

WORTH EVERY PENNY *joycast*[™]

Sarah Petty: When Minnesota photographer Jenn Kerfeld looked at her end of the year finances after 13 years in business, she was ready to close the doors of her photography studio with just \$376 and 89 cents of net profit. She couldn't keep going. A year later, after making big changes to her business model, she had \$46,486 in net profit during a global pandemic. Today you will hear Jen's inspiring turnaround story.

So the real question is, how are portrait photographers like us able to run a profitable business and still put our families first without selling digital files for cheap and working all the time? I'm Sarah Petty, your host of the Worth Every Penny Joycast and I went from a stressed out overworked mama with three babies to being named one of America's most profitable photographers without working my kids' lives away. Each week I'll show you how to find and serve boutique portrait photography clients in a world where we compete with free, thanks to everyone having a digital camera in their pocket. Take the first step to adding more joy and profit to your life by downloading your free photography business tools at joyofmarketing.com/podcast. Jenn, thank you so much for being here.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, thank you for having me.

Sarah Petty: I know it's hard to hear that number, isn't it? That you are in business all those years and you realized you weren't making money. So let's go back to what you were doing in those 13 years. Were you having kids and what did your business look like?

Jenn Kerfeld: Sure. So in 2007 when I started the business, I was just 25 and I didn't have a husband or children or any of those things, so I just worked and then worked

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some more. And it was just one of those things where I didn't feel like I had anywhere else to be that was more fun or better things to do. So I just worked really hard in my business. And it wasn't until 2013 when I had my kids... Well, I was married in 2012 and in 2013 I had my first daughter and that really changed my perspective and changed the way that I was looking at my time and my business. I wanted to spend more time with her, but I didn't know how to do that because I was working about 60 hours a week.

Sarah Petty: Wow. So during this time, were you selling digital files or were you always trying to sell prints?

Jenn Kerfeld: During that time I was selling prints, actually. Digitals weren't huge or really as popular maybe or as the thing that photographers were doing during that time. And so I was selling prints. I had a package for \$135 that had eight by tens and five by sevens and all the things. And I thought I was doing a really great service to my clients. And so no, I was selling no digitals up until probably 2018.

Sarah Petty: Okay. Okay, so you're selling prints, small packages, and you get married, you have your first child, and all of a sudden your time becomes a little more valuable. When did you open a studio?

Jenn Kerfeld: I opened the studio right away. The studio was in 2007, and so I took over an existing business and that's what he was doing. He was doing a lot of volume at lower prices, and so when I took over, I kept the name of that studio and I just kept doing the same things he was doing.

Sarah Petty: Got it. So you actually had a little bit of a system and he had probably been in business during film and so he had some good habits and the market hadn't really been trained yet to ask for digital files. That was like '03, '04, '05, that it

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was happening. So by '07 it wasn't like it is today where everyone's like digital, digital, digital.

Jenn Kerfeld: Right. Yep, absolutely. I never had the question of asking for digital prints until much later in my business. And so my biggest thing was just like I said, it was a lot of volume at lower prices. So combining that with starting a family, just it didn't work.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. So then you had more children, you're still going along and what did that next few years look like?

Jenn Kerfeld: So those were probably the roughest years, just trudging along, trying to do all the things that you do in business and keep going. I filled my weekends with families and if I wasn't booked with families or children, I was photographing weddings. And so I was a lot of time away from the kids. And then I had another child in 2015 and that's when things really got interesting because now you have two kids and you have a business and you have expectations in that business. And so I tried to raise my prices a little bit, but I didn't know really how to do it. And so I just raised my prices and I just went with that and I thought that was good enough. And long story short, it wasn't. I mean, you go through and a couple years go by and you're still doing the same thing and not much has changed.

Sarah Petty: So how are you justifying in your mind that you should keep going that way, right? Because I'm sure your life was hard, right? You're working all the time and you have these kids and you're trying to be a hands on mom and you're realizing things aren't going well. So how are you justifying that in your mind?

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Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, for me it was like I just didn't want to fail. It was like I wasn't going to be that business person who failed. So I just kept going and I just kept adding things like, well, I could fit some in here, or I don't need to take that Monday off, or... You just keep going and do a lot of work, a lot of volume. And I needed to, because my prices were so low, I had to do that volume. And so you just keep adding sessions and clients and then you keep doing more because you need more to make the money. And it was just kind of a vicious cycle really. I didn't know how to get out of it.

Sarah Petty: So what changed for you? Whether pandemic or what happened that changed everything?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, everything changed for me in 2019. So just before the pandemic. Well, I started in 2018 transitioning to digitals because that's when I started seeing a lot of my clients... Because I had raised my prices a little bit. I mean, still not very much, but I did raise them a little bit. But I found a lot of my clients were still wanting those digital copies and I thought, well, I should probably do what everybody else is doing and I should probably start selling digitals. And that is when I noticed my business really plummeted and I thought because I was selling digitals, I would be saving a lot of time because I was just not doing all of the production work after assembling the pictures and the putting orders together, that stuff, I was just giving them a digital copy and they were on their way.

And so I thought I could do more volume and it was not that way. I just ended up... I don't know how it happened, but I ran out of time and I had no time to do the sessions and everything just kind of started coming in on me. I do look at my numbers and I noticed my numbers at the end of 2019 and I thought, gosh, I worked a lot this year and I had nothing to show for it. So that was kind of the

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biggest eye opening for me, was that 2019 was a really busy year in my business photographing and I didn't show it in numbers.

Sarah Petty: Is that when you realized \$300?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah. Yep. That's when I noticed the \$300 in net and I was like, wow, that's really just not worth it for me. I don't need to do this. And I was thinking of closing the doors until I found... Well, I read your book the Worth Every Penny book. I found that and then went to Go Boutique Live in 2020.

Sarah Petty: So when you learned about Boutique and like, okay, maybe I had it right a little bit with prints, but you were still a high volume lower price print photographer, what did you say to yourself? Were you like, oh my gosh, maybe there's a better way? What did that conversation in your head sound like?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, that's exactly what it was. I was like, well, I was doing prints, I was kind of boutique, but I wasn't like a 100% boutique and I wasn't doing it the right way. And I think the biggest part for me was that I had no support, so I didn't have anybody to talk to about it. And my husband was like, "You're doing good." He didn't know. And so I didn't have anybody to talk to. I didn't have a support system. In the earlier years of my business, I was part of the PPA and the Minnesota Professional PPA Association and some of those groups were helpful then, but I wasn't part of them anymore because I didn't have any time to be a part of them. So yeah, I think the biggest thing was that I didn't know what other people were doing and I didn't know how.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, because being boutique, you can't kind of be boutique.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah.

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Sarah Petty: Right? That's like McDonald's deciding I'm going to be a sit down restaurant, I'm going to maybe add steak to the menu. And it's like, okay, but that's not going to work, right? There are so many missing pieces and I see so many photographers like you who have been doing it more than five years and are still sort of stuck in that unprofitable place. And I always wonder why do people stay so long in that place? And I think it's just like you were, you're busy, you're just working. And I think working hard, I'm just going to work hard. I'm not going to let it fail because I know if I just do more of these, I can have more clients and I can do more business without stopping to look at, okay, how many hours did I work for this money?

Jenn Kerfeld: Right. Yeah, absolutely. And I think that that's kind of the thing is when you start looking at how much time you're putting into doing those digital sessions and how much really what you're getting out of it, you're paying yourself less than \$5 an hour.

Sarah Petty: Oh heck, yeah.

Jenn Kerfeld: Which I was like, well, I could work at my kids' school and be with them for that and enjoy that too. So really the number really was scary to me, the \$370 that I was net that year. You can't keep going. I mean, you pay your bills and you do your things, but you can't keep enjoying your job knowing that you're not making anything.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. So disheartening.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah.

Sarah Petty: So you found us, you came to the conference, you joined our program, and what opened up for you and how long did that take to make changes and see results?

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Jenn Kerfeld: I saw results really quick. So when I went to the conference, it was just at the beginning of the pandemic, I remember Matt and I making a joke about it because it wasn't totally here in the States yet. And he was like, "Well, don't get sick while you're there," kind of a thing. And I was like, "Okay." Stuff like that. But it was really at the beginning of the pandemic. And when I came home, because I had already done a business similar but not fully boutique, I kind of knew how to just implement and go. So I went right into boutique breakthrough and changed my prices and that alone made a big difference. Getting the price guide right off the bat was just huge for me. But then the pandemic set in and there was no sessions and there was no business. So I was like, okay, I just learned, I went into the lessons and I just started learning and taking all of those notes.

And then as soon as we opened back up, I got to work, I booked sessions, I was doing volume kind of similar, but I was transitioning a lot of my clients to... I was having a lot of conversations with them about boutique and what that meant and what we were doing different and why I was doing it different. And very lucky that I was in an area and in a town where people were super supportive of me for that. And so just implementing the boutique system right off the bat made that big of a difference. And then that fall I was able to do my first charity event, which was really, really great. So that was really fun and probably one of the bigger pieces of the success of that year.

Sarah Petty: So just jumping in on what you said, that you're lucky you had a town that supported it, it's because you, it's because of what you did, you realize, right? You could have been in any town with the new skills that you acquired. And I feel like with students like you who have been in business, like you said, you kind of had workflow down, you had systems, you'd been doing and running a photography business. So as you were learning, you were probably like, oh,

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there's a piece I was missing. Like, oh, I've done this, done this. Oh, there's a piece I was missing. So then when you were ready to implement, it could happen quicker, right? Because you're like, oh my gosh. When you were sitting there and you started making that money, did you look back over those 12, 13 years? Oh my gosh, all the money that I didn't make in all of that time. Did you ever sit and look at that?

Jenn Kerfeld: I do now. Sometimes, I look back at those years and it's motivation for me to not be in that place again. But at the time I didn't look back. I probably didn't look at those numbers until this year, actually. So two years being into full boutique, two and a half years now. But just being able to look at those numbers, that was like, I knew what they were, so I didn't need to go back and look. I knew what I was doing and I knew that now I know what I was doing and how much I was working and not being paid for it. So yeah, it took me a bit to be able to go back and look.

Sarah Petty: How does your husband feel about your business now versus those years when you were working so many more hours?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, it's really interesting the conversations that we have because he's still kind of in that, Jenn works on Saturdays all day mode. And so then now when I'm home, he's like, "Oh, you don't have to work?" And I'm like, "No. No, I have a day off." And it's even just a mind shift for me too because Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are really the days that I work and I'll do a weekend here and there for clients and I enjoy that. But it's interesting just to wrap my head around the fact that I'm not at work every day of the week. It's a really good feeling. And when I leave to go on vacation or to take a family trip, I went on vacation in August with my kids this year, which I have never in 16 years ever

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been able to do before. I just took a week off in the busiest month of my year and it felt great.

Sarah Petty: And you got to be with them. What are your plans with your kids? Because you have a bunch of kids now, right?

Jenn Kerfeld: I've got two kids.

Sarah Petty: Two? Okay. You have two kids. And what are your goals with regard to that, right? Are you doing other things with them?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, if we do, I am, this winter, going to cut back possibly even more and start getting them off the bus, which is kind of... I never would've considered that before because it's the three o'clock, it's a busy time of day. So I've never been able to do that before. And just even just those little things like getting my kid off the bus or putting my kid on the bus and not having to rely on a daycare or a different provider to take care of the kids, it's a really great feeling.

Sarah Petty: That really is. I remember when my youngest was in preschool and the preschool teacher was super nice and she had high school kids and I said, "Do you have any advice?" And she said, "Be there after school because that's when it all comes flying out." Like this happened and that happened, by five, that's the meltdown hour.

Jenn Kerfeld: Totally.

Sarah Petty: And everybody's fighting and no one's getting along. So she's like, "Be there after school." And I always took that to heart because that's when they're wanting to talk. They're getting off the bus, they're excited and it all comes flowing out. So if

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you want to know what's happening at their day, be there then, which I think that's so amazing that you're going to get that time with them.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, that's going to be a really, really fun transition. And my kids are starting to get to a fun age now. Hannah is nine and William is almost seven. And so they do, they're excited to tell me about their day and they're excited to do the things. And in Minnesota in the fall right now, it's really fun to be able to go do fun things after school. And so we've been able to do that. And this is a fun story I'll share real quick, but two days ago my son signed me up to chaperone his school field trip and I didn't know about it. And so I was like, Oh, okay. Well the teacher called me and I said, "You know what? I can make that work." And I don't think in 16 years I would've ever been able to do that before. Just take a day off on a whim.

Sarah Petty: Isn't that great? And he wants you to be there. He signs you up.

Jenn Kerfeld: He signed me up.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, by junior high they don't do that anymore. So it's like those moments are the best gift as a mom to be able to say, "Yes." Your kid wants you to spend the day with him at school, with his friends.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, it was the best thing and the best day. And I had no guilt for not being at work or for rescheduling or any of that. So it was pretty great.

Sarah Petty: That is amazing.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah.

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Sarah Petty: So you sat down and you looked at, was it the first year that you made almost \$47,000 in net profit? So from 376 to 46,486, was that your first year during a pandemic?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yes. Yes. Yes. So during COVID, the first year during the pandemic, that was my profit, my net profit that year. Which is just mind blowing because it just was like proof that I was just wildly under priced.

Sarah Petty: Yeah.

Jenn Kerfeld: I look back and I'm like, what was I thinking all those... I was doing that for a long time. So yeah, I'm really thankful that I was able to make the change and have the support to do it. Because of course it's not always easy to just go from doing things at \$135 for a package to not doing that anymore. And that's a hard thing. And so having the support of the group of colleagues that we've kind of created in the community here, it's just invaluable to have that support.

Sarah Petty: We always say new level, new devil.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah.

Sarah Petty: Right? So you're at a new level. Well, now you have all these past clients that were paying a lot less that you have to learn how to talk to and transition. And then you went through a whole rebranding process because you realized, okay, I don't want this name of this past business owner, that's not my name.

Jenn Kerfeld: Right.

Sarah Petty: And so you were able to have this support through that. And as you're continuing to grow, so how does it feel now? What's your confidence level and your happiness level?

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Jenn Kerfeld: Well, my happiness level is so much more my confidence, it grows every day. Of course, there's always those times when you think, well, what if they don't call me? Or what if they don't want to come here? Or what if it's someone I really loved working with and they don't want to continue to work with me or whatever. So you always have those questions that come up and so that can kind of kick you in the side with your confidence. But for the most part, when you have a group of people that are supporting you and are there for you, they say, No, you can do this. You're worth it. You going to go rock this. It's going to be awesome."

So you have cheerleaders over in your corner saying, "Yes, you can." So when that confidence isn't there, it's easy to lean on the others around you. So I would say, even if you asked my husband this question, he would probably get the same answer, but probably better. But he has seen how I have changed in my personality and my happiness and calmer. I feel like I'm not so frazzled all the time, I'm just more patient, which is... It's great. It's a good feeling.

Sarah Petty: He knows happy wife, happy life, right?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah.

Sarah Petty: It makes everything go more smoothly when mama's happy.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yep.

Sarah Petty: And I think too for advanced students, having someone ahead of you, has that helped you? Because when you're the leader of anyone in your market or in your family that the most anyone's ever done, but you don't know what's next, I don't know. Has that helped you to see oh and so is ahead of me and look at their

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having this problem now I know I'm going to have that problem next and I'm ready for it.

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, absolutely. That's been a huge thing. There's been people that have been doing photography longer than me, there has been people that have been doing the boutique process longer than me. There is anybody at any given time will have advice for you, which is really a great thing and something that you don't know. And that's where I think the biggest piece for me is continuing to be successful with the boutique process is just having that continued support of your colleagues and other people that are having the same questions from their clients and the same things come up in business. So yeah.

Sarah Petty: Last question. What encouragement do you have to someone who's listening maybe in that position of, I've been doing this a long time, there's a frustration of why don't I have it figured out then, but also if I could just get one more little nugget or just need a few more clients, it'll all get better. Knowing and getting out of such a painful place, what advice, big picture do you have for them of encouragement?

Jenn Kerfeld: Yeah, I think the biggest thing that I could say was to have an open mind about it. The biggest piece standing in my way was me. I was the only person really in my life who didn't see what was happening. So I would say get out of your own way and have an open mind about something that you don't know. You don't know about it and you don't know that it could make it great, so why not give it a try?

Sarah Petty: Yeah, I love that. What's the saying? Fish in the fish bowl, can't see the water. Because they're in the fish bowl, but everyone else sees it. So that was really great. And I love seeing longer time photographers really fix the things, like the little knobs in their system and they can just get so much farther, so much faster.

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Jenn Kerfeld: Yep.

Sarah Petty: Thanks so much for being here, Jenn. This is really inspirational. I know everyone's going to love hearing it.

Jenn Kerfeld: Thank you. Thanks for having me. I'm happy to share.

Sarah Petty: Awesome.

Hey photographer! This is Sarah again. Really quick, I wanted to give you the chance to work with me for five days for FREE starting November 7th! You heard me right. I'm hosting a free challenge we call the 5-day booking boost. It's the busy season for portrait photographers. But the economy is more uncertain than we've seen in recent years. This challenge is for you if you feel paralyzed by marketing, always second-guessing yourself by putting it off. Hop over to the 5-day booking boost challenge right now at joyofmarketing.com/bookingboost. That's joyofmarketing.com/bookingboost. You'll get an HOUR of LIVE daily challenge training with me, a printable challenge workbook that will help you find your ideal clients, support, encouragement, and accountability in our private Facebook group. No matter where you are in your photography business, this challenge is going to help you understand the strategy behind finding boutique clients AND understand all the things you need to be successful in consistently getting bookings. Go online to joyofmarketing.com/bookingboost and join this next challenge.

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