

DeEtta Vincent: Hart Mountain Bakery

We went to DeEtta's house in Plush, basically the middle of nowhere to get an interview and to see her kitchen. We heard she won a contest and we were curious about her selling her products especially her biscotti. The interview was set at her house. Present in the interview was Joan Gross, Nancy Rosenberger, and Toan Ngo along with me and DeEtta. She was probably in her late 50s to 60s and was crazy about baking, her kitchen and her new found success.

Colleen A. Johnson [00:30]: So you won a contest, can you explain a little about the contest?

DeEtta Vincent: The contest that was labeled the great American Food Fight was held last August in fact at the same time, or conjunction with the county fair and all of those activities. It was the first time that the contest had been conducted here in Lake County. The purpose of this contest was as I understood it, or came to understand it after the fact was to identify rural entrepreneurs interested in developing a food product. The winnings, or the person who won the contest essentially won a contest to the food innovation center. And there was a first and a second place. Because it was the first year and because nobody really knew what it was all about, we only ended up with three entrances with four food products. Which unfortunately is not a lot, but it was the first time out. The contest itself was conducted, I think OSU had some part in it, so you probably have a better idea than I do about what was going on (no) oh, well basically what happened each of the contestants were asked to bring their product, and their story to the contest. The product so it could be tasted, sampled, looked at and the story so they could be interviewed. That was really all we were given in terms of direction. Once we got there basically what they did was a interview which was video taped that asked some generic kinds of questions more or less how we talked in public more than anything else. Then we talked with a panel of judges, two of whom came to the contest itself, actually I don't think they were from OSU, they might have been some form of affiliation, I don't really know, very knowledgeable people, and then the other judges were local individuals. One of whom runs the mortuary, but is also known as a gourmet cook and the other one runs a bed and breakfast and is also known as a very good cook and a good entrepreneur. So we met and talked with the judges. At no time did it feel like a competition, what it felt like was a conversation. And it was the first time that I had to talk to someone in Lake County in exchanging information and ideas about something that was interesting to me. Which was a marvelous experience, if it had just stopped there then it would have been worth my time just to have done that. Because it wasn't, "How do you do this?" check mark check mark, check mark kind of thing it was instead have you considered this are you thinking about doing that, what would you do in this situation. That kind of an open conversation and it was very positive. I can't speak to any other of the contestants, but I thought that it was an excellent thing for me to have gone through. It turned out that I won. Which was marvelous, but it wasn't really, I want to say again, it wasn't really a competition like you've got to do it, and I'm a very competitive person so I would have felt that if it were. And it wasn't till after I won that I understood what I was winning. What I won was essentially a dollar amount that paid to the Food Innovation Center. That was supposed to be used to get my product out in the market or to whatever the next stage

was. All things being what they are I didn't make it to the Food Innovation Center until February of this year, so you know I've got a good six months in there in the middle of a snow storm and all that sort of stuff. And when I got to the Food Innovation Center apparently one person was assigned to me and I'm sure they have many people assigned to different folks. The person that was assigned to me we communicated in advance so we had some sort of idea where I was. My fear was someone was going to pat me on the head and give me no information. It turned out when I got there Sarah Mohony??? was and is the person I was working with had lined up an agenda and focused on what I had asked as opposed to anyone there so it was a one on one discussion. It was only for a day and a half because that's when we had a horrific snow storm in February. Even at that I just had to get out of town it took 14 hours to get into Portland it was just awful. But what we did is we did a variety of things. I took samples of all my biscotti. A lot of people tasted it and they made comments of flavors and whatever else. I actually made some biscotti there while they were watching which gave her the opportunity to make comments on technique which she had none to make, which that was okay. We went shopping me and Katie went to a couple of markets and spent some time looking at packaging. You know what makes this product look like something you would pick up or at least look at because somebody has to pick up your product before you can buy it. Then we met with a graphics designer the point of that conversation was to begin the process of designing our label for the product. We had to do things like decide on the brand name. Heart Mountain Bakery just doesn't sound like Italian biscotti. And those are all the kinds of things you have to think about if you want to start marketing something so we spent quite a bit of time with this gentlemen and he has since worked iditively with me on a label which we should start using right away. I also met with a marketing person. That conversation was a little more generic, but it helped focus on how to market. Of all the things you can say, I picked up a quarter I took one away a, I didn't have that type of reaction there, but what I did was took some sensitivities away, that was good. I don't think I know one lick more about marketing than I did before, but I have a lot more sensitivity about what I might wan to do. For Example: when I went to the Food Fight my pitch, if you will was that I wanted to have an internet web sight to sell biscotti after I left Portland I was convinced I didn't. Because I haven't really thought about everything that it meant and what it meant in terms of progressive steps. After the discussion with the marketing ladies, All of us felt like I would do better by trying to find other outlets outside of the Lakeview area where I could deliver the products and build a process with product on hand, and doing all of that. Once you get on the internet, someone places an order, you better be ready right then and there to deliver. You better have your distribution channels in place. You know the worst thing that could happen to you is that you could be successful. And that's something I had to thing about. Now I've set that aside and we are going a little bit different with it, going a little bit different route. But probably for me the biggest piece, and maybe this is a lot more than you wanted to know, but the biggest piece that I got out of going to the food innovation center was the opportunity to meet people in food production. I didn't know beans about it, or bread about it. You know I've been someone who has baked all of my life, I enjoy doing it I've been doing it professionally, if you want to call this a profession, for several years but I've been doing it completely in the blind without the benefit of schooling or connections with anybody in the food industry. So being able to sit down and ask somebody something as simple as, "what in the heck do I do with all my

leftover egg yokes?” To have a conversation like that was just enormously positive. The funny thing was, and it became real clear to me, and as I mentioned before I was a competitive person, and as they say, well there is a lot of things they say, but to make the commitment to go forward, or just continue to play and have a good time. That crossed the line, because that’s kind of where we are. I’m in a very awkward position out here, it’s not, I wouldn’t say to someone, if you wanted to start a business go 50 miles out of town, where there is no labor force, where there is no control over a lot of things, and start a business. It’s just not what you want to do. However, that’s what I’m doing. And I can either play at it or make it happen and I’m going to make it happen. So probably of all the things one could say about the process, it was that I got interviewed by people that could help me really see what I was trying to do, and secondly let me make the decision about what I wanted to do about myself. That was good, that was enormously wonderful. I’m glad I won the scholarship if for no reason than that.

CAJ: Where is the food innovation center?

DV: It’s actually in Portland. As I understand it the food innovation center is a cooperative partner with OSU, and as I see it it gets a fair amount of funding from OSU, but its mission is to work with food manufactures of all shapes and sizes you corporations and whatever else and they do I think they are a consultant group and they do everything from consulting with your packaging to formulating better production methods to formulating recipes. They have a huge facility where they have test kitchens, if you wanted to bring a product to market they could do a focus group, they’ve got focus group testing areas. It’s really quite a nice facility. So that’s the difference at their end, and I just got to use a little bit and that was fine.

CAJ: Did you always make biscotti?

DV: No.

CAJ: You said about Hart Mountain Bakery, you said that several years before the contest? So how long have you really been around?

DV: I’ve been around a long time. I started Hart Mountain Bakery in the summer of 92 I guess it would have been, ’93 ’94, ’92 so I guess it would have been four years this year. (’03, 2003?) Yeah, I’m always off ten years, yeah three years ago. At the time, and I had mentioned in the kitchen that I had been working for the county and I didn’t want to be there any longer. So I thought what the hell and I quit. And it’s like what am I going to do with my time now, and up until this year, Lakeview had had an open air market on Saturdays, which could be referred to as a Saturday market and people bring stuff and sell it there. And I thought eh I was making biscotti at that point already though not commercially but people liked it and I made it all the time for my mom, and I thought oh I’ll just do that and I immediately found out that I couldn’t do that until I got a license a commercial kitchen license and do this and that. So I spent about a month to get my facility approved as a commercial kitchen. And then I started selling things in the open air market. What I immediately found was, I tend to do things and then I think about it, in a community as small as we are, you can’t have great depth. You can’t make 5 million pieces of biscotti and sell them, I could sell biscotti to 4 people maybe, but you can’t live on that so what you end up doing very quickly is becoming broad as opposed to deep, and so hart mountain bakery is a very broad array of baked goods. At that point we were even making dry noodles, bread, quick breads, pies; I do everything except decorated cakes.

You don't want me to do decorated cakes. But a broad selection of good and biscotti is just one of those things that I make.

CAJ: So do you think that is your main concentration now, biscotti?

DV: No, not until it becomes commercially more viable.

CAJ: In the contest, what were your competitors products?

DV: Someone had a steak sauce, and he was from Lakeview. And there was a woman from Christmas Valley, and she had a salsa, and something else. And she won the second place with her salsa; I never got to see her presentation so I just don't remember.

CAJ: Did you say she was from Silver Lake?

DV: Christmas Valley.

CAJ: How big is your business now?

DV: In what sense?

CAJ: Where do you distribute?

DV: When I first started the business, I started selling to the open air market, let me go back to that story. And it didn't actually take long before I developed a following and then there was a demand. Because you cannot in Lakeview buy a good loaf of bread. There is no bakery in Lakeview, no place can you go and buy a baguette, no place where you can buy a pie, unless you go to Safeway and buy something frozen. And our Safeway doesn't have a bakery like your Safeways do or anything like that. SO there is no place in town where you can buy good baked good unless it is something commercially manufactured by the town. So right away there was an immediate response and it was a positive response and I'm thinking oh, "that's cool". And then the weather got cold. And I'm thinking ooh, this is not so cool. What am I going to do? So what I did that first year is when we closed the open air market which was in October, I switched to delivering once a week in town. So people call me place an order and I'll bring it to you on Friday. And so I did that the first year, did that the second year, and then I kind of set aside the business for awhile. My nephew moved into town and started a plumbing business so I helped him get that going. But then he got up on his feet and he went away. So I continued in this, for the summer face to face selling, and in the winter place an order and I'll deliver it. Winter is always a little skinny. Of course we do anything like the holiday sale and any special events like that. I'll have a booth and sell all kinds of stuff. Then a year ago Lakeview locker, are you aware of them? (Yes) They bought Lakeview lockers in December of 96 possibly 95. There reason was to create a retail component of the business, so they approached me and said, "we would like to carry your baked goods". What there concept was was that they wanted somebody to be able to come in and buy stuff they needed to take for a dinner. And we spent several months talking about, we originally thought we'd have five products and we went through all that discussion. And they opened their retail component last august. And from the minute they opened it, until today we have never been able to keep enough stuff on the shelf. SO what a good idea from them turned out to be a marvelous idea for a whole bunch of people. And if you haven't been there I really suggest you go there and just look around. What they've done is they've created a, what I can only describe as a food boutique. And they sell there meats there of course, but you'll find wine, beer that you wont find anywhere else in town. You'll find cheeses that you wont be able to find any places. My baked good are there. They have all kinds of miscellaneous stuff from one minute to the next you never know what you are going to find in it. It's like going to an antique store; you have to keep mining it. They have just been very,

very successful. It's obvious the community is wanting something like that. And their success had been my success. So we deliver twice a week to them we deliver on Tuesdays and Friday mornings. Because of course my products usually have to be used fresh and immediately, you can't stock pile them so to speak. So I deliver there, I have come standing customers, one of which is a restaurant in town. I have a standing order which is a weekly order with one of the banks, who gives cookies out on Fridays to their customers. So every Friday they get 8 dozen cookies. So I am furnishing the pastries for the new coffee shop in town, The Gathering Place. So I have some steady constant customers, and then I still have people who call and make special orders.

Joan Gross: What's the restaurant in town?

DV: Mario's. This is the first calendar year where I am not doing anything else economically to support myself so I am living off the bakery proceeds this year. Last year I had a couple of contractors where I did their books for them, but I've cut everybody loose, so all I do now is bake. I have the chapped hands to prove it.

CAJ: SO you were listing off all your different products. Why did you take biscotti to the contest?

DV: Before I started any of this I thought and I still think that biscotti is a marvelous product and one that is good to sell broadly. For a couple of reasons: First of all, I think it tastes good. I hope you found the same thing to be the case, secondly the type of biscotti that I make is called a Tuscan style. As opposed to a roman style biscotti, probably more than you wanted to know, But basically the difference is that the Tuscan style biscotti there is no fat. In the roman style there is butter. SO if you get a piece of biscotti that is more cookie like or crummy like that, that's got butter in it. Anything that has butter in it doesn't have a long shelf life. And it has stuff in it that health conscious people don't necessarily want. I started making this biscotti for my mom. She gets up at 4 in the morning and has hot coffee. Well coffee was something that makes her stomach bounce a little bit but she is very sensitive to things like fats and she wants to keep them out of her diet. I just started making it for her after I moved here.

CAJ: What kind of recipe did you use, I mean did you make up your own?

DV: I started with a recipe that I found in a cook book and then from there is was whatever I felt like I wanted to do. So yes, all of these have gone through substantial metamorphosis. This one the chocolate cherry and the orange cranberry are new this year.

CAJ: Is that something you like to do? Experiment in the kitchen?

DV: [pause] The answer is yes, I love trying new things but I get very little time to do it. At this point it is something that you lose. It is like anytime you take a hobby and you make it into something more, you lose the fun. That is kind of what happened here. Because if I know I have to try something, it is because I have a specific reason to try it, or I want to do something new or whatever. Since I came home from the food innovation center I've been thinking about white chocolate cranberry biscotti. I just know that that would be a nice combination. But I just have to do anything with it though.

CAJ: Do you distribute your biscotti anywhere outside of Lake County?

DV: Not at the moment we will be soon.

CAJ: Do you have a plan for that?

LOG: DeEtta talks about Food Innovation Center packaging problems. She talks about the inflexibility of nutritional labeling. She spent six months working on it, and

now she learned she is exempt from it. So now she is battling with whether or not she wants a nutritional label. She has to pay for Nutritional labeling and it is an expense. She thinks she won't do it. She is exempt because anyone with fewer than 100 employees. She talks about printing costs and penny costs. You make pennies on the sale. She is not exempt from ingredient labeling though.

CAJ [28:20]: What is your favorite product that you make? (No) So you make a lot of breads and biscotti, is there anything else you do?

DV: Tomorrow morning when I go into town, I'll be taking biscotti because I made it this weekend. I'll be taking baguettes, cinnamon rolls, cinnamon pull apart, rye bread, whole wheat bread, orange date bread, I'm doing that for my quick bread this week. I don't know possibly some other type of bread. Kaiser rolls. Tuesdays tend to be lighter days. Normally I'd be bringing in 9 pies, but I took in extra pies on Friday so I won't take bake any today. I'll be taking in parmesan bread sticks and crackers. Italian herb sticks and crackers.

CAJ: And I can buy all of this at Lakeview lockers?

DV: Tomorrow.

LOG: I comment on her cinnamon pull apart bread and she goes into a story of why she does cinnamon pull apart. She describes taking the cinnamon roll extras and making the bread. It still tasted good.

CAJ: Do you use any local foods?

DV: What do you mean by local, Oregon?

CAJ: Whatever you define local as.

DV: Well out here (yeah I understand) Other than what we grow in the garden. But I try to use Oregon products when I can, for example. Hazel nuts I can get for sure. Pendleton flour from the mills, you know there is no reason not to use Oregon products. Obviously eggs are Oregon, milk is Oregon, but then I make things with pistachios which are not. But to the extent that I can I use Oregon products. But only if it is appropriate.

JG: Where do you get your supplies?

DV: Now that's some of the big challenges of being out here in the middle of nowhere. If you were to say to me, "what's the hardest thing?" it would be getting supplies and the cost of getting supplies. My supplies come mostly from Klamath Falls and there is a food distributor that comes over twice a week they will bring some products. So I have them carry over my four sugar you know the heavy things. They will bring it out to the lockers and they hold it for me and I pick it up there. Other things like grain that I put into multi grain bread and things like that. Those I actually pick up at Klamath in bulk food stores or in Bend in bulk food stores things like hazelnuts I order directly from the grower. SO I do things in a variety of ways. One of the challenges has been to buy in sufficiently large quantities where you can get any breaks in it. Obviously you can't make anything if you buy it at Safeway to sell. It doesn't work that way. And yet if you are going to bake with a bread, what I like to call a bread product base you have to have a pretty decent pantry. So what happens is I build a business and instead of buying a can I can buy a case and you just keep on plowing it back into the business and a lot of it is sitting right in my pantry right now.

JG: What else do you grow in your garden?

DV: Well I don't have a garden my mom does, she had a green thumb. In terms of what I use out of her garden, up until this year I used basil. If you go into the lockers you'll see basil pesto and sun dries tomato pesto in the case that I make. The rabbits ate the basil this year so we are not doing that this year but um. Spinach, we do a lot with spinach noodles, but we are not doing noodles I canceled that. I stopped doing those they were very popular but they were a lost leader. I did them deliberately when I got started because I wanted people to come to me to buy the noodles and then to buy something else. Well, now I don't need to do that, so I've had to tri some of the things I did away, which makes sense.

LOG: Joan asked about selling from her home. DeEtta is not set up to do so, by the rules from the department of agriculture. She also doesn't sell to the Plush store because "for whatever reason" they don't want her products. It's more of a saloon. Nancy asked about hours of work she puts in, she says, "A lot." Monday and Thursday are the big days. It starts with pies. Then she takes a little nap, and then bakes all night, then delivers. Long hours but that all she does. Her mother helps a little, she is 79. But she is not dependant on her. She does a lot of dishes. Her great-grandfather lived in the area in the 1870s. They talk about the red lava house. She talks about her migration back to the homestead. Her mother moved to plush in 1990. She talks about changing her own life. Not having any other plans she bought the house from repossession. She lived in fast cities all her life she doesn't feel she had to do that anymore. She worked with technology. She worked for lawyers in Milwaukee. She talks about her current slow speed internet. It was a huge change for her. She still enjoys baking, though she has to do them now. She want to have a tangible product in her life. She felt that she just pushed paper and had nothing to show for it. She isn't interested in getting rich; she wants the satisfaction of people liking her product. Then she talks about her view. Nancy asks about her label. We get to see it.