy Brennan: Yes.

David Crabill: Like you, you, you specifically under make them

Tammy Brennan: Right to yes.

David Crabill: marketing tactic. So let's talk about that.

Tammy Brennan: I got some great advice is, uh, from a local business person, is to always leave people wanting, and like, if people have a fear of missing out, you know, on social media, people will line up for hours at the hottest place they saw, saw on social media because they don't wanna miss out on something that somebody said was unreal. So I kind of look at that and I kind of think, okay, well I wanna create a hype around my cookies, so what can I do? So I'll do a post, you know, for two weeks and I'm gonna introduce this at the market and create, uh, limited time only, around it. Um, yeah, and I don't over bake certain things, even though I could probably sell, you know, a hundred some more cookies. I purposely don't bring that many because first I want other people to try their flavors as well. So if they get there and they're too late, well then they'll try another flavor and fall in love with that as well. But I want people to line up and they do. So, um, last year that, uh, was my second market season. And people were lining up an hour before I opened, as I was setting up. And it was really funny because people were coming in and helping me set up, because you get to know people after a while at the markets. It's really fun. And so people were helping me put up my canopy and, and my tables

and my tablecloth and chatting away and making sure that they, you know, they're not losing their place in line as they're doing.

So. But, um, sort of creating that, you know, the slow pan of what I'm bringing to the market always in my stories before I, I, you know, the night before this is what you're gonna get. You get down low you make, you know, you get the light right and you just slow panic. And so they look big, they look thick, they look delicious. And, um, you know, I, I, you know, post I see so many people post blurry, unattractive pictures of their baked goods or AI pictures of their baked goods. And, um, and I think, oh my, it's just not hard. You know, I don't have fancy equipment. I just have my, I just even got a new iPhone last year. I had this really old iPhone.

But if you just take your time and you do it a few times until you get it right and you play with the angles, uh, you know, you, you can really be yourself that way. And, um, and that's what I do is I just try to, um, take really delicious photos and I talk about my cookies. And it probably, and people talked about this all the time when they came over to my house to, you know, to cook, you know, to eat at dinner or if I take food someplace else, well, before I had my cookie business. I describe food differently than most people. I describe the experience of eating it. I describe, uh, the ingredients that go into it. I'll say, you know, this, I made, this is a stew. It has a red wine with a demi glaze background. And, and you know, like, I'll describe it very detailed and, and I use words that are luxury words, to describe it because, you know, you spend all that time making it and using nice quality ingredients.

It's important that people are drooling just from listening till you talk about it.

David Crabill: We're talking about a couple elements of marketing, like scarcity, you know, making sure that you, you're under supplying the demand for your products, and then also social proof, which is, you know, having a line at your market. How long did it take for you to get a line at your markets? I know you started, I think in the fall of 2023, and, and I'd assume that you didn't have a line right away on the first day.

Tammy Brennan: no. I did not have a line at all. The first day, uh, I sold out, but it was like, um, at the very last moment, you know what I mean? Like, you know, oh, a couple cookies left, you know. Um, but that's a really, really small market in a really small town. And I think there were 15 vendors or something like that, maybe 11 vendors at that market. Um, so, uh, it wasn't until, uh, probably, uh, halfway through the market season, which is from June to the end of September that I started getting lineups in the first year. And, uh, this year, uh, this past, this last year, I had a market, I had lineups every day. Um, and, and it just grew and grew and grew throughout, um, the season till it became a bit of a frenzy at the end of, people getting cookies. Uh, so 'cause. I, um, I was really ready for a break at that point. I was exhausted. You know, I'm 58 years old and hauling all that stuff and standing up day after day in the kitchen doing all of this is sort of hard. you know, and plus I'm doing, you know, weddings and other things as well. So, um, I knew I wasn't going to be doing anything else until the Christmas hall, you know, market. And so people felt this frenzy to load up and, um, buy hundreds of dollars worth of cookies. You know, and even then, I haven't even done a market since Chris, the Christmas market. So, um, my first

market, like the popup I'm gonna be doing, is on Mother's Day. so people will be pretty excited to get cookies for Mother's Day.

And I'm also launching some new cookies as well. There I am making a brunch box so that, um, uh, as well, like a brunch box, flavored cookies. And, um, and so I've been posting a lot about what goes on ahead of time and making them and posting, you know, in my stories to get people excited already.

And it's months away. And I started doing that a month ago. So, you have to build that excitement before you, you go ahead and you, and you launch, post it in your stories, post behind the scenes, post, you know, more. You keep posting, keep posting, keep posting because people don't see everything and you think you, they gotta be sick of seeing this.

They gotta be sick of seeing this by now. and they're, I still have people saying, I didn't see that. I didn't see that. Oh no, you know, I missed out. I didn't see that. So, uh, so you think you're being annoying to your followers, but you're really not. Uh, and that's something that I had to learn as well.

Just post, post, post, post, post. Get people excited across the board and get the sound of the cutting of the cookie, the, and the opening up of the cookie. You know, the money shot. Get the money shot well ahead of you, you're gonna be launching.

David Crabill: So let's talk about social media a little bit. You have over 150,000 followers on Instagram. Now, you know, obviously you have, you've grown a ton. Do you feel like there was a point when you hit a turning point in your social media and things just started to work really well?

Tammy Brennan: I'm gonna say my turning point for social media was within my first year. All of a sudden I just really took off and I realized people, what kind of reels people wanted, and I learned what trending music was and how to edit things better and just do a better job with social media. 'cause I wasn't really sure you knew what to do and what directions to take. But one thing I also had to learn about social media is it is international. So a lot of my followers are from all over the world, and they're not local. And so it really had a small effect on my local business because like, like my cookie company, you know what I mean? Like, so people think, oh wow, you like, what am I, like cross, uh, platform.

I have 240,000 followers now. And people think, oh wow, people must know you in, you know, But no, most of those followers are from, you know, around the world. And people are still discovering me locally. A lot of people don't know who I am. And so, uh. You know, so unless they go to the Thursday market, they don't know who I am or they happen to find me on social media. So, um, it doesn't always relate. So sometimes like joining those local groups for your community on Facebook is probably the way to go if you're looking to, uh, increase, traffic to you at markets and to your business for local businesses Anyways,

David Crabill: Is there anything that you did to like actually? Use social media locally, like to actually use your social media presence to boost local sales.

Tammy Brennan: Going into other businesses and collaborating with other businesses. That was a big part of it. Their audience all of a sudden becomes your audience and you combine, and now you have two, two companies and two sorts of platforms looking out for one thing.

David Crabill: So what, what's an example of that? Can you give an example of what that looked like? Like a collaboration or what you did?

Tammy Brennan: Richfield, uh, brew Pub, uh, uh, saw me at the market

And so my collab with them is that, uh, you know, they would bring me in and get me local exposure to their pub nights and I would set up there And sell, you know, 15 to a hundred dollars worth of cookies, you know what I mean? And, it was nice for them because, uh, my followers would come in and also nice for me is because people participating in this event would get to try and meet me for the first time and try my cookies. And they would do a really good job of promoting me and I would do a good job of promoting them.

So it works out both ways. uh, the, the US Chef store, um, I tagged myself lifting heavy bags of sugar and you know, flour when I was there and I'm like, are gaining muscle and I didn't think anything of it and I tagged them and next thing I know, uh, they're contacting me and they're like, we would like to do something special with you.

And next thing I know they're following me around for three days, uh, and um, with a camera. And that was really fun at the market. And of course I had, it was my first year at the market and it was so fabulous 'cause I had a lineup that day. Uh, a long lineup. Uh, and uh, so, you know, and next thing I know that turned into, uh, them doing like, uh, Tammy shops, Tammy's cookie company shops at the US Chef Store.

Next thing you know, I'm on, um, a commercial for them. And then, um, local TV sees that. And next thing I know, I'm doing a monthly [00:59:00] spot on baking, uh, on the local TV station on Afternoon Live. So it's just. Snowballs, uh, if you're, I mean, not too sc I was terrified the first time I went on tv. I like actually cracking my teeth.

I was so scared. Um, but I did it anyway. I was sick. I, I, it took two days to recover. I had a headache, um, and app. I look at myself and I go, I don't look terrified, but I really was like inside, like, I was like ice cold and panicked, but I did it anyways, and all that stuff. Snowballs. The more chances you take, the more doors you open, uh, you know, terrified or not, you know, uncomfortable or not. I yank those doors open and then, you know, just do it. Do it scared. I know everybody says that, but it's really true. You have, you have to do it. If you really wanna grow and you wanna stand out, you have to take those chances. If you fail, you know, honestly, you know, you fail.

David Crabill: It's so interesting that you're, you know, like this whole TV thing came from just tagging a company on one of your Instagram posts and didn't that whole like commercial thing happen like the day after you fell over your dishwasher or something?

Tammy Brennan: I, I, as Michelle from Home Sweet Home, likes to say I'm the klutziest person. She actually knows I took the end of my finger off yesterday. But yeah, I was rushing around because I was doing two markets, which was stupid in, uh, trying to do two markets, chewing too much, uh, uh, at once, and I had to cut back, and I'm running, I'm running.

I left my dishwasher open and I tripped over it. Thank goodness I, there weren't any but knives or anything. I, I, ugh, it's hard to even think about. But, uh, what I ended up doing is really injuring my back and I put like a planet size bruise on, uh, on, on myself. But my back was big. Even now, if I sneeze every once in a while, things shift and I, and it's like pain for three weeks. Um, but um, yeah, and I had to film the commercial and set up for the market and I was crying when I was setting up for the market because I was in so much pain. And of course, it's a Thursday, my husband's working, he can't help me. Um, you know, so I'm by myself and I have little tears, crocodile tears, you know, going down my face and I'm lifting the stuff out of the car.

But we got there, we got it done. And, um, you know, they helped me pack up a little bit when they realized how injured I was. They weren't there when I was unloading. But we got through it and, uh, they, they made two commercials out of it, uh, the, the two days of filming. And then I did something else for them. and they always ask me to do their corporate orders for them. So I'm always blessed that that relationship has happened.

David Crabill: You said something interesting there that you felt like doing two markets was a mistake, you know? 'cause there's a lot of people that would do two markets in a week, you know,

Tammy Brennan: For me, it was a mistake because, um, now, I'm 58 years old. I had a knee replacement. I. You know, it's standing up so much. And also being at a market for another day was, uh, a day that I couldn't be baking or making dough. And, you know, my cookies are over the top. They're not just big bowl scoops and, and go, like, they're filled.

They have gourmet frostings and toppings. They're a lot of work. And just even packaging, you know, takes hours by itself. And, um, and I think if I was just doing like the traditional scoop cookies, I would've been okay. But I just couldn't keep up. I was And with social media taking off, you know, and the amount of hours that go into that, and the weddings and all the events and the corporate baking on top of that.

Um, and then, my other, you know, after a few weeks, the other, uh, the Thursday markets, I started, you know, gaining. And whereas the other market was really hit and miss because they didn't really advertise. And that's something you really wanna look for in a market, is who actually use social media and promote

there's things to look for when you're looking for a market to be in. And not all of them are good fits. And, uh, it's, and sometimes to grow you need to let go of some things. And even though you feel bad and you might feel a little guilty 'cause they gave you, you know, a start, uh, sometimes it's just not the right fit for you.

And that was one lesson I had to do. Even though I felt guilty and I felt like I was quitting, I wasn't following through on my commitment, which is big for me. I just realized that to grow and, and make the best cookies I could possibly be, this needed to go. And sure enough, it really did.

And, uh, letting go of how we used to do things like, you know, taking orders and shifting our businesses as we grow is the way to grow. Hanging on to things doesn't allow us to grow. And, um, that's a really important lesson. And I know, remember, um, I keep talking about Michelle because she's been such a wonderful mentor to me. And she said, Tammy, how businesses grow. And, uh, you letting it go and not killing yourself will, um, make you happier. And there's no point in being miserable, if you don't love what you do. And if you love what you do, it comes through in what you're making.

David Crabill: It's kind of interesting, you know, you, you, you chose to drop a market, you know, essentially drop a revenue stream in, in some ways in order to focus more on the one. And also, you know, you mentioned that you are basically baking in seasons now, you know, you're doing the summer season, you're doing the holiday season, then you got multiple months in between where you're not selling cookies, which is obviously like me.

You could be making a lot more money. You could be, could be making more people happier. Right. Could be pleasing more people. I know we talked about you being apple people pleaser. So what, what's, uh, what's caused you to decide to take these big long breaks in your business, in your, in your baking business?

Tammy Brennan: more like what has allowed it and what has allowed it is me teaching. And, um, so I focus on recipe development and teaching, during, now this is actually, uh, more my. A year of doing this is really not baking nearly as much in my off season. And, um, even though, like I'll be in the kitchen later today and, and, you know, working on recipes and, um, I'm gonna be filming a new tutorial on, uh, banana base, dough. again, Michelle sort of said Tammy, you know what I mean? Like, don't kill yourself. Uh, we're not getting any younger here, Missy. And, uh, you know, here is your skillset. You know, you're an amazing teacher, you know all this information and people want this information and they want your recipes so, you know, make it happen.

I want your recipes. And, uh, she wanted my lemon meringue pie recipes, what she wanted. And um, so she really sort of pushed me forward in that direction. And then when I was approached by Bake Fest. Um, as well to teach. I'm like, oh my gosh, I love teaching. And I actually, in my former life, uh, before, uh, you know, children, uh, I was actually working for the school board in Vancouver, BC as a counselor, and I did teach as well.

So this was something that I felt very comfortable doing and felt natural to me and, doing so has allowed me to have income this year. So when I go into baking season or when I do my popups, I'm refreshed. I'm having a good time. And although I'll be exhausted at the end of September, I, you know, when market season hits, I will be, um, know, I, I'm, I'm really excited instead of like, instead of feeling like it's begrudging chore to, you know, constantly doing the pile of dishes and hauling and setting up, because it's a lot of work.

I know a lot of times on social media people say, oh, it's a beautiful fairytale because they want to sell you a course, but it's hard and it's not easy and it's physically demanding, it's mentally demanding. and you do need breaks.

And, as I move forward, I'm really happy with the decision to, um, sort of move my full-time baking to part-time and focus on, teaching aspect as well.

David Crabill: so, you know, one thing about selling your recipes is, you know, kind of giving away the secret sauce. Right. You know, was there a hesitation to do that?

Tammy Brennan: Absolutely. I did not want to do it. I absolutely did not want to do it. And again, Michelle talked me into it. She said, Tammy, this is gonna change your life. Uh, and sure enough, it really did. Um, my lemon meringue pie tutorial took off. It's with the smores, it just took off. And, um, and, you know, I was thinking, oh, what if somebody else comes in and they, you know, buy my recipe and next thing you know, they're at the market and they're selling the same cookies.

So far, that hasn't happened. Um, but, you know, I've had, um, a few incidents on, uh, social media of people trying to resell my recipe as their own. And,

you know, I just, instead of getting so upset about it, um, what I do is I just put my head down and I keep being the innovator. I keep being the one that they're trying to be, the one that they're chasing, that I'm the one that's coming out with new flavors, new techniques, um, new science, um. And, you know, and just being, trying to be the leader of the pack on that, to stay away from, you know, just, there's nothing I can do. I, you know, I, you know, we can have, we have our terms and conditions and I, it's not that I call people out and ask them to pull it down off their sales site or call them out. And that happens. Uh, and I, and I do that when I see it, but I can't control everything and I can't be the type of person that monitors on, uh, even what everybody else is doing. So I just have to be, I just have to sort of move forward and, and I actually love recipe developing. I love coming up with new flavors.

It's a creative outlet for me. And, um, you know, 'cause sometimes when you're in the, the, you know, baking season and you're trudging and you're in that market, you just sort of feel like you're, um, you know, you're a worker bee during that time.

And, you know, you have your recipes and you have your methodology and you have your dishes piled up and you have the floors filthy and you're just trudging through it. But those, the times when you're creating something new is, for me, the last moment of, uh. it, it's like a piece, it's like a moment of pride.

You know, when I put out my lemon meringue pie cookie, I was so proud of myself. I just thought, look at that. I've created something that all of a sudden, people want, and people will copy you.

Like, 'cause they want it so bad. That feels really good. It feels like, uh, uh, you know, at 58 you can still be an innovator. Uh, you can still make a difference. You can still teach people how to do things and, you know, it's kind of nice to be wanted and needed.

David Crabill: Do you ever feel like you have trouble keeping up with it? 'cause I know you post a lot on social media, like do you ever have trouble, like coming up with new ideas, the things to post and feeling like you constantly have to innovate, constantly have to put something new out there. Like does that ever feel like stressful or a burden?

Tammy Brennan: Well, okay. For social media. Absolutely. That can be very stressful. I have times where like, I'm like, oh yeah, yeah, I can, you know, make this video, you know, real, make this real, make this real. And then other times I just feel like, how many times can I say that? You know what I mean? What can I say that's new? You know, with AI out there now you have everybody Googling, you know, basically asking ai, you know, stuff that maybe they don't know, but they just put it out there anyways 'cause AI tells them to, and they create their own platform from that, where I'm always the type of person I, I put mine out through experience and through knowledge. So it is stressful trying to stand out now when, um, that is, social media has changed drastically over the last few years. And, um, so there's, yeah, there's a lot of pressure. You know, some people are just beautiful filmmakers. They have all the skill in the world, uh, you know, to do these things.

And, um, you know, I'm, I'm a home baker. I, I just do the best I can and it just, there does feel like that pressure of putting something out every day. And, um, and you know, and not everybody is kind on social media, you know, Facebook can, I, I, I actually didn't go on Facebook for six months after, um, you know, an incident that another baker was mad at me over nothing and just violently threat, you know, horrible behavior towards me.

Sent me a voice message actually. And it was so disconcerting and upsetting that, um, I. That, you know, it threw me for a long time. And, um, I don't, you know, when people say, oh, you can toughen up. You can toughen up. I, I, I, you know, I maybe a little bit I've toughened up, but that type of stuff is so difficult to deal with and, um, yeah.

You know what I mean? Like, it, it, people think, oh, you know, you're so lucky to have this many followers, but people don't realize who I am. But people don't realize the work that it takes and the stress and the constant, you know, I never have a day off, ever. When I go on vacation, I never take a day off.

I'm always, if I don't answer my comments or my messages, they pile up so much that it becomes overwhelming. So I, uh, so I'm always, every day, even when I went to Portugal, you know, Spain for two weeks, I was posting and, and, um, and answering, because it's too much to take a break, you know, you, feel like, oh, you know, your follower, you know, your, your reach is gonna be less because it's true.

If you take a break and you don't show up for two weeks, all of a sudden in, you know, social media, meta just, they, they, they dock you. You know, they, you know, and that happens. So,

yeah. It's like they play a game with you and it, it, you know, and you're always trying to stay ahead of, you know. You know, how can I get more views?

How can I get more eyes? You know, that type of situation. And it's, it is, stressful. And last night, I'm gonna say, I got up out of bed at 10 o'clock last night to, uh, make a reel because something occurred to me. So, and, and then if you don't, you know, if you don't write it down when they come, they go, you know what I mean?

Like, if you're in the shower, you're driving and you're like, oh, here's a great idea. And then it's gone. Um, maybe it's my age, but, you know, and you know, you don't wanna live like that. But, uh, it, and I really try and I've stepped back and, and, and taken a, like, a reality break from it. This is, you know, social media is a different world altogether. Yeah, that's something I'm still working on is my attitude towards social media. Um, I have a love-hate relationship. I love the relationships that I've gained, uh, you know, from people, you know, kind people and you know the questions. And I love that. But at the same time, I just hate that dog piling and the viciousness that can go on, on social media, especially on Facebook. And, um, the pressure. That's when a reel goes viral on, um, Facebook. I never look, I don't look ever.

David Crabill: So what is causing you to push so much? I mean, you know, you obviously grew the cookie business like, and you have lines, you're selling out every week when you do the markets and now you're, you're doing social media, you're saying you can't even take a day off when you go on vacation. Like, what, what's motivating you to make it bigger and bigger? You know, keep growing it.

Tammy Brennan: I think it, again, it's my competitive nature. Uh, it's just like, um, just constantly pushing myself and, um, you know, it, it's really hard not to compare yourself to other people when it's just constantly in your face. And so, um, so it's just, that nature of I want to do the best job as I possibly can, and I want to answer people, I want to, you know what I mean?

Like, I just don't wanna be the person who never answers a message, you know, like, I just don't wanna be that person. And also for me too, because I sell, um, my tutorials and, you know, my classes online. That's also my income, uh, stream as well. And uh, so that's a big part of it.

If I want, you know, I worked really, really hard at this and my first two years I didn't make nearly as much money as I should have been, you know, be for the amount of work I put into it, you know what I mean? I just like it. so much work into when you're building, of course, you know, you're building something, you're not, you know, making a fortune. and I sort of feel like, okay, really hard at this and I've built my audience and, I give so much, free advice and I've helped so many people along the way that, you know, I need to sort of be compensated for it at this point. You know what I mean?

Like, I don't mean to sound harsh or weird about that, but I sort of feel like, know, I deserve to be paid for my time. and that selling and that audience is sort of what's helping me, do that. You know what I mean? Like, to be compensated. So yeah, I, the harder I work, and here's the thing is the harder I work, the more money I make. And that's a hard one to step away from.

David Crabill: So you, you do think money is a motivating factor for you because I, I got the sense that, you know, it was like you were bored, you're an empty nester, that, you know, you were just looking for something to do with your time that you loved. But you, you're saying that you, you feel like the money is a big factor.

Tammy Brennan: Absolutely. Um, you know. You know, and I think it's, and yeah, you know, you wanna be compensated for how hard you work. and I guess I feel, uh, that especially after some of the, a lot of the abuse I take on social media you know, it's not all fun in games, you know, to be honest. It can be downright vicious at times. Yeah, money is a motivator. And, um, and I've never made my own, here's the thing, David, I have never made my own money like that. I have brought in you know, I was 29 years old. And for me, know, know, it's not about, oh, will I be able to pay my bills? Will I be starving? To me, it's about that sense that I can do this too.

You know what I mean? Like, you know, I can make this happen. I, you know what I mean? Like, it's not about do I wanna go on a fancier trip or whatever. It's about that sense of self-esteem. I'm chasing that [01:20:00] sense of worth and I know that, and I just, you know, and I need to again, work on those issues. But, um. You know, like we judge people by how successful they are. And sometimes that's how a lot of the times in our society is, is that success is tied in with how much money you make. And, um, know, and, uh, that's the reality.

David Crabill: I know that you got married a few years ago before you started this cookie business. What has your husband thought about the business? You know, as it's grown, I.

Tammy Brennan: Well, I'm gonna say he wasn't big on me starting. he didn't want like the mess, he didn't want the liability,

and he, at first he was like, you know, go get a commercial space and go get him a commercial space.

Go, you know, and, you know, do all this. And I didn't want to. And, you know, he kept pushing my businesses in ways I didn't want, um, to be honest. And I just stuck to my guns. I just put my feet in and I, and I said, no, this doesn't feel right. Uh, I wanna keep going in this direction. And, um, and now, uh, you know, he just, I've shocked him. He's like, you know, like, man, you have. Wow, you have done such a good job. And, um, you know, you just totally blew me out of the water. And, you know, now he couldn't, he couldn't be prouder. And, um, know, he, uh, you know, he's a big cookie fan and, um, you know, okay. For years I was always, you know, the housewife, you know, people would say, oh, well, you know, ask a hus, my, one of my husbands, because I was previously married, say, you know, what do you do?

And my previous husband had a big job, like a fancy job with a big title and, um, at a big company. um, and, you know, nobody ever asked me what I did or, oh, how nice. Your husband lets you stay at home, or, how nice, how nice. And, you know, it's nice to have people all of a sudden so excited by what you do.

They don't, you know, like, you know what I mean? Like, it is, I guess you don't maybe, you know, like just always being the supporter. All of a sudden people are asking me and excited and everybody loves cookies and wants to hear about the cookie business. And, and it's, you know, I get asked a ton of questions where I go and, um, being on social media, it just makes me feel special.

So when I say, you know. and stuff like that. It's not just that, it's about, I guess I feel a need for some recognition after years of being the [01:23:00] support system and being a little invisible, if that makes sense. Um, it's just nice to people excited,

David Crabill: So we've covered a lot about what's allowed you to be successful. You know, you're, you're a very persistent person. You're a go-getter, you're an A type person. I think that has something to do with it. There also, you went deep into the baking science and like to create a product that is truly an exceptional tasting product.

And then you've used some marketing tactics. Certainly, you know, leverage social media to some degree to kind of expand this business and grow, like, become a very, very successful business at this point. Do you think we missed anything? Like there is, is there anything that you feel like you did as you were growing the cookie business that has really allowed it to take off, that's made you successful or as maybe other people struggle in [01:24:00] trying to build their business?

Tammy Brennan: when you fail and it will happen, people won't show up. You'll get rained out. You know, like those things happen. Uh, you know, you fall on your face, you know, you don't give up. And I think that's for me, uh, you don't walk away. You know, I, I, I'm invested, I'm invested in my dream. And, um, even, you know, even though it has been a hard journey, it has been so rewarding.

I have learned so much about myself. I have built my self-esteem back up. I feel like I've, um, sort of found myself again. Um, that was, you know, probably the biggest thing.

You know, listening to your gut, knowing what's right. Um, still taking advice is important, you know, from people who have experience, but understanding what's right for you and what's not right for you is super [01:25:00] important as well. And your gut will tell you that something's not right and something feels good, doesn't feel good, it's not for you. And I guess to me too, it's finding people around me that support me and encourage me and, um, you know, when I'm having a bad day, you know, I, things aren't going well, is they, they pick you up and they help pick you up. You have to pick yourself up in, in general, but they sort of make it easier to get back up and go out the next day and, and keep going.

David Crabill: You mentioned, you know, dealing with failure, but one of the things that I thought was quite notable is how you incorporate failure into your business. I mean, especially on social media, right? You're like, you're sharing your failures. You're not hiding from them. You know, you, you, you've had many of them as, as all businesses do, but you're very public about those failures and you're kind of sharing the realness with [01:26:00] people.

Can you talk a little bit about, like, was that something you did from the very beginning? Uh, is that something that you learned along the way? Because I think that's a big part of what makes you stand out on social media.

Tammy Brennan: Um, I, I'm gonna say the first time I shared a failure was very early on. I had burnt some toffee and it was black. It was just totally ruined. And, um, and I'm like, oh. And I was making a reel about how to make toffee and I don't walk away from it. And, um, and so I'm like, oh my gosh, what am I gonna film for today?

And my husband's like, well, film, You ruining the toffee. And uh, I'm like, okay. And sure enough it did well, and I'm like, okay, here we go. And, um, so people, you know, they wanna relate to you, you know, and I think that's what people always say to me is, I'm so relatable. It's [01:27:00] because I'm them. You know?

Like, I'm not, I never pretend to be perfect. I never pretend to be the best. I never pretend anything that, you know, I cry easily. I get emotional easily. I laugh easily. And, um, and I make mistakes. Daily. Like, you know, you know, I, I wander away from the stove, I burn things. 'cause I'm, I'm like, oh my gosh, you know what would be a good idea?

Maybe I should just do this while it's cooking. You know, and, um, I think I'm, I'm probably, you know, like most people, like, we all make so many mistakes and whether we admit them out loud is another thing. And, um, just admit, admit them out loud and, and

David Crabill: Well wait, you, you say, you know, you're talking about how you make a lot of mistakes. You're not perfect, but it also seems like you're always striving to be perfect.

Tammy Brennan: Oh yeah, always striving to be perfect. I'm always [01:28:00] striving to do better. Uh, but in that striving, the pushing you, you, uh, you know, you take on more and more and more, uh, in the pushing and you're learning more and more and more. And uh, and your brain gets filled more and more and more. And, uh, you're tempting new things all the time and it's easy to lose focus and it's easy to, you know, mess up.

Uh, you know, I just had a real takeoff on social media and I messed up my Auto Link dm. So all these people are asking for this tutorial. You know, 500 people asked for it. And. I didn't notice until like seven, eight days later. Now it's too late. And I'm hand, you know, messaging people, I get to a hundred and I'm done. know, like, you know, you know, I can't be the only person that does stuff like this that makes mistakes. And, um, [01:29:00] and I, I think people see themselves in me and, uh, you know, I'm gonna admit, like, I probably make more mistakes than most people because of my type of personality. Um, doing five things at once.

I wander off all the time. I actually just posted a reel about it this morning. I have a squirrel brain. Um, and, uh, that's what makes me so accident prone because my brain just keeps going. um, I'm thinking about 30,000 things at once. So, you know, there's other people out there like me,

but I'm always striving for better methods and better ways to do things and, you know, how to deal with my squirrel brain. You know what I mean? I, I, I try to be more methodical. I try to do

these things and, um, I don't always succeed, you know, I, I guess they. They kind of make me who I [01:30:00] am.

David Crabill: You come a long way, you know from, from starting with nothing, no business experience, building up this cookie business into a very successful cookie business. And now I think you didn't foresee that you're gonna be turning this into teaching business and selling recipes and all this stuff. So where do we go from here?

Looking ahead, what are your plans for the future?

Tammy Brennan: I plan to put out, you know, continue to put out tutorials and classes 'cause I really love to do that. Uh, to be honest, I don't know how long I will be doing, um, uh, probably just popups or maybe go into the weekend, the big weekend market once a month. Um. You know, I'm sort of hitting that age of retirement.

Will my husband be, you know, gonna retire eventually? And you know, the last thing he, you know, I wanna do is miss out on things. But still, I don't wanna give up completely on it. I love it. It's part of, it's [01:31:00] become part of my, I, well, a big part of my identity. Um, 'cause I created it, it's my baby, right? And, you know, I, I would love to eventually maybe do a cookbook, uh, uh, you know, a cookie book, you know, and even then, I don't even know where to start. How do you do that? What, what's involved? Um, uh, you know, it's a big venture to do something like that, but that's something I, you know, maybe that's an end goal, uh, of that.

But, you know, I want something still, and I'm not quite sure where the end game is going, but I keep looking and opening doors and, um, and looking, because I still feel like there's something I need to do or I want to do, and I haven't hit it yet.

David Crabill: As you think back on the last few years, what has your business meant to you?

Tammy Brennan: Oh, it means everything. Um, well, not everything. Of course my family does, you know, means a lot to me too. And there, [01:32:00] the center of it all. Um, but it has meant, um, oh gosh. See, I get weepy. Um, it has just meant me, you know, when you age. See, I don't know, I get weepy. Uh, as you age, you become, especially as a woman, you become a little more invisible and. Um, it's just really nice and it has been nice just to be the star of the show, know, once in a while instead of the supporting actress or the, or the extra, you know, you know, my daughter was a national level swimmer, you know, and super star and, you know, and, uh, which is, was amazing and I supported her and everything like that.

And so I sort of feel like this is my time to, um, be my own star and create, you know, not that I'm a superstar or anything like that, but create, uh, something for myself that, I'm proud of, you know? So, oh, I'm weepy. I'm always weepy. So, um, it's just been important for, um, developing. I just feel like, you know, my mom died young and didn't sort of get to do things like that for herself, and sorry you know, I just, I just don't wanna be the person that out on, even though I work hard and I complain about it sometimes so hard, I just don't wanna miss out on living my life to the fullest.

David Crabill: It's good to see that emotion and just how much it means to you.

Tammy Brennan: Yeah, it

it means the world to me because, you know, just when you go through a big struggle in your life, losing really when she was young and vibrant and, you know, you just, you don't take things for advantage. You know, you kinda, you're waiting for the shoe to fall. And I think that's part of what motivates me is, [01:34:00] um, you know, is like the shoe could fall any moment and, um, just go while it's still going.

You know, like, because you don't know, you don't know what tomorrow brings, and you don't know what could happen to your life that you have no control over. um, that is a lesson that I've learned. Um, so as you know, I can try to control, you know, my own destiny and, um, my own successes and my own failures and my own, um, in life.

Uh, to some degree, small degree.

David Crabill: Yeah, I mean, you know, my, um, my brother passed away when I was in college, and then my dad passed away shortly after college. Um, and, and they're a big part of the reason why I do Forrager, you know, and, and I've talked about that in a previous podcast episode, but like, I definitely understand what you're saying, [01:35:00] where he's like, you never know what the next day will bring.

So you need to make the most of what you have right now.

Tammy Brennan: I am trying to do you know, put limits on my working so I don't forget to live in the moment. And I get so caught up sometimes it's easy to get caught up sometimes, and, you know, and you know, oh, I made another sale. Oh, I made another sale. And, you know, it's so easy. It's so rewarding.

I sort of feel like it's sort of like when you, you know, like a slot machine, you know, and it's like ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. It gets a little addictive. And, um, and it's true. And, uh, but it's just like, okay, why am I doing this? What are my, you know, what are my goals for ending happiness? And um, that's something, you know, I was so busy the first few years that now I have a little time to think about it.

And, um, and, you know, and talk about it with friends and you know, I get asked all the time, where are you going? And I'm like, I don't know. I don't know. And I really don't know what my end game is, and I don't know. And, um, but that's okay. I'm okay with that because right now, here in the moment, um, I'm feeling pretty good about myself and, um, I shocked myself. I know I say I shocked my husband.

I was shocked. My goal was, um, to sell some cookies and make people happy and, you know, and, do this side business, uh, that would just bring me some joy and, you know, bring in a little extra income and, you know, and, and it just took off. And, um, and I really shocked myself too.

It's not that I don't, didn't think I was capable of doing these things, [01:37:00] but, um, I think maybe at this stage in my life, I, you know what I mean?

Like, you think, know, all these young people, like tech is so easy for them. They, you know what I mean? All these things, you know, filling up forms in the government and all these things are so easy for some people and for me, they've been really hard, really, really, really hard. And people that, you know, grow up a little bit younger, they're used to tech, they don't get it.

And so that's that extra barrier, that extra challenge, um. When you know people, uh, you know, on social media, they're young, they're cute, they're vibrant. They, you know, and, and you're like, yeah, well, I'm a grandma and, um, you know, I got gray hair and wrinkles and, uh, you know, these are the people that you know,

David Crabill: You've got more followers than most of them. So,

Tammy Brennan: Thank you. But then you have, when you have those moments of doubt, you think, why do people follow me? I'm, you know, you get, everybody gets that at times, you know what I mean? And, um, but then you have to stand back and look at where I was, where I was two years ago? Holy moly. I have come so far. I'm so proud of myself,

David Crabill: Well, thank you so much, Tammy. Now, if people would like to learn more about you, where can they find you? How can they reach out?

Tammy Brennan: Social media is always the best and TikTok is hard for me. I don't have a ton of followers there. I'm not always there. Uh, Instagram messaging, uh, emailing me, uh, are, you know, those are the best ways. I am on Facebook. And I do, um, answer all my messages on Facebook as well. But the absolute best place, uh, to contact me and I will, uh, uh, answer is on Instagram messages.

David Crabill: Awesome. Well, I'll share links to all those in the show notes. And thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

Tammy Brennan: Thank you for having me.

David Crabill: That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/167.

And if you've been enjoying this podcast, I would like to ask you if you are watching this on YouTube. If you could take a quick moment and subscribe to my channel that allows you to get updates for future episodes and also click the thumbs up button to like this episode.

And if you're listening to this on a podcast player, if you could take a quick moment to leave me either a review on Apple Podcasts or a rating on Spotify, I'd really appreciate it and will help other people like you find this podcast.

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

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