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Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:04] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov, I'm the host of this podcast, The Conch. We are coasting along on our journey with this podcast, talking about seafood and the ocean, and most importantly, showcasing the incredible people working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, examining the challenges they face and the triumphs they've achieved. Today, we are so excited to have a very special guest joining us, Emily Caslow. Emily is the fourth-generation family member and owner of Acme Smoked Fish, the premier smoked fish purveyor operating since 1906. Welcome and thank you, Emily, for joining me today on the Conch. Let's get started.

Emily Caslow [00:00:43] Hey, Julie, it's so great to be here.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:46] It's been a little bit of a time to get you on the show. I know you are so busy, and everything goes in waves and waves of busyness, so I really appreciate you taking the time to come and chat with me today.

Emily Caslow [00:00:58] It's my pleasure. I'm so happy to be here.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:01] That's awesome. So, I mentioned in your bio that I just said that Acme Smoked Fish has been around since 1906, and I would love to start with the history of your family's business, and more specifically, I'd love to hear what happened in 1906. And how did Acme get its start?

Emily Caslow [00:01:18] In 1906, my great grandfather, Harry Brownstein, immigrated to the United States from Russia and settled in Brooklyn. He became what was known as a fish jobber, delivering smoked fish in a horse drawn wagon from smokers to appetizing shops throughout the city. Fast forward several years my grandfather, Rubin Caslow, right out of high school becomes a fish jobber as well. He meets and marries Harry's daughter, Charlotte, my grandmother. Harry had been wanting to get into the manufacturing business himself and let's just say had a couple of unsuccessful attempts. So, with Rubin, his son in law and his own two sons, they gave it one final try. In 1954, they chose the name Acme, so it would be first in the Yellow Pages. In the early days, my grandmother kept the books at night and made deliveries during the day. She was ahead of her time as a real working woman. The business, though, didn't take off for decades. There was tons of competition. With dedication to quality and a hefty amount of luck Acme started to grow. In the seventies, slicing machines changed the business, helping pave the way for packaged smoked salmon to enter supermarkets. And that's really when the business began to take off.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:02:35] I have so many questions. That's so amazing to hear the really long history of your family and how they settled into New York and started this fish business. Do you know what area of Russia they came from?

Emily Caslow [00:02:48] They came from Eastern Europe, specifically Ukraine.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:02:52] And you said that they chose the name Acme because it was the first alphabetical name in the Yellow Pages?

Emily Caslow [00:02:58] Right. So, the Yellow Pages was listed by industry and then all the manufacturers.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:02] Oh.

Emiily Caslow [00:03:03] So there was a competitor who started with the letter B. They needed to be before the B, so they chose Acme.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:09] That's hilarious. I feel like I've heard that before because there's so many other companies called Acme, right?

Emily Caslow [00:03:15] Right.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:15] Because of that purpose. I'm wondering, even if any of our listeners really even know what the Yellow Pages are.

Emily Caslow [00:03:22] It's so funny. I was just about to ask you. Do they still make it? I don't think so.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:27] I don't know. We can put a link to the Yellow Pages in the show notes. I'm just joking, we won't do that. You've been in the family business then I'm going to assume all your life, right?

Emily Caslow [00:03:36] For the most part.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:38] Well, you've always been surrounded by it. Let's put it that way.

Emily Caslow [00:03:40] Correct.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:41] So was it always a given that you would enter the family business?

Emily Caslow [00:03:45] Not really. I was always super interested in Acme.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:49] Mm hmm.

Emily Caslow [00:03:51] Out of college I worked for a nonprofit called UJA in New York City. And while I enjoyed it, I still had that tickle to be at Acme. I grew up seeing my parents involved in philanthropy as volunteers. And it wasn't until I was actually working at a philanthropy myself that I realized I could do both. I could work at Acme and be involved in philanthropy in my personal life. And actually it's come full circle because we now have our own philanthropic arm at Acme.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:20] Yes. And we are going to talk about that shortly. So I just want to hear a little bit more about what was it like growing up in a family where your life was revolving around the family business?

Emily Caslow [00:04:31] For my dad growing up, both his parents worked at Acme.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:34] Yeah.

Emily Caslow [00:04:35] So it was all they did all the time. But my mom is a doctor by profession, so our lives didn't necessarily revolve around Acme. And I remember vividly sitting at the kitchen table having dinner during the week and my mom saying to my dad,

So what's new at work today? And my dad had the same answer every time. Nothing much. He didn't want to come home and talk about work generally.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:59] Yeah.

Emily Caslow [00:04:59] It was one thing, though, in my family that I will always remember. We were not allowed to go into a store and buy smoked salmon. It was only brought home from work. And to this day, my kids are not allowed to spend money on smoked salmon.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:15] That is so funny. What would happen if you did bring smoked salmon home that you bought?

Emily Caslow [00:05:20] I probably be asked why I was wasting money, which I would say to my own kids the same exact way.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:26] Your family would just go in chaos, right?

Emily Caslow [00:05:29] Yeah.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:29] Why did you do that? That's so funny.

Emily Caslow [00:05:31] I remember a great story when my mom was in her residency. My dad and I would do the food shopping when I was a little girl, and he taught me to go into the supermarket and take the Acme packages and cover up the competitors.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:43] No, stop!

Emily Caslow [00:05:44] So that it looked like the store only sold Acme.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:49] That is so funny. Yeah. That's sabotage.

Emily Caslow [00:05:52] Is it though or is it friendly competition?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:55] Friendly competition. That's right. So let me ask you again, Acme has been in business since 1906. How did your business fare during the early stages of the pandemic? Were there any supply chain challenges? And did you have to reconfigure anything in your business to the new reality? How did you fare in the pandemic?

Emily Caslow [00:06:16] As essential workers in the food industry, we were open throughout the entire pandemic. Besides moving some of our administrative jobs to work from home, it was business as usual at all of our factories, of course, with enhanced security measures. Our business became highly retail focused during the pandemic. We converted our beloved Brooklyn Fish Friday from in-person to a curbside pickup. And I'm proud to say, because I was involved with this, we only missed one Friday during the pandemic.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:47] Wow.

Emily Caslow [00:06:48] And curbside pickup continues to this day. Supply chain, though, didn't hit us really until later in the pandemic. And we're actually still dealing with those issues today.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:59] Tell me what Fish Friday is.

Emily Caslow [00:07:02] Fish Friday started probably in the early seventies when there was leftover products on a Friday afternoon, and it would spoil if you left it in the cooler until the next week. It was predominantly herring at the time that was left over each Friday. And my dad's cousin Gary said, Let's open up to the local community. Greenpoint, where we are, was predominantly Polish then, and you'd have all these people coming in and buying up the śledzie, śledzie is herring in Polish.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:07:32] Oh.

Emily Caslow [00:07:33] As smoked fish gained popularity and Acme became a staple in our community, and the community around us changed, Fish Friday grew and Gary created something called Gary's Special, where he makes something special that can only be bought at Fish Friday. And it grew from there. Can't get smoked fish any fresher than from Acme at Fish Friday. The prices are wholesale prices. And it's a real community before the pandemic, before curbside pickup, people would wait in line for hours at certain times of the year, they'd bring their New York Times, they'd stand in line, and it's one of the only times I can remember seeing New Yorkers patient in line.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:15] That sounds amazing. What was the term you said that as Polish for the herring?

Emily Caslow [00:08:20] Herring in Polish is śledzie.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:24] Śledzie, oh my God, I love that. And you mentioned about the supply chain issues didn't really start happening until later in the pandemic. I mean, I consider we're still in a pandemic. So, you're still experiencing some of those issues now?

Emily Caslow [00:08:35] We are.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:35] Yeah.

Emily Caslow [00:08:36] I think like everyone running a business during the pandemic, our new reality became be ready for anything. Like you said, it's still a pandemic. We still operate under that. Be ready for everything.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:49] Yeah, that's a really good model to have. So can you tell me what other kind of fish besides herring and śledzie do you have for sale?

Emily Caslow [00:08:56] All different flavors of smoked salmon, whitefish, sable, kippered salmon, which is baked salmon, whitefish salad, baked salmon salad. If we smoke it, we sell it on Friday.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:10] So it's mostly salmon and whitefish that you're smoking.

Emily Caslow [00:09:14] A lot of black cod, which is sable, ciscos.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:18] What's that?

Emily Caslow [00:09:19] Cisco is a smaller fish, I believe, also from the Great Lakes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:23] Oh, interesting. I don't know a lot about freshwater fish except for salmon. That was the little side. I'm really excited to hear about that and that Fish Friday sounds amazing. It sounds like you're building a great business, but you're also really building a community. And I think that's so telling that people will literally stand in line for the fish on Friday. That's amazing.

Emily Caslow [00:09:43] The Brooklyn Runners Club comes by once a month. You see all these runners coming down the street with their little backpack. They buy their smoked fish, they put it in their backpack, and they keep running on their route.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:54] That's amazing. That's so funny. So, in addition to being a business that's been around again since 1906, Acme has a real great set of values. And one of those is every relationship matters. Another one is wow them with quality, and another one is citizens of seafood. So, I'd like to talk more about the value citizens of seafood and your efforts to quote, I'm reading from the website, "To do right by our people, our communities, and our planet by putting social responsibility and sustainability at the center of our decisions" unquote. So, you have an excellent sustainability report, by the way. And the report shares that Acme really started a more comprehensive sustainability journey in 2021 and is busy collecting baseline data around four key pillars of sustainability. So those are raw materials sourcing, packaging, carbon footprint, and people and communities. So, what was the catalyst, I'm curious, behind a more concerted effort to assess Acme's footprint across all of these pillars?

Emily Caslow [00:10:58] Great question and impressed how much of the sustainability report you're familiar with.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:02] I read all of it. I read it from front to back and again.

Emily Caslow [00:11:06] Wow. Quite simply, we want to leave the world a better place from where we found it. And we know that, like many industries, the seafood industry is complex and has its own unique set of challenges. It's easy to say you want to assess the carbon footprint. It's not a new concept, but it would take a lot of resources to do that well and accurately and then figure out what are we doing to make this even better.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:30] Yes!

Emily Caslow [00:11:30] We've been focused on sustainability for years. And one major catalyst that helped bring our efforts together is hiring our first ever sustainability officer, Rob Snyder, who I know you are acquainted with.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:41] Yes.

Emily Caslow [00:11:42] Rob has a deep knowledge and experience in the industry, to lead us all to become even more responsible citizens of seafood at Acme and also beyond our four walls.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:52] That's great. It's really interesting, and I've mentioned this on the program before, that we don't have accurate figures about this because no one's

actually taken a tally, which is probably something I want to do in the future. But many of the companies in seafood, the long-term companies that are still around are family run businesses. Right. I'm sure you've noticed that as well. And so they've been around for, you know, 150, 100 years, family run businesses that have ways of doing business, their traditions that have been handed down from great, great grandfather, you know, to this day, to the other family members that are leading the business and it's really hard. I'm assuming it's hard to make changes when you're dealing with tradition that has been, again, passed down in the family business. When new companies enter the market and there's a lot of new seafood companies, particularly smaller, maybe more niche, you know, like tinned seafood companies coming onto the market that I've noticed recently. And most of them have hopefully start out with kind of sustainability baked into their DNA. So it's like sustainability is there from the very beginning, you know, and since self-proclaiming that you are just kind of starting your journey in sustainability, which is amazing and thank you for that. I would love to hear your description of how it's been to take a company that's more than 100 years old and integrate sustainability into it.

Emily Caslow [00:13:17] It's a really great question because, yeah, in this day and age, it certainly appears easier for a millennial run business with a sustainable mission to get it right the first go around. So first and foremost, I would say that we've always been laser focused on responsible sourcing and food safety. And I think it's one reason that we decided to have our own operations in Chile and Norway. So, we're right at the source. When it comes to the many other ways that we can run a company in a sustainable way, I would say that we start off with some small changes and suddenly we were off to the races. From upgrading packaging to composting at the factory. There's a lot happening, and we hope with time it's going to become part of our company culture and in our DNA that will make us proud and make me proud for our next generation to continue.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:14:06] Yeah, I think that's really great. A lot of people or companies, I think they're afraid to even take that first step and then they're also afraid of kind of the optics like, Well, why weren't you doing this from the beginning? Or why do you have to start something now? But like you said, you've always been focused on, you know, responsible sourcing and supporting the communities from where you source. So I think, you know, a lot of companies that they assess like actually look at what they're doing. They probably have a lot of these sustainability principles in place, but they're not thinking about them in that way, right?

Emily Caslow [00:14:40] Totally.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:14:42] Yeah, I think that's a really great thing. And congratulations on, you know, you mentioned Rob and he's such a great inspiration, actually. And we're going to talk a little bit more about the other efforts that you are leading. So in 2021, Acme launched the Acme Smoked Fish Foundation. And a key element to this foundation is to identify and celebrate efforts to lower carbon footprint of the seafood industry, which is so important. So, the platform for this celebration is the Seafood Industry Climate Awards, which recently announced its first winners. So, I have many questions about the awards, but first I want to hear more about the foundation, so the Acme Smoked Fish Foundation, and why it was started and what other efforts will the foundation support?

Emily Caslow [00:15:25] So I'm super excited to talk about the foundation.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:28] Yes!

Emily Caslow [00:15:28] Its beginning is actually bittersweet. So, my uncle Eric worked at Acme for 40 years and was co-chairman along with my dad, Robby. The foundation began when Uncle Eric passed away and we began talking about ways to honor him. He was a history teacher before he came to Acme. And not only was he a company historian, but he cared so much about our employees, so much about our local immigrant communities, and did so much to help our community. So, when we were thinking about the best way to honor him, it seemed only natural to start an education fund. We now offer educational scholarships for children and grandchildren of Acme employees. And since launching last year, we have awarded 14 to date. We've made it accessible companywide with applications available in, I think, seven languages. And I know that this program is making Eric proud, and I feel really good about continuing it. We also have similar programs in other countries where we work. So, in Chile, we funded a playground and soccer fields for the local community. And in Denmark, where education is free, we hire Ukrainian refugees at our facility and help their families transition to new communities by providing school supplies. What we realized right away was that each country had its own specific needs. Each community where we have employees have specific needs. So, we're just beginning, and I look forward to seeing where the education arm of the foundation grows to.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:05] Amazing. So, are you involved in running the foundation?

Emily Caslow [00:17:09] I'm actually the president of the foundation.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:12] Well, okay, so you are intimately involved in running the foundation. That's amazing. So you have this education component, which sounds incredible. And I really appreciate the fact that you say that the communities kind of guide you to what their needs are and you support them and then providing educational opportunities for your staff. That's amazing. I want to hear more about this newer arm of the foundation, which is the Seafood Industry Climate Awards.

Emily Caslow [00:17:38] Thrilled to share that our three award winners will be joining us at the Boston Seafood Show next week. I'm looking forward to seeing you there and hopefully many of your listeners as well. So, each of our three Seafood Industry Climate Awards have received a \$40,000 grant to support their work.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:55] Yes.

Emily Caslow [00:17:57] And now I get to tell you about them, which is the most fun.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:18:00] Absolutely.

Emily Caslow [00:18:01] The Mi'kmaq Nation in Maine is focused on adapting renewable solar power energy while developing RAST, which is recirculating agriculture system technology. This project helps support food security for Mi'kmaq Nation. Their goal is to create an energy independent aquaculture system and protect themselves from disruptions to the food system brought on by climate change and other events.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:18:27] Yes.

Emily Caslow [00:18:28] It was really interesting to learn about this project and see that Mi'kmaq Nation hopes to inspire other Native American communities working on similar efforts. Then over to Alaska, an organization called ALFA - Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association. They're launching a pilot to convert the Alaska fishing fleet to Hybrid Diesel

Electric. Isn't that awesome? They're transferring technologies proven through success with ferries and tugboat to pilot two vessels to convert. This could lead the way for the electrification of boats, not just in Alaska, but beyond, and reverse the fuel usage and carbon emissions in the industry. And then lastly, the Lift All Boats Initiative from Luke's Lobster in Maine. So, the lobster industry faces many challenges. Among them, the rising cost of fuel, the related carbon footprint, and also a lack of diversity, which I think this part will interest you the most. They have started a student lobstering program that provides access to Black, Indigenous, and people of color, mostly immigrants, who typically lack a pathway to becoming commercial fishermen in Maine. During this program, students learn about the carbon footprint of the fishery and the innovations that can reduce emissions from the lobster industry over time and Luke's hopes to show a path forward that is inclusive and climate positive. I'm really excited about all three of them, and you'll get to meet them if you don't know them at the show.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:56] I look forward to that a lot. Are you going to have some sort of event to celebrate these winners?

Emily Caslow [00:20:02] Monday morning of the show, we'll be hosting a reception at our booth for the winners, and we hope that all your listeners will stop by.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:11] That's great. We'll definitely make sure and put that in the show notes because I will definitely stop by. I love that kind of stuff.

Emily Caslow [00:20:19] And we have a great creative name for it. Well, hopefully calling it Lattes and Lox or Lox and Lattes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:25] Oh, I love it. I love lox and I love lattes. The Seafood Industry Climate Awards, will they be annual?

Emily Caslow [00:20:33] I'm so glad you asked. Yes, we are launching the 2023 Seafood Industry Climate Awards right around the show.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:41] That's amazing.

Emily Caslow [00:20:42] And actually, not only have we launched this in the U.S., but we just launched the Seafood Industry Climate Awards in Chile.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:49] Oh, amazing. So, when will those winners be announced?

Emily Caslow [00:20:53] Hopefully before the Boston Seafood Show. But TBD.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:57] Gotcha. So, have you been able to get other companies or other banks or industry leaders to contribute to your fund?

Emily Caslow [00:21:06] We have several donors to the fund.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:09] That's amazing. Well, hopefully that will continue to grow. It sounds like such a great initiative in honor of an amazing man and family member.

Emily Caslow [00:21:17] Thank you.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:18] Well, you're welcome. I'm going to switch the conversation here to talk a little bit more about gender equality and women in seafood. And you are a woman in seafood. So, I read in your bio that you have three children and that you rejoined work at Acme in 2016. So, I imagine that there was a hiatus because you were working on taking care of your children.

Emily Caslow [00:21:40] Correct.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:42] How did you reintegrate into the business, and do you have any tips for other mothers that are reentering the workforce?

Emily Caslow [00:21:49] It's a great question. I think reintegrating into the workforce after taking time to raise kids is difficult, even when it's your family business.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:57] Yeah.

Emily Caslow [00:21:58] I feel very lucky to be in this position and have some flexibility that other moms might not have. So, I'm not sure I can give any concrete tips. But I would say my main piece of advice is to take one day at a time and remember that it won't be a perfect balance from day one. Don't throw in the towel just because your kids have a meltdown. Gosh, if I did, I would be long gone. What I learned most is that kids are resilient. They just like to make us feel bad sometimes, but they are resilient. Your question actually made me think of seafood villages where everyone works in the same industry in different roles, and I imagine that that's where the mantra it takes a village came from. And I think that the other tip I would give is relying on your community and your friends is how I keep the balance of work and parenthood.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:22:51] Yes, that's absolutely true. Do you think that your kids are going to go into the business, into Acme, when they get older? Have they expressed interest?

Emily Caslow [00:23:02] In our next generation, in the fifth generation, between my cousins and my brother, there are a lot of kids. I think that there are some who are a little older who this is a reality for very soon. My own kids, I don't know. I'd like them to know that it's an option, but not feel that it's an obligation.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:23] Yeah, that's a good way to go. And it's really fortunate that they have that option, right? I mean, not everybody has that incredible opportunity waiting for them that they can partake in or not.

Emily Caslow [00:23:33] Absolutely.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:35] I asked this question of all of my guests. And again, you're clearly a woman in seafood and the seafood industry. SAGE is about building gender equality in the seafood industry. So, I'm hoping that you could share one or two aspects of the industry and its culture that may contribute to inequality in the sector. In your experience, and what are some of the things that the industry can do to lessen these inequalities?

Emily Caslow [00:23:59] I think it's a really important question. As a smoker and distributor, we have big jobs at Acme that require a lot of physical strength, like loading a truck with heavy boxes and pallets. Or driving a big truck long distances to make

deliveries. And historically these things are things that men have done and are generally easier things for men to do. When I move a truck, it's still shocking for me to see how many employees are watching me do it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:28] What? Wow.

Emily Caslow [00:24:28] Like, I just want to start by saying thank you for being here and for talking about these things and for asking these questions. I think that you are helping lead this charge to have open communication and opportunities and organizations like Women in Seafood hosting conferences. There's a lot of momentum now that we need to keep moving forward. Which definitely didn't answer your question, but that's the best I can do on that one.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:58] Yeah. No, that's okay. It is a difficult question to answer because I'm asking you to think about systems that are in play. And not only that, we think about the intersectional characteristics of systems. You're actually a unique case because you're working within a family dynamic, right? And then you're also working in a seafood industry dynamic. So, I think it's a head scratcher sometimes and something that requires a little bit more thought. So, I think you did a great job answering that question. And also, I will take your thanks and kudos anytime I can. How can SAGE help you as a woman in seafood?

Emily Caslow [00:25:39] I think keep doing what you're doing. I'm so happy to have the opportunity to have conversations like this and to be challenged by you to think about these hard questions.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:25:48] Yeah.

Emily Caslow [00:25:49] And I look forward to meeting more people throughout the seafood world who are interested in this topic and doing what you're doing.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:25:55] That's awesome. Well, I'm always happy to also have conversations not only with you and other women in seafood, but also with your brothers and your other people that are in your orbit. Always ready to have these discussions. So anytime.

Emily Caslow [00:26:09] Awesome.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:11] So this podcast is to inspire people working in or thinking about starting a career in the seafood sector. I would love to hear what advice you would give to women already in the business or thinking about starting a career in this exciting sector.

Emily Caslow [00:26:25] I would say pass the passion. If you're in seafood or you want to get into seafood, find the thing that really gets you out of bed in the morning and follow it. For me, even though it's my family business, something that always inspires me at Acme is innovation. From new products to starting the foundation and building a philanthropy program to new packaging or certifications. We're growing every day because of the passionate people we work with. Because of that, no matter when you're listening to the podcast, we're always on the hunt for passionate people.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:57] That's awesome. That's really good advice. I mean, it seems that people are more and more realizing that it really is important to have passion for what you're doing and do what you want to do. And I think there's almost like a change of I don't know it's like an atmospheric change where people are like, Yeah, I'm not going to do that anymore. I want to do what I want to do, and I feel that way.

Emily Caslow [00:27:17] There are very few silver linings from the pandemic, but I would say that that's one of them. You know, there've been so many people like yourself who have changed careers during the pandemic to do something that they love. And I think that if that's our silver lining, it's a pretty good one.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:27:34] Yeah, I agree. I've said that before. I think, again, there's not a lot of good things that came out of the pandemic, but definitely a few good things came out and I think that's one of them. And I really hope that that sticks, like people continue to seek what they want to do and not put up with egregious violations in their human rights, to be honest. I really want people to continue to think about how they can live their lives better and that includes work.

Emily Caslow [00:28:02] Back to your question about women reentering the workforce. I mean, I think work/life balance is important for everybody, but I think that the pandemic highlighted that and work/life balance is especially important for mothers. And I think that that's also a new reality, work from home, and I think that employers realize that it's a competitive market and if you want to keep people, you need to give them the balance that they deserve, quite frankly.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:29] Yeah. Again, I hope that that's something that sticks. I'm not convinced that that's going to happen. I mean, I don't know. Actually, I don't know. What I'm scared of is we're going to revert back to the old ways where, again, you know, work/life balance was not even thought of. It was like, okay, once you leave the office, you know, you're on your own kind of thing. And if you have a sick kid or whatever, it doesn't matter. And I'm not speaking about you, clearly. I'm speaking in general, like about the whole workforce. And I agree. I mean, work/life balance is really difficult when you're working from home and your life, and your work are literally in the same room.

Emily Caslow [00:29:09] You're absolutely right. Anecdotally, and I don't know if this is interesting or not, but there was an article in a newspaper, a local New York newspaper, saying that New York City subway ridership is reflecting the change in people's working style, and that Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday the trains are at peak ridership, pre-pandemic peak ridership, and that it seems many, many people are working from home on Mondays and Fridays because ridership is so affected.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:42] That's an interesting statistic. I love that kind of statistic. So, it does sound like people are finding that balance even when the offices are opening back up, right?

Emily Caslow [00:29:52] Yeah. That what they're seeing in New York City.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:55] I haven't talked to anyone that lived in New York in the pandemic, so I want to ask you a question. What was that like in the early days of the pandemic? That was scary for New Yorkers specifically? Like, I remember.

Emily Caslow [00:30:07] It was scary. You saw New York City streets empty. I remember wanting to take a ride down to see the Navy vessel that they brought in to serve as a floating hospital. And it's usually a half hour drive from where I live, even though it's all in Manhattan. And it took 11 minutes to get there. The streets were desolate. But on the flip side, every night for months, I think maybe five, six, seven months, at a certain time, I don't remember if it was 5 p.m. or 7 p.m., people would holler outside their windows or ring cowbells or bang pots and pans as a thank you to the first responders and the doctors and nurses who were working so hard. And it was a real sense of community. It reminds me a little bit of post-9/11 in New York City.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:05] Oh, yeah.

Emily Caslow [00:31:06] There was this shock and then there was this feeling of community.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:11] Well, I mean, if anything, I can tell you just the post-9/11 experience, of course, I wasn't in New York, but everyone looks to New York. And I think it's just an amazing city and amazing people. And how, like you said, it was like this community, and it actually really just comes through. I love New York.

Emily Caslow [00:31:29] Come visit.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:30] I will. And in fact, that was the last trip I took before the pandemic. The virus had already landed in the U.S., and I remember I was at an event at the James Beard house.

Emily Caslow [00:31:43] Oh, yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:44] And it was, I want to say, the last week of January 2020. And we were crammed into, I don't know if you've been there, but it's very small.

Emily Caslow [00:31:53] I have, yeah. Very small. Yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:57] You go through the kitchen and then there's that foyer thing, not foyer, but it's like a room, essentially. And we were all in there and I remember crammed in there, and it was when everybody was starting to elbow each other instead of shaking hands. And I remember we were laughing kind of like, Oh, yeah, blah, blah, blah, whatever. So that was my last trip. But I remember thinking, Oh my God, I could have easily been exposed to that virus at the very beginning.

Emily Caslow [00:32:24] Oh wow!

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:24] You know, who knows? Right?

Emily Caslow [00:32:26] I mean, it's so interesting how much we didn't know, like, we were elbowing to say hello, but we weren't wearing masks yet. We're still crammed in elevators together.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:37] Yeah, exactly. And I remember even flying on the plane home, they gave us bottled water instead of any kind of drinks because of the virus. And then they're like, because of the virus, they won't let us hand out drinks or anything, just

bottled water. But we're all still sitting crammed in next to each other with no masks. It's crazy. It's absolutely crazy.

Emily Caslow [00:33:00] We just didn't know. We just didn't know.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:33:03] I'm so happy to hear that, you know, you fared well out of that experience. Again, you know, there are silver linings, but it was pretty traumatic, especially, I think, for New York City. And then the Fish Friday's thing sounds fantastic. So, one more question I have is about, Seafood and Gender Equality is about uplifting and amplifying diverse voices in the seafood industry, and this podcast is one of the main ways we're doing this. So, I'd love to give you the opportunity to uplift someone. So, who would you like to uplift and why?

Emily Caslow [00:33:33] First of all, as I've been listening to a bunch of your podcasts recently, I love that you do this.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:33:39] Oh, awesome.

Emily Caslow [00:33:41] I love it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:33:42] Thank you.

Emily Caslow [00:33:43] So I would have to say. I want to uplift my SICA Award winners, who I've gotten to know over the past year I'm inspired by their work and their commitment. So that would be Cara O'Donnell at Mi'kmaq Nation, Linda Behnken and the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association. And then Ben Conniff and his team at Luke's Lobster.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:03] That's amazing shout out. So SICA again is an acronym for the Seafood.

Emily Caslow [00:34:07] Industry Climate Award. I feel very cool saying SICA awards. But you're right.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:14] SICA, so Seafood Industry Climate Award. I wanted to say Seafood Impact Climate Awards, which it could be, right? It could be. It could be that, too.

Emily Caslow [00:34:21] Oh, that could be. You're hired.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:23] Okay. Yes, I'll take that position in my free time, which I don't have.

Emily Caslow [00:34:27] Yeah, right.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:29] I want to know what's next for Acme.

Emily Caslow [00:34:32] So we talked about it before the 2023 awards.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:36] Yes.

Emily Caslow [00:34:37] The SICA awards in Chile, and as you mentioned earlier, this year is all about metrics for us. We laid out our mission in the sustainability report and how we will quantify our carbon footprint. So, this year is about doing the work.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:52] I look forward to reading the next sustainability report, and I do have to mention that it is actually excellent, and I really appreciate the transparency and the candidness and I really love looking- I'm kind of a nerd, I guess, like that. I love looking at how people think about, okay, what baseline assessment, what are we doing now and then what are the goals that we want to achieve and how we're going to get there and just making it all public because I think it shows a lot of leadership and I just love it.

Emily Caslow [00:35:21] Thanks. Thanks. We're working hard at it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:35:23] Yeah, it's clear. How can our listeners find Acme online?

Emily Caslow [00:35:29] Go to our website at www.acmesmokedfish.com. You can learn more about us. You can use our store locator to find Acme products sold in your area and you can find our sustainability report.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:35:46] Yes. And I highly recommend looking at that if you have any interest in a really great example of how a company reports on their sustainability efforts and also, you know, amazing fish. I was at an event in Chicago in the summer and Acme was there and I tried some fish, and it was absolutely fantastic. So, keep doing what you're doing. Obviously, 100 plus years you have experience and recipes and trade secrets that I'm sure are kept in some vault somewhere. So, Emily, I want to thank you. We're at the end of our time today, end of our conversation. And I want to thank you so much for really being a leader in the seafood space and showing others, you know, how you can support not only, well, sustainability in general, but also how can we address the climate change, which I say it is the biggest challenge that we are facing and are going to be facing in the future. So I really appreciate your time coming on the show and telling us about this and then all your efforts that you guys are working towards. So, thank you.

Emily Caslow [00:36:48] Julie, thank you. Thank you so much for having me, for giving me this opportunity. And I can't wait to see you in person in Boston.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:54] Absolutely. Thank you for tuning into The Conch podcast. It would be amazing if you could take just 2 seconds to leave a review and share this podcast with your ocean loving friends. Thank you.

Crystal Sanders-Alvarado [00:37:10] The Conch podcast is a program of Seafood and Gender Equality, or SAGE. Audio production, engineering, editing, mixing, and sound design by Crystal Sanders-Alvarado, for Seaworthy. The theme song "Dilation" is written and performed by Satan's Pilgrims. Funding for the Conch podcast is generously provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and Builders Initiative.