

FINAL: Connie Corwin

VC: Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: We are here with freelance hairstylist Connie Corwin – full disclosure, by the way, she is my sister. We have the same last name, you may have noticed that. And, we are going to talk with her about the challenges her business has faced due to Covid. So Connie, welcome. Thank you for joining us today. So let's start from the beginning. Why don't you tell us about how you got into the hairdressing business and how long you've been doing this?

CC: I always had a fascination with hairdressing since I was a little girl. My first excursion to the beauty salon was when I was about ten years old. And I got a hairdo, and I was so impressed, I looked so grown up. I had this bubble hairstyle and looked really cute and was different from what my mother ever did, cutting my bangs straight across. I just loved to go there and I guess my mother would give me a treat every couple of months, I could go to the beauty parlor again. And I just thought it was a magical place where people came in looking ordinary and they came out looking beautiful. So I always had a fascination with that and I, inside I wanted to do that for a living. And then my career just started in a different way but I always had it in mind that this is what I wanted to do.

VC: You were in the corporate world for some time.

CC: I was in the corporate world and that's the direction that my career took. However, once I was an adult and out of the house, I did go to beauty school while I was working in office work during the day. I went to beauty school at night three nights a week and Saturdays and did my thousand hours, took my State board and got my hairdressing and cosmetology license. So that's how it started. And once I got the license I decided I wanted to leave what I was doing and become a hairdresser.

KK: Since you were a kid and you were so fascinated by the salons, what made you decide to do freelance versus going into a salon?

CC: Well, I did start out actually working for some salons. And I did that full time five or six days a week. And my goal in working for a salon was not just to go in and do volume. I always was interested in the artistry of it. My goal was to be an apprentice. You worked for the salon, you assist the other stylists but you get training and every couple of times a week, you get to do haircuts and you get feedback. And so that was my goal in choosing the places that I went to work for. However, those places, at that time, now this was decades ago, at that time they did not pay minimum wage. Then I decided I need to make a living wage so then my career, the full time career, changed and I did office work and spent many years in the corporate world. Eventually getting a marketing position, but I remember at the beginning of working in the corporate world, I used to at

5:00PM, after the person in the office left, I used to go in somebody's office, close the door and do haircuts.

KK: For the people that worked there?

CC: Yes.

KK: How cool.

CC: I told that all this is what I did and I kept doing freelance work while I was working in corporate, but after a while, as I got more into the account marketing/account development job, that kind of took over so I didn't occupy offices any more to do haircuts. Fast forward 20 years. My position was eliminated and I was thinking, well, what am I going to do now? I always wanted to go back to hairdressing, but this time I decided I don't want to work for a boss. I'd like to pursue the American dream of having my own business. However, I did not want to take a risk and actually have a brick and mortar salon, so I decided I was going to do freelance. And years back I had a boyfriend who was a hairdresser who had, at the time I was just out of beauty school and I was dying to get experience. You're just out of school and you really don't have customers yet. So he was an established hairdresser and he had two clients that he would go to their house and do their hair. It was a mother and daughter and he asked me "do you want to work with my clients?" And I did their haircuts for a while and then fast forward to the then-current situation, I said "you know that was a nice experience going to someone's home." It was comfortable for them and it was comfortable for me, I just liked the interaction so I said, "I want to do that now. I like that." So that's what I did and that was in 2008 and here I am today and I'm still doing that.

VC: Why don't you tell us about your business now and what kind of clientele you have?

CC: Now I service people from all the boroughs of New York City, Nassau County on Long Island and Westchester and I guess that's about it.

KK: How has the business changed, going to people's homes because of Covid? How has that changed the dynamics for you?

CC: Oh, it has affected it big time. I would say my business has gone down 50% in total. There are people who are just not comfortable yet with this kind of service and I think it's a combination of, they have conditions or they just don't feel comfortable. The other 50% is fine. For three months, when the pandemic – when the shutdown in New York City first happened which was in the middle of March, I received an email from New York State signed by Gov. Cuomo saying,, "there shall not be any personal services, you know, in cosmetology at all." So I hung up my scissors, it was about three months, I didn't do anything. And it was the same period when salons could not operate. Also, since the beginning of the pandemic, I didn't want to go against the government. And, also I was afraid, we didn't know really much about this disease so I just didn't do

anything. Then towards the end of June the State said its okay for salons to open but with certain provisions, and I used PPE. I wear a mask and a face shield when I'm working and I require the client to wear a mask. And one good thing, if you could say there's a good thing about how Covid has affected --- In the warmer weather I actually got some new clients that I think I probably would not have gotten otherwise. These are people who suggested or who requested that I do a haircut outdoors, in some cases they lived in a private home, it was in their backyard and in the New York City area I've done haircuts on people's apartment terraces. So they were comfortable with outdoors but not indoors so there was that middle ground. Now that it's winter it's too cold for outdoors, so those people who I did their hair a few times outdoors have stopped because it's too cold and I guess they are not comfortable yet with indoors. I expect that as the vaccine gets more prevalent and the weather gets better that business will pick up but now it's probably the slowest it's been in a long time.

VC: Wow. So Connie, can we just go back a little bit, and why don't you tell us a little bit about your clients.

CC: My clients, I actually did a recent tally because it has changed since Covid. At the present time, a combination of elderly and if they're not elderly then they're disabled/homebound. That combination is about a third of my clients. Before Covid it was a higher percentage, it was 40% now it's about 30%, the remainder of the clients are really a variety of, a lot of busy executive women, and it's mostly women. My business is promoted as "women only." I do not go to men's homes, apartments, due to really safety issues, my own personal safety and security. Since Covid, however, I have a few married clients and they have asked me "Oh, will you cut my husband's hair too?" So I do, for them I will but in normal circumstances it is women only and I just keep it that way. I just wanted a clean definition of who are my clients and it's limited to females but these are extenuating circumstances.

KK: And their wives are there too, so it's not like you're walking into some stranger's house.

CC: Right.

VC: Do you do kids' hair as well? Like if you're in a family situation and somebody would say, "Oh, could you cut my son's hair, my daughter's hair, have you encountered that situation?"

CC: I have cut children on occasion but honestly, they're really difficult because they don't like to sit still for very long, they squirm. But, I will do it; I really try to accommodate the client if they request it.

KK: You know the old saying "only my hairdresser knows ..." Especially during Covid, have you become closer to these people more like friends, even listening to them more, kind of like a semi-therapist?

CC: I always listen to them, I always am kind of in that role as the, I would say not really a therapist because I don't give them advice but I'm really more like a good friend who listens and I enjoy that aspect of it. Everybody's different, everybody has a story and people do tell me all kinds of things, all kinds of personal things which I really appreciate and I really feel honored that they do speak so honestly and I find it really interesting. But there are so many different personality types, and also not everybody wants to talk. There is that stereotype of like you say, "Only your hairdresser knows for sure," the therapist angle but there have been times when I walk in and they say, "Oh, do you mind if I watch this?" They're binge watching something, they want to watch and that's fine, I'll just, I'll just do my work. I love the work I love to do haircuts especially so if somebody doesn't want to talk, that's fine. Whatever makes them most comfortable and I just try to do the best job I can.

VC: Do you find that people share different types of things during Covid or is it pretty much whatever is on their mind?

CC: I think it's whatever's on their mind but because Covid is so much in our lives and all over the news and it just affects everything, Covid is a topic of conversation. So yes, we have conversations and sometimes it's about current events, it's often about current events, just things you would talk about anything you would talk about with a friend.

KK: Since you are a freelancer, and the total responsibility of your business is on you, did you get tested before you went to these people the first time?

CC: Oh, yes, absolutely. I wanted to get tested before I stepped into somebody else's house. I just said it's a good idea to get tested before resuming my freelance work and also I continue to get tested periodically. So I think since I went back in June I think I've had five or six Covid tests.

VC: What would you say is your biggest challenge during this time?

CC: The biggest challenge during this time really is the clients' hesitation about getting this kind of service. And, there's really nothing you can do, people have to feel comfortable with getting their hair done, if they're not comfortable with it I don't want to try to push them into doing something they didn't want to do, so Covid, I guess that's the challenge, that's why business is down 50%.

KK: Do you think that once this is over and it's going to be a long time, that your business will change because of this whole experience with Covid?

CC: Do I think it will change? Well, I think it will come back to a normal flow. I believe that it will, those clients who were hesitant, eventually they will be back.

KK: Well, we look forward to that day.

VC: Yes! That's for sure, that's for sure. As a freelancer I'm sure that you must have received some kind of out of the ordinary requests in terms of your services. What would you say is the most outlandish request that you have had?

CC: One time, now this was by email, so a man emailed me and he said he would pay me \$500 to cut his wife's hair really short, and he said she has hair down to her waist, will you work with me? Give her a really short haircut but without her knowing?

VC: What did that mean, without her knowing?

CC: Well, I guess she would know in the first snip. I said no, my response was she would have to agree to it but that's --- and I don't even know if that was legitimate.

VC: So Connie, if people want to learn more about you and book your services, where can they go?

CC: My website is hairdesigneroncall.com, all one word, and my phone number is 917-873-1027.

KK: That sounds wonderful.

CC: All details, pricing, is all on the website.

VC: Great. Connie, thank you so much for joining us today, for sharing your stories and your experiences.

CC: Thank you. A pleasure.

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