

It's in the twist



Gert Kruger started baking koeksisters in 1992 when he started testing his secret recipe in the market. After delivering one of his first batches to a local store, it sold out within about an hour. So when he lost his job in 1994, he had already established a demand for his famous twisted confectioneries. "My salary just wasn't cutting it for us, and now I bake so much that I can afford rent, school fees, and even help out some other families in need," he says. Gert is a big man with a big passion for his sweet treats, and has a long list of ways one could enjoy a koeksister, but one of his favourites is still just chilled with a glass of milk.

He has lived in Nelspruit for more than 23 years and has been involved in the food industry just about all his life. He used to be a chef at a local grocery store, and was also a butcher for about 10 years, but these days he gets to do exactly what he likes: baking koeksisters. "Everywhere I go people know me as the koeksister man," he remarks, and seems to be quite proud of his title.

Gert got his recipe from his father-in-law and explains that it has quite a heritage, "My in-laws baked for the church in Malalane for more than 25 years. The recipe itself is over 30-years-old and I have changed very little to it from the time I got it."

He does not believe in adding things for flavour and feels that if you know how to make a good syrup it will taste perfect without any additives. There is also just one right way to twist a koeksister, and that is in the original way it has been done for years. "If there were 10 koeksisters in front of me, I would be able to see which one I twisted, and if I were blindfolded, I'd taste mine from the others," says Gert.

On average he bakes about 60 dozen large and 60 dozen small koeksisters per day, but sometimes pushes it to 80 dozen of each. He feels that it will be hard to do more since he does everything himself and spends a lot of time preparing and getting the syrup to exactly the right temperature.

Gert feels that his recipe has a good shot at winning him the title of The Hulett's Koeksister Champion 2012. As Gert puts it, "I've seen many businesses fail because of food that is not up to standard, or has too many bells and whistles, and my koeksisters are simple, but simply delicious."