

Transcript Funeral Potatoes & Wool Mittens: Buttery Caramels and Fancy Dishes with Liz Murphy of Betty's Antiques, Mar 30, 2024

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[Quote Liz] But just enough touches where you're like, oh, she's been thinking about me all morning and preparing for our little lunch together, and it's just so sweet and thoughtful.

[Staci] Welcome to Funeral Potatoes and Wool Mittens, a show for people who embrace the warm and cozy spirit of everyday living in the Midwest. From the blog Random Sweets, I'm your host, Staci Mergenthal. In this episode, you and I are going to meet Betty's Antiques owner, Liz Murphy, from St. Paul, Minnesota.

She's walking us through her charming vintage boutique on the historic corner of Selby and Snelling Avenues. Plus, she shares the sweet way that her grandma, Betty, influenced how she dresses up a table in a non-fussy sort of way so that we can make our guests feel special. Even in our everyday living, using touches like fresh flowers and table linens to glassware and candles and pretty dishes.

We talk about an evening with Lawrence Welk and her manageable way to appreciate our fine china, what mindset we should be in when it's time to wash those fancy dishes. Plus, Liz tells us a couple of her favorite spots that are near her shop where she "likes to eat lunch and enjoy a treat. And we talk about the cookbook that her cousin put together that's full of recipes and stories that the family put together that are of Grandma Betty. And she even gives us Betty's recipe for buttery smooth caramels, which you can get on my website, randomsweets.com. And while you're listening, take a look at Liz's website and her social media, which you can find on bettyzantiquesstp.com. So the STP is for St. Paul, so bettyzantiquesstp.com.

It's a pleasure to be here with you, Liz. Welcome to Funeral Potatoes & Wool Mittens.

[Liz] Thanks, Staci. It's a pleasure to be here too.

[Staci] Sarah Peterson of Vintage Dish and Tell, she told me about your shop, Betty's Antiques, and she mentioned that you have a cookbook of your grandma's recipes. And so I'm just glad that you accepted my invitation and that you're here today so that you'll share about your shop and grandma Betty and some of her recipes. And then something else that I need a lot of help with, and that is setting a beautiful table and creating welcome vignettes as a host when you host parties and such in your home or other places. I've heard that you're really good at it and passionate about it. And there's also a little piece of that about using your good dishes.

[Liz] Okay, sounds good. Thanks again for having me, Staci. Yes, I met Sarah shortly after I opened Betty's Antiques, which is in St. Paul, Minnesota. I was offering my new customers caramels that were a very close replica to my grandma Betty's recipe. And Sarah, I think

that was sort of the kickoff for her and I to start talking. And we've actually become great friends ever since then.

And that was in June of 2022, 2023, sorry, 2023. So I've been open, Betty's Antiques has been open not quite a year. And I named the shop after her. And I'll tell you a little bit more about that in a minute. But I live in St. Paul, really close to the shop, which is so convenient. My husband and I are kind of empty nesters. We have two girls, one that is a college graduate, flew the nest and is in her first big girl job and lives in an apartment in St. Paul. And then our second daughter is a sophomore at Madison. So she is working hard as a neurobiology student. So we love to go see her in Madison. So yeah, we've lived in St. Paul for we bought our first house in 1996. So we've been here a long time. We feel like St. Paul is appropriately nicknamed St. Small, because it does really at times feel like a small town and our little shopping, my little shopping district here on Selby and Snelling really does kind of feel like a charming little main street with restored buildings and lots of independent shops and restaurants.

[Staci] I lived in the cities in the Twin Cities when I let's see, it would have been the early 90s, like 89, 90, 91. I recall, I was a teenager at the time, I recall thinking it's a big city, but you do get to kind of have your own neighborhoods and little areas where you do shopping. So you get to know people and it doesn't seem so big after a while.

[Liz] Exactly. Not only that, but as we got settled in St. Paul, we started meeting a lot of families that their parents lived a couple streets away, their aunt and uncle lived close by. They went to school in St. Paul, their kids are going to go to St. Paul. So there's this real kind of legacy. People might grow up in St. Paul, leave for a while and then they end up coming back. So that's the other thing that sort of gives this city a little bit of that small town feel.

[Staci] So Betty's Antiques has been open, you said not quite a year. What did you do before that?

[Liz] I have always been a lover of antiques and I kind of learned the ropes at a shop not too far from Betty's Antiques called Missouri Mouse, which is more of a collective shop. So there's about 30 dealers in there. And I just loved the idea. I've always been an antique lover. Love the idea of kind of having this little side hustle, if you will, because really my whole career has been in product design. So I worked in the corporate world for 19 years prior to that, worked for a more medium sized home furnishings company in town. And when I left my corporate job as a product designer and I really did love looking back on it, it was again, it's funny to think about all the little elements of your life that kind of build up to something really special, which is what I how I would describe my my life now. And I working for a big corporation, it allows you to not only work with top talent in the industry but also travel the world. And so all of those experiences, I feel like I've sort of come together to what I'm doing now. My love for furniture, lighting, decor is all just a culmination of my work experience and just my long life, my long love of of antiques.

[Staci] So you're in your natural habitat.

[Liz] I think I am Staci. I think that's a really nice way to put it. I feel so lucky to be coming to this space that is just so, it just is so me. I think it just represents me so well.

[Staci] And I'm sure you've experienced then it sounds like the when they say it when you own your own business, you have your own business. It's not that you have to work any less. You actually probably work harder, more hours, more dedicated, but it probably doesn't seem as hard of work, right?

[Liz] I would say labor of love has never felt so appropriate to say, because yes, I do try to give myself a little break. The shop is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. And so I do try to take a little a little break. But you're right. It is a totally different kind of energy and a different kind of tired, if you will. When when you're doing you're doing this because you want to do it and you want to do it on your timeline and your way. It's really kind of liberating.

[Staci] Now, we talked a little bit about food when I first you and I first visited and you said, I don't I don't do a lot of cooking. My husband does most of the cooking around here. And I said, well, that's OK. I want to hear about that, too. So what are some of your favorite dishes that he makes or in your family? What do you say, "will you please make this, this is what we love"?

[Liz] Well, it's funny. I do. I mean, sometimes I'm really sheepish about about admitting that because, you know, there's something about what I'm doing in the shop that I think does lend itself to entertaining and and pulling out all your fancy dishes and things. So I think naturally people think, well, she's probably a great cook, too. And the reality is, I've never been a great cook. I've never really enjoyed it. I don't know why. My mom was a fantastic cook. My grandma, Betty, was a great cook. She did a lot of hosting and entertaining and cooking and baking. But yeah, my my husband, who it's funny because he thinks about how picky he was as a as a kid, how picky of an eater he was. And he's like, Gosh, my mom would just love to see me now making all of these dishes with all of these ingredients and all this kind of experimentation and on the grill and you know, all that. But I would say, you know, when he's when he's kind of in his element, he's outside on the grill. He he loves to grill and I would say, you know, one of our like favorite moments is usually in the summer or fall when he's got the grill going and he's doing I love it when he does salmon with grilled veggies, a little side of potatoes. If it's corn on the cob season, we love to do corn on the cob and a glass of wine, of course, sitting out on the patio. So that's probably my favorite meal, but I also am kind of a casserole comfort food person. So when it's when it's winter or, you know, in the the early January, February when when typically in Minnesota, it's dark and cold. I love like chicken rice casserole or he does like a chicken and crouton dish, which is really, really simple, but it's just so comforting. It's like cream of mushroom soup with chicken breasts and croutons that just get really, really crunchy on the top after baking. Those are those are a couple of meals that I love in the winter. And then, of course,

every once in a while, we have breakfast for dinner. I think there's something kind of fun about like waffles and eggs and a side of bacon for dinner, which he does really well, too.

[Staci] Does he make homemade waffles?

[Liz] Oh, yes.

[Staci] Oh, yeah.

[Liz] And we've got a great waffle iron. And so, yeah, that's the other thing is cooking tends to be really enjoyable when you have all the right gadgets and all the right equipment. And so he's pretty into that, too.

[Staci] Are any of his recipes handed down from his family at all?

[liz] That's a good question. I think his mom, he has a great memory of his mom's getting chocolate chip cookies up to him at St. John's when he was a college student. So his recipe for chocolate chip cookies is just slightly different than the Nestle recipe on the chocolate chip package. And then he also does no-bake peanut butter. They're kind of like little peanut butter nests with the crunchy chow mein noodles and peanut butter and Karo syrup and sugar. And they're just like these little kind of no-bake balls.

[Staci] Yeah, the haystacks.

[Liz] Exactly.

[Staci] Love those.

[Liz] And those are definitely something his mom made as well.

[Staci] I wouldn't shy away from saying that. I mean, we talk a lot on the show about everybody has different interests and talents. And if it's something that you don't really enjoy, then you're not going to put your energy into it. And luckily, you have a husband that does. One of my sisters, Kalli, she does fine and great in the kitchen, but she doesn't love preparing a lot of meals. But her husband, Josh, I mean, he whips up things on the smoker and he's grilling and doing all these fabulous dishes in the kitchen and making her amazing meals. She'll send us pictures. And I think that's fantastic. That's how people, you know, that's how you get along.

[Liz] And exactly. No, I do feel lucky.

[Staci] And I don't I don't exactly like snow shoveling, but my husband will do it. That doesn't mean he likes it, right?

[Liz] Exactly. It takes a village, right? Yeah.

[Staci] So let's talk about Betty's Antiques. I have not been there yet because once Sarah told me about it, I'm like, oh, I can't wait. And so she and I both are talking about spending an afternoon together, have a little lunch and coffee and come to your shop and visit the other ones in your neighborhood there. But I'm waiting until we're not in winter. Although who knew that for the last three months we wouldn't have any snow to impede travel. So I have not been there. So paint a picture. Tell us what Betty's is and what treasures people will find there.

[Liz] Well, the first thing you'll notice is how adorable this building is. The building is a little standalone brick building that when it was first built in the early 30s was a family owned diaper service, which is kind of funny to think to think about a diaper service way back then. But if you think about what was happening in the 30s, Summit Avenue was well established. There was a lot of neighborhoods, very affluent neighborhoods in St. Paul at that time. And a customer of mine came into the shop shortly after I opened. And he was telling me that as a kid, he remembered those trucks doing all the deliveries. They're little white branded with the family's last name, which he couldn't remember. And I don't know as well, but he remembers all the trucks kind of doing their pickup and delivery of the diapers. And so the building just has some not only charm, but just history. And it's just off the just an alley away from three really great restored buildings in this little intersection, this little shopping district. And then, of course, once you get inside, people really feel like and have said over and over again, like antiques in this building is just like the perfect match. And so I love antique furniture, which you'll see a lot of lighting, so lamps, floor lamps, table lamps. I even have a couple of hardwired fixtures for sale and a few little sconces, lots of decor. And I love antique dishes, serving pieces, flatware, dinnerware, unique little shapes and sizes of glass, tasting glasses, coupe glasses. And so people come in and they're like, wow, you've got some amazing dishes. I'm on a mission to bring back china.

[Staci] And so Sarah probably was in love with everything when she walked in because she loves dishes, right?

[Liz] She does, yes. Not only the caramels we connected on, but definitely the dishes. And she, of course, has been one of my best customers.

[Staci] Hopefully her husband's not listening to this.

[Liz] Right, exactly. Although he's been in a couple of times too.

[Staci] Where do you acquire your items? I mean, you have some, you are closed Mondays and Tuesdays, but on weekends and such, you're there, your store is open. Where are you finding all of these wonderful finds to bring them into your store?

[Liz] That's a great question. Naturally, I love estate sales. That's really how I started estate sales and auctions. But since opening the shop, and you're right, I don't have as much time to kind of be hustling around at estate sales. I have been fortunate enough to meet a lot of people, and I'm at that age where friends of mine's parents are transitioning, downsizing. There's a book out there called The Swedish Art of Death Cleaning.

[Staci] I read that book! And that lady is hilarious.

[Liz] So, you know, pragmatic about just all the things that we acquire. And if we're not careful, our families, once we're gone, are going to have to deal with so much while they're grieving or while they're doing legal work and funeral planning. And then you might have a whole household to deal with. And I think there's a lot of people who are kind of at that stage in their life. And my shop is not huge. So I still need to be really particular about what I bring in so that I too don't have too much stuff. But I have met the most lovely people. In fact, that's why I was at the shop yesterday. Even though the shop was closed, I met a woman. She also has been a really great customer, but she's also downsizing and thinning the things that she had at her lake home. And so we went back and forth in an email and I selected some great things from her. And that's another reason why I was sort of hustling around this morning was just finding places for it because you love to show off all the stuff that you just acquired. And if I do it well, which I'm of course still learning, it has a little bit of a seasonality to it. So the fact that I have these treasures from her lake home in the shop now, I think really coincides with how people are thinking about this time of year.

[Staci] Do you have everything out that I mean, you said your shop is small. So do you have to have things packed away that are sort of seasonal? If you had Christmas dishes or something, would you have them out all year long?

[Liz] No, I do pack stuff away. I think that might be also a little differentiator of my shop versus other shops is I do want it to feel a little like a boutique. So I do want it to feel really relevant to the time of year. And so I think that also kind of creates a little anticipation. So when, for example, fast forward to later this year when I'm going to put out Christmas, I want that sort of anticipation of what anti-Christmas things is she going to have versus some shops. And again, they do it very well. But they might have Christmas in their space all year round. But I do like to keep my shop fresh and ever evolving and ever changing. And I think that seasonal layer is a great way to do it.

[Staci] Definitely. Have you ever had an item that you've just you intended to sell, but you're like, I just can't get rid of this. Isn't it hard?

[Liz] It's hard. It is hard. And I think I've gotten over that a little bit. But I will admit I have a few pieces at home that my husband's like, so is this eventually going over to Betty's? And I'm like, well, yeah, eventually it will make its way to Betty's. I'm not exactly sure if that's going to happen. But yes, it's hard. But I am, you know, I am in the business to sell and I want to, and plus I get to come here every day and enjoy it. So I do feel like it's sort of the

best of both worlds because I love it and I get to see it every day here. So then I'm not as compelled to keep it at home.

[Staci] How about unique items? Is there anything that you can think of that you have come across or found that you've sold that is just so unique?

[Liz] That's a good question. I feel like, I mean, being in the antique business, everything is unique. Everything is, you know, almost everything is one of a kind. I do have a piece of furniture in the shop right now that it's a French piece. It looks like a dresser with kind of a top that opens up. Almost like a, again, it's hard to explain because it is so unique. But when you open the top, that whole sort of, it's almost the depth of a drawer slides out at the same time. And inside there is a mirror and then it's all lined in white marble. And the gentleman that I bought it from, he purchased it in Iowa. And he called it a commode, but it's, it is a little bit taller. It's almost like a men's shaving station, where a man in this, this piece dates back to the eight, probably late between 1850 and 1900. And a man might have one of those white ceramic, like ironstone bowls and then his shaving sort of shaving kit. And he would stand versus like a woman sitting at a vanity. And that piece, that piece is very tempting to bring home. It's kind of the, it's kind of the star of the show in the shop right now. And I'm, I'm, I love having it because I think it can, it's the type of piece that can be used so many different ways. Right now I have it styled as kind of a, I have all my silver plate flatware. All, I love collecting unique serving pieces and little demitasse spoons and unique little appetizer forks. So I have a whole collection sitting on the piece right now. So it's sort of styled as like a little dining room server.

[Staci] Maybe eventually it'll make its way to a good home, not yours.

[Liz] Yeah, I know. That's the plan.

[Staci] Well, that piece is much more elegant than one of my most unique pieces. If somebody would ask me, I had to think about it. And I have this glass, it looks like a little measuring cup. It's maybe six inches tall, has a spout, obviously very vintage. And it says right on it, in the glass, the raised glass, urine specimen.

[Liz] That's awesome.

[Staci] I use that in my bathroom on the counter, you know, put Q-tips or whatever in it. I remember leaving the store even and not getting it and telling my sisters, this is just so funny. And they're like, get it, it's so quirky.

[Liz] I think that's the other part of what I'm doing now is enjoying people coming in. A lot of times it's like a mother daughter or granddaughter, mother, grandma shopping. And there's just the memories and the sharing of like, do you, you know, one like sister looking at another sister going, don't you have this from mom or, you know, where, what did we do with this? You know, when mom died. And so I just, I think it's so entertaining to, to hear and see people's reaction of, of antiques that that's sort of spark these memories.

[Staci] Right. I mean, you're kind of in the storytelling business.

[Liz] Exactly. And that's why I love like what happened yesterday when I was purchasing some things from a woman in the neighborhood is you do get to hear the story and then you get to pass that story on to someone else. I've had, I've had a lot of books. I do love to sell like coffee table books and interesting books in the shop that that fill some of the bookcases, but also I decorate with them. And there's been a lot of books that have had little notes or articles or like theater programs or just like all kinds of things just tucked in the pages of these books that kind of again, add to the story of who owned the book before I did. And people love that. And I always leave that stuff in the book because I think people also love to, to think about who might have had the book before them.

[Staci] Especially in cookbooks. When people write little notes, like I added this or too much this or the other, or this is really good. I picked up a cookbook from St. Vincent de Paul in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, because I'm close to Sioux Falls. And there was a community cookbook from, I think the Legion Post in Duluth. And it looks brand new. So I'm like, Oh, I love them when they're nice and clean too. And so I picked it up and then one night I was going through it and this note dropped out and it was something along the lines of dear, you know, bride and groom. Check out the recipe on page 64. It was grandpa's favorite waffle recipe, you know, and then love grandma or something like that. But, and the paper, the note paper that it was written on, I believe, had, you know how we used to have recipe cards and things with our actual name printed on it. And this note does so. I know the lady's name. So I go through the cookbook, the community cookbook, and she and her husband both had a lot of recipes. I think she helped compile and do the project for the community cookbook. So they have a lot of recipes in there. So now I'm on a search on the Internet looking for this lady in Duluth. It looks like her husband has died, but she, I think, is maybe still around, but in her 90s. And so I want to try to find her and talk to her. But then I'm like, well, do I hurt her feelings and tell her that the gift that she gave to her granddaughter for a wedding gift got given away and it doesn't even look used? So I'm sort of torn.

[Liz] That is a quandary. Oh my gosh, Staci. I would feel the same way because at 90, yeah, you don't want to make her feel bad.

[Staci] Right. So I'm not sure where I'll take that, but it's fun, though. I do love to see the little slips of papers and writings in those books. Well, if somebody's in your area at Betty's Antiques, if you were going to recommend something up in your area, where should people go?

[Liz] Well, I love the idea of spending a whole morning or whole afternoon right here in the Selby, Snelling little district. And Rose Street Patisserie is just on the corner, kind of anchors our neighborhood. And you cannot go wrong with going to Rose Street Patisserie for their amazing pastries, delicious sandwiches that of course are served on the most

amazing croissants. They have a whole range of coffee. And so that that probably would be how I would describe Rose Street Patisserie. And then across the street is Yum Kitchen. And the vibe at Yum Kitchen is just a little bit more modern and bright. There's always good energy going on there. And they serve beer and wine. And they've got, you know, bigger entrees. They also have treats like bar. In fact, you would probably love to check out some of their bars. They do like a really amazing Special K bar. They're kind of their own version. And it's just, it's a little more bustling in there. It's a little bigger, a little bit more modern. But those are the two spots that just are kind of no brainers. And of course, all walking distance from my shop.

[Staci] Okay. Yum Kitchen. Yeah! I mean, if it's fall, I will make a stop just to get their pumpkin bars. What do they put in their cream cheese frosting on those pumpkin bars? That's what I want to know. Because it's not like a normal one like I make at home, which is wonderful. But there is something in there.

[Liz] I know. That's how I feel about their Special K, their peanut butter Special K bars, which probably I need to try those then because again, they're doing something special there at Yum.

[Staci] Yes.

[Liz] And of course, the portion sizes of those bars are, you definitely want to share. Otherwise you're like, Oh my God, I've totally overindulged.

[Staci] Let's move into talking about Grandma Betty. Now, I said to you when we were talking before, I kept being afraid that I was going to call you Betty instead of Liz, because Betty, Betty's Antiques. I want to hear about Grandma. It's so special that you named your store after her. So there's obviously a good connection there.

[Liz] Oh, for sure. And my full name is Elizabeth and Betty is a nickname for Elizabeth. So there are a couple of regular customers that do call me Betty, and I don't correct them. But yeah, so my grandma, Betty, she was also quite a career woman. She was the director of nurses at the hospital in Le Sueur where I grew up. So she was a busy career woman. She was a widow at a young age. So she, her life revolved around, of course, all of us grandkids and my mom and aunts. But she also had a really tight group of lady friends that they played bridge together. They did cocktails at four o'clock together. They traveled together. Some of them were widows as well. Some of them weren't. But that kind of sort of laid some of the foundation for the sort of feeling at my shop is about sort of appreciating some of the finer things and not being so concerned about breaking a glass or chipping a plate or what have you. And she was always really good at that. She wasn't afraid to, you know, use her cloth napkins. And I remember when I was a student at the University of Minnesota, and I of course go down and see Grandma Betty, my parents also still lived in Le Sueur. You always felt special going to her house because she was very, like her table was set for the two of us. She usually had like little pipin' hot loaf from Pillsbury or the little

croissants from Pillsbury in the oven and like a chicken salad and the goblets and the cloth napkins. Not overly fussy, like she's not going to iron all that stuff, not that kind of, you know, elegance. But just enough touches where you're like, oh, she's been thinking about me "all morning and preparing for our little lunch together and it's just so sweet and thoughtful. And that kind of feeling is what I love to convey in my shop, which is don't be afraid to get out your fancy things. You don't need to polish the silver, but just enjoy if you're going to have these things in your cupboard. Get them out and use them. She was always just so good at that and I don't think there was a box of dishes in her basement. She had her things accessible and ready to use. And we have, us cousins, have so many memories of eating around her kitchen table and enjoying all of her treats. So yeah, she was kind of the center of the family.

[Staci] It's a beautiful way to remember her and what you said about she's been thinking about me all morning. And that's exactly what things like that make people feel. What's the family cookbook? Was it your cousin that put together a cookbook of a lot of Grandma Betty's recipes?

[Liz] Exactly. It's a very, you know, nothing fancy, but my cousin Megan took the time to gather some of those recipes that I think all of us cousins remember the most. And she organized them in a cookbook, sort of like all the entrees together, all the sides together. A picture of Grandma Betty is on the outside of the cookbook. But I will say, so this cookbook, I don't remember what year Megan put this together, but it was definitely a few years back. And she, as she was putting it together, she asked all of the family members to email her like a few stories that tie into a meal or a particular dish that Grandma Betty put together. And so there's little anecdotes and quotes throughout the cookbook from my family members. My favorite section of the cookbook is the treats, the desserts. But one of the funny stories in here, I'm just going to quick read it because it's pretty short, is from my Aunt Karen, so my mom's younger sister. She lives in California. And so she used to come to town for like a chunk of time every summer. And she submitted this little story, it's called caramels. And she says, I called her house during the holiday season during the fall sometime, and Dick Moriarty answered the phone. Now, Dick Moriarty was a handyman in town. And so he oftentimes was helping my grandma with, you know, home maintenance type project. So Dick Moriarty answered the phone. And Karen says, I thought I had the wrong phone number. He was painting mom's dining area and she was stirring her caramels and couldn't answer the phone. So in order for her to talk to me, Dick exchanged places with her. He stirred the caramels and she chatted with me for a while. Because if you know caramels, it's like a science, maybe even more so than an art. You cannot stop stirring that caramel, the caramel ingredients, and they have to be at a certain temperature for a certain period of time. She was not going to ruin the caramels just because Karen called.

[Staci] Now are those the caramels that you had in the shop or that you and Sarah reminisced over?

[Liz] So of course, Grandma Betty is no longer around and I don't cook. So no, those weren't exactly hers, but they were so close. I bought them from a woman in the neighborhood who actually was connected with me before I opened the shop. So I was at her house purchasing some antiques that she was selling. And she shared with me that she makes caramels and sells them to a few shops in town. And so as I was leaving her house, she said, let me give you a couple caramels. And so I took the caramels and tucked them in my pocket. And I was heading over to the shop with the things that I'd purchased from her. And I popped one of the caramels in my mouth. And I was like, OMG, these are the buttery, smooth, grandma Betty caramels that I have not had in years.

[Staci] She knew what she was doing. She's a good sales lady.

[Liz] And her name is Patty. And of course I've placed several caramels orders from her since because they're just, they're perfect. And they're such a good conversation starter when people are visiting Betty's Antiques for the first time.

[Staci] Do you have a few favorite recipes in that cookbook that you or that your husband will make or just that you have a good fond memories of that grandma would make like her chicken salad or something? Is that in there?

[Liz] Well, I have to, I have to stick to the treat section because that's my favorite. Her popcorn balls. I mean, that was a, that was a holiday favorite. Her popcorn balls. There was just, again, like a little more science to them than maybe art because they weren't like the prettiest thing, but they were, you know, made with Karo syrup and sugar and they were a little bit chewy, but a little bit crunchy, always wrapped individually in wax paper. And then she had them sitting in a paper bag on top of her refrigerator, just, you know, ready for us all to come over during that holiday season. So love the popcorn balls. She also would over make things like mint brownies, the little peanut butter balls that have a thin layer of chocolate over them. She would kind of like over make all of those so that even like in the spring or early summer, when again, all the cousins and we're all kind of gathering at her house, we would naturally end up in the basement where the deep freezer was. And the deep freezer had the green Tupperware with the white cover, with all the like over baked treats. And I mean, my little cousin Casey, we would prop him up and he'd crawl in there and pull out the container, the Tupperware containers of the peanut butter blossoms and the peanut butter balls. And I mean, we would enjoy those little frozen treats all year.

[Staci] Isn't it funny that you can even picture the actual container that it was in?

[Liz] Yes, because those containers are still floating around my family for sure.

[Staci] Sometimes you look through those older recipes. Well, first of all, lucky if they have anything written down. And then if they have it written down, they might not even have the amounts or measurements of ingredients. But is there any unusual like method of doing

something that you saw in there or ingredient that you're like, we can't, that's not what we use or I don't know what that is.

[Liz] I think more so in this cookbook are kind of so Megan sort of typed up all the recipes, but then she also had sort of a photoed layer of the recipe in the recipe in in my grandma's writing. And so sometimes she did say, let me see if I can find a good example. There were times where there were like little warning notes or again, not to belabor the caramel, but she does talk about, she puts in, because caramels are all about timing, not just the recipe. And so she's got little footnotes in here about how time, like it takes approximately 30, 55 minutes, I think it says 55, to boil, to come to a boil and stirring consistently. And then of course, you're using your little candy thermometer because it has to come to 245 degrees. So there's little sort of helpful tips about things like that. I also love because growing up in the same town as Grandma Betty, I would oftentimes, my sister and I would would spend the night or weekend at her house if my parents had things going on. And so one of the headers in the cookbook is called An Evening with Lawrence Welk because we would go to her house. And it's so funny to think of like going to your grandma's house today, you know, you'd probably be plopped in front of a movie, your grandparents maybe wouldn't even watch the movie with you. It'd be, you know, some Disney movie. I was pleased as punch to be at Grandma's Betty's watching Lawrence Welk with her. I mean, it was like, I never thought about like, I should watch my own show. It's like, no, I'm going to watch what Grandma Betty is watching tonight, which oftentimes was the Lawrence Welk show. And people listening to this might not even know who Lawrence Welk is. So, so Google, Google Lawrence Welk, because it was just the most charming story and he had musical guests on and then he'd have the swing dancers and it was just sweet. And so this, and of course, if I was lucky at Grandma Betty's on a Lawrence Welk evening, I would have a TV dinner. And so I'd have a Swanson TV dinner on her TV tray in front of Lawrence Welk. But then there's also like the whole, this whole page in the cookbook is about the casseroles, chicken casserole, chicken and rice casserole, hamburger soup, spaghetti. And then of course, a Tombstone pizza. That was also, if there wasn't a Swanson TV Dinner, a Tombstone pizza was also a treat to have at Grandma Betty's.

[Staci] That's fun to know that those were treats at one time. I mean, now we're not very interested.

[Liz] Now it's like, I don't even think Tombstone pizzas exist anymore.

[Staci] We're going to sort of come to the end, but we've left the most important thing to me anyway, because I really want to just hear a little bit from you about setting the stage and setting the table. And what you're doing is you're bringing the same thing to your family. I bet if people were to describe you and coming to your home, they would probably say the same thing. You know, she's been thinking about me all day. She's been planning for this and making me feel special. So like you said, your husband does a lot of the cooking, but you're making everything look beautiful. So you have your planning and entertaining how you plate it. You even talked about how you plate food sometimes or how you might put it

on a platter or in a bowl and use the pretty dishes. So I want you just to talk a little bit about that.

[Liz] Well, the planning is the key and I have a very clear memory. In fact, it still happens to this day where my mom has her yellow legal pad out and she's planning. Usually it's a July 4th gathering or some sort of summer gathering up at their lake home and the yellow pad comes out and she is in planning mode. And she she of course does that way better than I do. But but it does you know, it does require a little planning. And if you you know, want to set the stage in a way that is not stressful, you know, you got to plan ahead a little bit. But when I think about like all the Thanksgivings that our family has hosted, I love you know, getting out candles, getting out my silver like silver candlesticks or flatware. I'm not big on having to polish. I think things with a little bit of tarnish are totally fine. I think they actually look more authentic with a little bit of tarnish.

And so little decorative details on the table I think are really key to kind of conveying that feeling of that you're having someone special over that you, you know, want to convey that feeling. And fresh flowers. I love having fresh flowers on the table, not overly, not a ton of them because you want the whole idea of gathering around a table is to connect with family and friends.

And so you need them to have to be sort of small sort of blend in a little bit, not big huge bouquets, but maybe a couple small vases sort of up and down the center of the table that people can easily pass things around. And then I always love a fresh tablecloth. And again, it doesn't have to be ironed because once you get everything on your table, you don't even get credit for a crisp tablecloth.

And so I love, in fact, I have in my shop, there's just a few categories at Betty's Antiques where I have supplemented with a few new things. And this winter I decided to bring in some washed linen napkins and tablecloths. And I just love how the washed linen looks. It just has this drapery kind of, it's not even wrinkled, but just think about something right out of the dryer that you either could iron or maybe not. I would lean towards the maybe not. And that's what these tablecloths look like. And they just add a little bit of casualness to your table.

But one of the things I do to help Vic, as he's again kind of thinking about a big meal like Thanksgiving, where you want to serve everything when it's hot, it becomes sort of this timing issue. So that's the one thing that like my version of the yellow legal pad would maybe help him sort of time everything out. And then I get all the serving platters and serving bowls and serving spoons and forks and get them all laid out on the island with little post-it notes in them so that it's like, okay, the corn's going in here, the mashed potatoes are in here. So it's, and we haven't forgotten anything. So I'm sort of like the Sous Chef, but not the chef at all. I'm like the Sous, I don't know, table, tablescape person.

[Staci] Beautifyer

[Liz] Yeah, exactly. So yeah, and candles, going back to candles, they're such a mood setter. So you could kind of like dim the lights and have the candles be a little bit more of your of your light source, but not not scented candles, you want just unscented candles. I happen to love either just, you know, creamy white candles or just like softer colors in general. And then of course cloth napkins. I always get out my napkin rings and put the cloth napkins in the in the napkin rings. But yeah, so I, it works for us and we've hosted a lot of Thanksgivings at our house. So I feel like we've kind of play on each other's strengths a bit when we are doing big meals like that together.

[Staci] When you're doing tablecloths, do you have really just neutral tablecloths and napkins?

[Liz] I like more neutrals, but there's also something about maybe having, maybe you are layering. And again, this might be like a little fussy, but it's a way to use maybe a Christmas tablecloth that might cover the whole table. And then you might take a square tablecloth or something more neutral and put it on a diagonal on the table so that maybe your Christmas dishes then if they're patterned might sit on something more neutral. But yet you still have your Christmas patterned tablecloth on there. So it's like kind of a little bit of layering the pattern with something with no pattern and that's that's kind of fun, too.

[Staci] So one last thing about all of this, use your fancy dishes. So how do we get over the they don't go in the dishwasher. So when the meal's done and everything gets stacked up, you can't put them in the dishwasher.

[Liz] I feel like I've got a couple of answers for this this scenario and one Sarah from Vintage Dish and Tell, she and I have talked about because she does such a great job posting like old photos of her, like mom, aunts, grandma in the kitchen. And one of the things that her and I have talked a lot about is kind of the mindset of what happens when the meal is done. And you're you're that part of the day is wrapping up.

And there's something kind of charming and special about maybe the ladies, then they get to go into the kitchen and maybe just decompress and continue to chit chat on just their little topics while they do the dishes. And maybe the guys, I know this sounds really sexist, but maybe the guys are watching football if it's like a Thanksgiving or Christmas meal. But it's it's just a mindset that the day "or the the labor of love is not over when everyone's done eating it.

That it is about kind of getting back into the kitchen and wrapping it up and putting things in leftovers in just the right container and and washing the dishes. Because yeah, most of the finer china does need to be hand washed. But there is some new china that if you have a like a light wash cycle in your dishwasher, you can easily dishwasher some of that stuff, too, if it's not those hand painted details.

So that's kind of one part of my answer, Staci, but the other part is just like day to day. Maybe just pull out your salad plates from your set of china or just pull out the bread plates and use them with your morning coffee. Or if you're you're doing a family dinner and you're just going to do a little side salad, put it on one of the little bread plates or one of the salad plates.

And yes, you might have to hand wash them, but I think it sparks a little conversation with your family too. And your kids might be like, gee, mom, you got out the china. Like, what's going on? Or you might and you might share with them like I got this this china from Grandma Betty or, you know, I have the best memories of growing up and my mom had this china. And I think that is a manageable way to appreciate your your fine china without feeling like you have to get the entire set out. Just pull out bits and pieces and use them day to day when you feel like it.

I love doing that with my grandma's. She's got this very sweet blue and white set from Germany. It's nothing super fancy. But I have both the salad and the little bread plates and the fruit bowls stacked up in my kitchen so that if I'm just doing a little snack or toast or whatever, I can grab those instead of my my everyday boring white dishes.

[Staci Yeah. You know, that's great advice. That inspires me. I walk by. We have a little cabinet with a glass door and I have, I think, two of my grandma's tea cups where we would always have hot tea with her. And I'm going to start using that to just have hot tea. I mean, all you're having to do is do a little wash, rinse, and then thinking more of less like a chore when we get into the kitchen, having some of those other things that you're taking out daily. I mean, why do we do that? So even during the pandemic, little things like we weren't going places. And so I wasn't putting on my nice perfume. So it would sit there for six months. And I'm like, why? Every day is special, right? Every day should be special. I should be putting on my nice perfume, even though I'm not walking out the door, because it still smells good and it's special to me.

[liz] I love that analogy. I love that analogy, Staci. That is spot on. I think every day is kind of a gift and we should enjoy it and not save it for some elusive rainy day. It's just like, nope, today is the day.

[Staci] What if we're not here for that rainy day? What if we're already gone?

[Liz] Exactly.

[Staci] That's a great inspiration. Thank you.

[Liz] You're welcome.

[Staci] I hope that inspires people to look around and see what are some of the things. And maybe it's not even in the kitchen. Maybe it's something else, but, you know, start using

those things. That's why we're passing them down to family as well. The special things and not waiting for a holiday even. What you're saying, what you reminded me is even the everyday. It's not just the holiday.

[Liz] And honestly, when I think right now as of these little plates sitting on my counter, they're, they're so pretty. They're, you know, it's like kind of like a little decoration. I also have a little mini plate wall in my dining room. So I have a few plates that I've pulled out of a few sets and a few single plates I've collected along the way. And I've created this plate wall, which is really easy for anybody to do, to add a little fun color and pattern to their kitchen or dining room, or really any room.

[Staci] Yeah. Well, do you want to leave, have words of wisdom or inspiration before we end it here?

[Liz] Well, I mean, I think in culmination we maybe just did. Just appreciating every day. And when you visit Betty's Antiques, you might see a lot of fancy glassware dishes, silver platters. And I think those special things layered with your everyday things. I think they just, they just make life a little more interesting and a little more enjoyable. And yeah, I think don't be, don't overthink the idea of every day being a little fancy.

[Staci] What is the address of Betty's Antiques and where can people find you on social media if they want to follow you until they can come visit you?

[Liz] They can follow me on Instagram or Facebook, bettysantiques-stp.com, STP for St. Paul. The address of the shop is 1605 Selby. And again, it's a little standalone business just down from the three buildings that kind of anchor the shopping district on Selby and Snelling.

And yeah, usually I have things out front outside. And of course this winter I took full advantage of that. I always have a few tables and chairs. I have a cute bench that stays outside. So if I'm open, you'll probably see things, lovely antiques filling out the front door.

[Staci] Great. Thanks for inspiring us to use our fancy dishes, Liz.

[Liz] You're welcome, Staci. Thanks for inviting me.

[Staci] What a lovely episode, Liz. Thank you also to Sarah Peterson from the blog Vintage Dish and Tell for introducing us. And if you missed Sarah's episode, you can find it in season 2. It's episode 9 and it was published on December 1st, 2023.

Now I've never made caramels before. I know they're tricky, but Grandma Betty sounds so good when she says buttery smooth. They sound so good that I think I'm going to brave it and make those caramels. So the recipe for that, if you want it, and look at photos of Liz and Betty, are on randomsweets.com.

I hope this episode inspires you to use something fancy in your everyday living and for the holidays. Be sure to follow Liz on Instagram and Facebook and the links for all those are in the show notes. Thank you for tuning in today. I'm your host, Staci Mergenthal. Sweet wishes!