

The Conch Podcast-Megan Waldrep FINAL.mp3

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:04] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov and I'm the host of this podcast, The Conch. We are continuing on our journey with this podcast, talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're showcasing some of the incredible women working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, examining the challenges they face and the triumphs they've achieved. Today, we are excited to have an amazing guest joining us, Megan Waldrep. Megan is a freelance writer, author of three columns in both national and local newspapers and magazines, and has united an online community known as Partners of Commercial Fishermen. So, like it sounds, this community is for anyone in a relationship with a commercial fisherman. Welcome and thank you, Megan, for joining me today on The Conch. Let's do this.

Megan Waldrep [00:00:51] Hi Julie. Thank you so much. I'm honored, honored to be here.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:54] Thanks. I'm really happy to have you because you and I have had some previous experience interviewing each other before or actually you interviewed me before for your website, which we'll talk about. So it's really exciting for me to be on the other end and asking you some questions now.

Megan Waldrep [00:01:11] Yes, I'm so excited. And I'm also a little nervous because I've never been on this side so it's first for me.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:16] You've never been interviewed before?

Megan Waldrep [00:01:18] Not in a live interview where I'm speaking. I've done written interviews and you know, it's my safe space and I'm a writer. I can delete and edit. So here I feel very vulnerable.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:28] Oh, thank you for sharing that you're vulnerable and I guarantee you I won't exploit that. You can feel free to say whatever you want or as little as you want. You have a wonderful Instagram and wonderful website, and before we come on this show, I really look at what you've put out in the world, and you're very, very open, very vulnerable in your writing, like you said. So thank you so much for coming on and agreeing to share your life as a partner of a commercial fisherman. I can't wait to jump into it more. Your website, meganwaldrep.com, and we'll be sure to put this in the show notes later so people can find you online as well as your social media as ground zero for your work and your community of partners of commercial fishermen. So your mission is to make partners of commercial fishermen feel less alone. So what drove you to this effort? Give us a little background on that.

Megan Waldrep [00:02:19] Thank you for the question. And honestly, it was created because I felt alone. I felt completely isolated in an industry that I had no idea about. I met Chris and we did the long distance dating thing. I kind of knew what he did in Alaska. I kind of watched 10 minutes of Deadliest Catch than I, that was it. But I really didn't understand. And then it wasn't until I moved to Washington and we were having, I think it was Dungeness crab, round the table with his family and three generations of commercial fishermen sitting around the table. I was just completely in awe and I really loved how they connected. It reminded me of my childhood of being a military brat and the camaraderie among military families and a world that I just didn't know existed. And then 20 minutes later, 30 minutes later, the conversation dove into boat parts, as they do, when fishermen

get together and I'm like, wow, this is not so fascinating anymore and I'm starting to feel guilty for not thinking this is interesting. You know, I was starting to feel like, am I not being supportive? Because this is hard to follow along sometimes and also it was the fear factor of your partner leaving and the worry and all of all of these emotions that my friends really didn't understand. My family didn't really understand. So honestly, I felt like it was a Hail Mary. I wrote this piece for my blog called Nine Things to Know When You're Dating Commercial Fishermen. And it was basically just me, I think, talking to myself saying, this is what to expect. The conversations will revolve around here, like this is how we can mold and support and still be ourselves. And it was funny because the only emails that I was starting to get really were the emails coming from girls all over the globe on this one specific article. It wasn't my relationship column that I had. It wasn't all these other pieces I was doing. It was on commercial fishing and I'm like, Oh, wait, there are other girls out there that are like me and that are also having these challenges and looking for a resource. Maybe I can help be that resource because to back up when I was dating Chris, I was looking, Googling, What did you do when you dated commercial fishermen? There was literally nothing out there. So honestly, that was the problem. There was no resources and so I was like, I feel like I'm out here on my own. Is there anybody else?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:34] So to back up just a second, you were dating this guy, Chris, who was a commercial fisherman in both Alaska and in Washington?

Megan Waldrep [00:04:44] At the time he was only fishing in Alaska and working in a boatyard, working, I think, electrical and that kind of side of the boat building industry. We were just in Washington having Dungeness because of a commercial fishing friend had given us some of this bounty because that's what I also learned to eat really great seafood from all different fisheries and such a joy, a bonus.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:07] Basically in order to kind of feel your way around your relationship with your boyfriend and your boyfriend's family and then by extension, his friends and colleagues that are also fishermen, right? So you're like trying to find your way through this. And so you put out this article and then you start getting responses from people all over the world. Is that right? That's amazing.

Megan Waldrep [00:05:30] Yeah, they would trickle in, I mean, just here and there. But it was a flair. And I felt, oh, wow, this is amazing. There's other girls who feel this way. And the other thing about it was my boyfriend at the time, now husband, his family, they had been in the industry for generations. So, you know, his mom, his brothers and sisters, like they all knew about it. I'm an outsider times a thousand and so to hear other women that were also outsiders because there's a lot of women who live, let's say, in the middle of the country and their partners fly off to far away fisheries. And for a long amount of time, you know, there's not a lot of community around to show that kind of support. So yeah, luckily this these women have become a community for me as well, I mean, for each other. But just it's been so nice to feel literally that you're not alone.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:17] Are there any people other than women in your community of partners of commercial fishermen?

Megan Waldrep [00:06:22] Not yet. I have not gotten any letters from anybody other than women. I would love to hear a male's perspective of what it's like. But, you know, a lot of people, it's hard for them to share. And I understand, like, not everybody wants to delve into their personal life and challenges, but I welcome anybody who is in a romantic relationship with a partner because it is quite different than being related to or friend of.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:44] I'm going to ask about a couple other things that you do on social media, specifically on Instagram because you do a lot of polls and you also share, which is great because you do the polls, but then you also share the answers that you get. And some of them are really crazy and really out of left field kind of for you, I think. Maybe not for others, because you ask about things like farmed salmon versus wild salmon, what's the deal? And then the whole thing explodes and then you're like, What happened? I don't even know what happened. I just asked a question So we'll talk about that in a second. I think it's really interesting following you and following on your blog and also on your Instagram. There's this real seasonality to fisheries work and to the work that your husband does, right, and by extension, your life. Right? So your husband works in two fisheries right now, Alaska salmon. And I think it's the California spiny lobster fishery, correct?

Megan Waldrep [00:07:31] Yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:07:32] Yeah. So he's in either Alaska or in California. And in California you're around, right? It's not like he's going off for like months at a time, but still it's like he has to go out. And so there's seasonality I think is really reflected in your work and of course specifically in his work because he's either gone or he's here. For example, a lot of your posts on your website are reflections on how to prepare for the departure of your fisherman or how to prepare for the arrival of your fisherman, or what to do when they're gone or what the transition is like when they come home. So there's just a lot of a lot of discussion around kind of preparing for the departure or preparing for the arrival. So how do you when you guys are finally together, actually enjoy the time and just be together and not think about that stuff?

Megan Waldrep [00:08:15] I love this question. It has a lot of the beautiful facets we can discover. This is how the time goes for us when he's in Alaska with very, very, very loving words. I mean, this it's more out of sight, out of mind in a more peaceful way where I'm not having anxiety when he's fishing in California and he's gone for just an overnight or a couple of times a week, I have more anxiety because I know what the sea conditions are. I see when the wind changes and I'm more a part of that world. I feel like the quality time together that we get is obviously super important. When he comes back from Alaska, we've agreed to a 2 to 3 day not doing anything but bonding together because it can get pretty awkward when you haven't seen someone for a long time. You're very excited to see your loved one. You've missed them, but at the same time they're adjusting to land life again, to actually sleeping in a bed, eating healthy meals. You're adjusting to sharing your bed again. You're adjusting to a new routine because you've kind of had your your own room program going while they were gone. So for me, it's okay, let's walk out this and this will be our time to reconnect. Then we leave time. I mean, we both have projects going on always. And I think for fishermen there's always something going on, whether it's in the scrapyards, boatyard, whatever, engines. So for me, the biggest advice I can give people is to find a hobby that you love, that you will, or a project that you can continually work on, whether they're on the boat or off the boat, for on season or offseason, because the volatility of the industry does not stop at the end of the season. There's still so many projects that can come up. There's still so much that can happen. And he's got to go and, you know, check on a part here and have it. And that's great. Letting Chris do that and handle this is what I can do to respect him and not try to control things, which is something I do try to do because I love to keep things in order. So in order for me not to meddle, if you will, and show support is me delving into my own projects. And then if he happens to have a windy day off and and I can move things around, I do. And I'm like, let's go grab

lunch. Let's go on a hike. To be able to have a flexible schedule along with his schedule is really nice. That's what I'm fortunate to be a freelance writer. The hustle is real, but you can adjust the time if you can figure out your work schedule and how your creative process is, honestly, it's really about reserving time for yourself first and then figuring out how to be flexible when those magical moments come and it's too windy and the guys are hanging out. It's just so nice so you got to cherry pick when you can during the season and the offseason. For us, we live in California and in North Carolina. We just bought a house last year that needs a lot of work. So for us we drive across the country and that's another way that we bond is the road trips to get from each coast has been nice.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:11] Yeah, there's a lot of great advice in there. I don't know about taking a road trip together because one of us wouldn't make it to the final destination. I just feel like I'm so paranoid and such a, it's not paranoia, it's like I need to have control over driving, so I'd have to be the one driving the entire time.

Megan Waldrep [00:11:25] Yeah.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:26] We just released an episode today of The Conch with guest Erika Feller from the Marine Stewardship Council and she also said something very similar to what you said about being ready and available to kind of be flexible. Right? And if you can, if it's possible and she said it in the context of kind of increasing opportunities at work, advancing yourself professionally, but she called it maximizing the serendipity potential. So I think that's what you're, I know, I love that phrase, too. I think that's what you're talking about when you're saying be flexible. So if you do have a windy day, maximize the serendipity potential as much as you can and just take off and go do something fun together.

Megan Waldrep [00:12:03] Exactly. Exactly. And also, even if it's not a windy day and he's out and you're feeling it, go take yourself out. You know what I mean?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:12] You've mentioned on your blog that you got seasick a lot. Do you still get seasick?

Megan Waldrep [00:12:16] I haven't puked overboard, let's just be transparent about it. But we lived on a sailboat for three years and traveled on it for two and I was seasick a lot for the first 4 hours of the 24 hour voyage. But now I've realized that anti-nausea helps. I did not do that on the sailboat. I was trying to be hardcore and get my sea legs. No, I have nothing to prove I should said. But the ginger pills. Everybody has their little magical potions that work. Some of the anti-nausea out there works. The homeopathics been really helpful and lots of snacks and bubbly beverages.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:48] Ginger, I hear. Is it good?

Megan Waldrep [00:12:49] Yes, absolutely. Ginger.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:52] Well, that's crazy that you're living on a sailboat and your house is literally making you sick.

Megan Waldrep [00:12:57] Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Well, unfortunately, the boat, we sold the boat years ago and I still haven't gotten over it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:03] But congratulations on buying a new house. I've also been following your renovations on that. And it's a lot, right?

Megan Waldrep [00:13:10] Right, yes, it is a lot. It's a whole sailboat times a thousand.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:14] Exactly. And it could get you sick in different ways. So recapture some of that fun time. So back to kind of talking about seafood and you know, on your blog and on your Instagram, which again, I find is so great. I just love how you do it and I think it's really well curated. You give a lot of information about seafood that you find at supermarkets and you know, you're just like, you know, someone who's a partner of a commercial fisherman, but also trying to learn all this stuff at the same time throughout the course of your day. right? And so I remember a particularly rousing series of social media posts about farmed salmon that you posted. And I talk about aquaculture a lot on the show with other guests. And so I would love to hear what did you learn from people in your network when you posted about farmed fish versus wild fish?

Megan Waldrep [00:13:57] You said it right. It was nothing that I thought would ever explode into what it was. But it was amazing to see how many opinions there were and how much information, what kind of information, people were getting. And also for me because I was learning, I honestly before I dated Chris, I didn't even think to ask for wild caught. But I'm just I'm a seafood lover and to me, it was all seafood so. Now that I'm married to a commercial fisherman, I advocate for wild caught seafood because I support that community. That's our lifestyle no matter what. But what I've learned about through that conversation was that a) people have a lot of opinions and that's great. So there's that. And b) to, to nutshell it, from what I gather, the nutritional content is comparable and the only real differences is that the farmed seafood may have some kind of additives of some sort. I don't know what, but I'm not saying they're negative. I'm not really sure what they are. I think it also depends on which farm you're getting your salmon from. So I guess what I'm saying is it's still great, but I am supportive of everybody who is in a fishing community because I understand that it's tough no matter who you are. I'm here for the people, whether you're a farm fisherman or a commercial fisherman. I'm here to support that community and the families. That is who I stand with.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:11] I think that's a great answer and I think that's the thing that gets so confusing and really difficult. We talk about communication to the consumer a lot on this show and it's really, really difficult. The seafood industry has a lot to learn about how to communicate around different types of seafoods and methods of production and benefits and the challenges to just, you know, everyday people. And you have more information than a lot of average consumers. But still it's really confusing. And I think that stance that you have supporting fishermen regardless and supporting their communities is a good one because there's plenty of information out there now for the consumer to understand the challenges with individual production types. There's less information around the people behind the seafood, and I try to stress that a lot on the show too.

Megan Waldrep [00:15:56] You know what also really turned my head a little bit was realizing that farmed seafood is actually filling in a hole and helping with a certain market of seafood that people aren't able to fill up on seafood. It's not readily available everywhere. So the fact that farmed seafood is able to give people that type of experiences, I don't know if experience is the right word.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:17] Nutrition.

Megan Waldrep [00:16:18] Nutrition, yeah. That protein, that healthy protein that really turned him and realized, oh, wow, wild caught seafood is such a privilege. It's taking things for granted. You know what I mean? And realizing, oh, yeah, this, everybody is out here doing their best, you know, hopefully we're all doing our best. All we can do is do the best for our families and ourselves. You know.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:39] You know, you alluded to this a little bit around your worry as a wife of a commercial fisherman. And I don't need to remind you that commercial fishing is one of the most dangerous professions on the planet. And you made a post once about deckhands and the issues that your partner experiences with them, why they're late to work, and why they literally miss the boat. And so what are some of the other issues that your fisherman experiences on the job when fishing, but not necessarily have to do with the danger of the profession, but just challenges in general, like trying to find good help, deckhands, trustworthy people that you're going to go literally sometimes and put your life on the line with. You know, what kind of challenges does he experience out in the field?

Megan Waldrep [00:17:18] Great question. I want to shout out to his three deck hands that he's had in Santa Barbara and say that they've been great. So it's not about them at all. The excuses that I share is called Commercial Fishing Excuses and it is

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:30] Perfect.

Megan Waldrep [00:17:31] hilarious, and I highly recommend anybody to look at these excuses because they're amazing. To be honest. A lot of the issues that people face are people who can hang and who are willing to do the hard labor and maybe who have had experience within hard labor. I know a fisherman that says to ask the fisherman what their parents did for a living, and that will give you a clue into maybe how hard they would work. And I never thought about that before. I was like, Oh, that is one way to do it. Another thing that's a very serious issue is addiction is something that people are challenged with in every industry. And I think commercial fishing, add the danger to it, it's even worse. And mental health is also a huge one. Nutrition can be a big one. But I mean, for Chris and the deckhands, I think the general, for him, he would say that's just deckhand issues. These are just things that people are just dealing with personalities all the time. And are people going to show up and actually step up and put 100% every time, even if they've gotten 2 hours, 3 hours of sleep. Just finding reliable workers that will bust it out through the whole season and stick with it, I think is mainly the biggest challenge. I'm sure fishermen can tell you a whole other list, but from what I understand.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:18:40] I think you're right and I think I've heard about that quite a bit. And I think one of the things that kind of helps against that is that the money is pretty good still, right? I mean, they can go out and make pretty good money in a short amount of time.

Megan Waldrep [00:18:51] Exactly. And that's why all of them are busting their butts in Bristol Bay right as we speak, because Bristol Bay is happening right now like full force. So that would be peak season and, yeah, and that's why because I've asked commercial fishermen, why the hell are y'all doing this, like for real? Because I'm like, this seems like it kind of sucks and is really hard and painful and hard on the body. And it was like, well, I mean, when it's good, it's good, you know, I mean, you can really have the potential to make a lot of money. And not only that, I mean, these people are a special breed and they also, they love nature, too, you know, and they're in these incredibly pristine waters and

views that I've yet to see. And I think that's what probably keeps them going, too, is that camaraderie and the setting. And and of course, the money can be great.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:39] It's a definite way of life. And I think you're right. It's it takes a special kind of person. And it's actually quite interesting how they tend to find their way to the fisheries and in fishing and maintain that lifestyle. It's really unique and actually quite difficult.

Megan Waldrep [00:19:52] Exactly.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:53] And you mentioned mental health, which I think is interesting. And I also wanted to flag that you and so we had on season one, I think it was episode four or five maybe, I can't remember. But Monique Coombs who also, yeah, who works for the Maine Fishermen's Communities Association, I think community is in there anyway. So she talked about how they've had some really great success with initiatives around mental health and and commercial fishermen. And then on an other note, you guys went to school together in Germany or something?

Megan Waldrep [00:20:23] Yeah. How wild is that?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:25] So wild. Tell me again what the connection is there.

Megan Waldrep [00:20:28] I'm an army brat and Monique's dad worked for the Department of Defense. And we we lived in Heidelberg, Germany at the time. I went to a Department of Defense school and yeah, we were buddies in middle school and.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:39] That is so funny.

Megan Waldrep [00:20:40] I know small world. Then like a year ago I think she slid into my DMs. Like, wait, is this Megan from Heidelberg? I'm like oh my gosh. How did we a) connect, reconnect, and b) both become part of the commercial fishing community. I mean this is not something that we've had backgrounds in. It was really great. And to see her be such a powerful person in Maine, I'm just so inspired and I can't wait to reconnect with her in real life. And I'm just in awe and applauding them from afar because they really are setting the standard and hopefully something programs that will be able to be rolled out across the country.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:14] Yeah, I hope so too. And that's what I said when I was talking to her, because I would love to see that support for for fishermen all over the place and their partners. Right? That's a huge issue. And that kind of leads me into this next discussion topic of the contribution of partners of fishermen to the global fishing industry are significantly underrecognized. And honestly, partners of commercial fishermen are the literal backbone of the global fishing industry. And not only is it unrecognized work, but it's unpaid work generally. You know, I don't know what you have your individual agreement is with your commercial fisherman. I'm not talking about you. I'm talking in general. But majority of the work that partners or spouses of commercial fishermen do is around keeping the home running, tending to the children, you know, welcoming. We talked about the departure and the arrival of the fisherman's spouse. I mean, they're coming home. The home is ready for them. You know, they're leaving. You're taking care of all the stuff you're paying, the insurance bills or whatever. You're you know, you're paying all the bills. You're making sure all the TV stay on or whatever. And I once wrote, quote, "While they might not be actually steering a boat, they keep the ship afloat through the support of their fisher

partner, be it through assistance with gear maintenance, keeping the books, caring for the children in the home, and waiting with a warm meal for their partner to return." Generally, again, like I said, this is unpaid labor. And so how do women contribute to the fishing industry and what would the world look like without the support of partners of commercial fishermen in your experience?

Megan Waldrep [00:22:43] I think off the top of my head, the biggest things that women or partners contribute to the commercial fishing industry is giving their partners peace of mind to focus on the job and do their best to be as safe as possible to bring home for the family. I feel that the partners, because of that, are taking on all of the burden because that is part of the arrangement. The worry is mixed in there, that single parenting, something that I highly, highly respect and have praised every single parent mom out there and also single parents that are married to commercial fishermen having to not only ease the worries of their children, but also not show those worries to make sure that they have a strong front for their family. I actually know another partner who I believe had to dig out basically six feet of snow to get out of her house in Alaska because her fisherman is gone. You know, these are things that women are dealing with from paying bills to digging out pathways to get to their cars or even just the basic worry. And I think that's what it comes down to, is the unknown. And that's something that we deal with all the time. Pricing, weather, safety and what partners can bring to that community is helping those fishermen do their best. And then what would the world look like without them?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:01] Yeah.

Megan Waldrep [00:24:01] I mean, a hot mess comes to mind. I mean, it probably be very bad fishermen that are probably not operating at their best that they could. I can't even imagine. I don't even know.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:14] I think it would collapse.

Megan Waldrep [00:24:14] What would that be like? Yeah, right.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:17] I think it would collapse, honestly, I did an interview with the Environmental Defense Fund. It was a written interview, but with some of their field staff out in mostly Latin American countries. And they were talking about what if women disappeared, women who are actually working in the processing, for instance, and what would it look like if they were gone? And like the fish wouldn't be processed. It literally would stop.

Megan Waldrep [00:24:34] Yeah,.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:35] it would stop the entire industry because the fish wouldn't be processed. They wouldn't have the marketing. They wouldn't have the sale. The things that women actually do and are known for in the industry and I think this is part of it is, like you said, keeping the home fires burning. Honestly, like you said, digging out the snow and making sure their kids get to school or whatever. So I think it would be a mess. I think you're right, a hot mess.

Megan Waldrep [00:24:56] A hot mess. Exactly. Actually, there's an account on Instagram called Life of Fisherman's Wife, I believe. She's in England. She learned how to, I believe, make the traps or the nets for the traps out there. And her husband's like, wow, you did such a great job. He hired her. She's now part of the business. There's a lot of wives that

are also working with him, which I love that. And when I help Chris in the yard, transparency, I'm like, Oh no, you don't have to pay me. He's like, I mean, I pay my deckhands. I'm like, Yeah, what am I talking about? Yes, you could definitely pay me to help you 100%. Pay me. So I mean, it's whatever you feel most comfortable with, however the arrangements are. But like I said, it's the whole monetary value. I think that's hard for women who don't go to a traditional job every day. It's like, what makes you feel comfortable and valued in perspective?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:25:39] That's really great. And I, you know, I really appreciate that insight because being a partner or wife or spouse of anyone in an industry where there's significant travel and maybe significant danger is really, really hard and it's definitely not recognized as much as it should. We mentioned Monique in Maine working on the mental health support for commercial fishermen. Unfortunately, the women or the spouses of these fishermen, this type of support is not available for them yet, which is really unfortunate because they're experiencing some of the same, you know, maybe not at the same level or at the same intensity, but they're experiencing the same kind of issues that their spouses might be experiencing. And they are the ones that are dealing with trying to find the solution and trying to find the support. So I hope that those women eventually get support as well. And, you know, you might have something to say to that, but I think it's really hard to be in your position.

Megan Waldrep [00:26:29] I was thinking about that, like, how do we equate the challenges on land and sea? I think it's just different are both hard and different and that it takes different parts of you and many different parts at different times.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:39] Well, I think, you know, as the partner of a commercial fisherman, I think we've established that you are, in fact, in the seafood industry. And I think we've established also that without partners and spouses of people of commercial fishermen, we wouldn't have an industry or as we said, the industry would be a hot mess. I think we've established that. Right. So and this podcast is really meant to inspire women working in or thinking about starting a career in the seafood sector. So as a partner of a commercial fisherman and as someone who is in the seafood industry, right, because of that, what are three tips that you would give to someone who is starting a relationship with a commercial fisherman apropos to what they can expect to do to support the work of their partner and essentially really be a part of the industry, the fishing industry, de facto.

Megan Waldrep [00:27:26] The number one thing. I mean, how many times can you tell a women, just don't worry, it's going to be fine. So that's not helpful. The point of my blog and what I'm learning and what I really, really want to get across is that I want to encourage fierce independence within a strong partnership. I want women to feel that they are their own person. They can achieve their goals, they can do whatever they want, and they can still be loving partners and have somebody that is equally there for them and supportive and respectful and fair. That is the goal for me and any friend or anybody out there. So the top three tips that I would say is, number one, cultivate your independence and harness that. Go do the things that make you happy and find out what you want out of relationship, what you can bring to it. Number two is find a project or hobby you can work on, on or off season when plans change or whatever, it's there for you, it's yours. And number three, I say join our community because we have a supportive group of women from literally all over the globe, which I never thought I'd ever say. From Indonesia to Canada to England and the good ole U.S. So we're out there. I have a private Facebook group. It's just been really supportive. Women post questions on there like, Hey, what's some tips for a care package? This is my first season and I don't really know what to expect and I'm really sad

to I haven't heard from in a week, what would you do to relationship advice, is he cheating? Like how do you know? I mean it gets very intimate. So definitely join our community on Facebook and I hope to bring that to my website soon. So a private forum to be continued and it'll be just us on meganwaldrep.com.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:57] So how can SAGE support you as a woman in seafood?

Megan Waldrep [00:29:01] You're doing it right now. That's all I can say. I really appreciate everything that you're contributing to the community because I've learned so much from you, Julie. Honestly, I never even thought, Oh yeah, you're right, women should get paid doing the yard work and things like that. Like, why can't that be a part of the conversation? And I really love how you shine a light on the women who are processing seafood. These are things that the layperson, the normal person, me, I wouldn't think about unless I was in this industry. I mean, how much work that is, what the conditions are like, who's actually doing it? I mean, I think that what SAGE can do is continue what you're doing. That's that's what I think. Thank you.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:38] Thank you. That's really great validation. And I get very little feedback. So I try to take these opportunities to find out from people. What can I do to help you even more? And so it's really good to hear you mentioned about the Facebook group, and I think that's really powerful. And I do plan on doing something similar to that in the future, but I'm going to keep the lid on that project for a while until I have more meat on its bones. But I think, you know, there is some more that we can do to create a community, and that's part of SAGE's kind of strategy also is to create community for women in seafood. So definitely continue to have those discussions and support you as well. Here's a really good one. So SAGE 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 here's your opportunity to uplift someone, so who would you like to uplift and why?

Megan Waldrep [00:30:27] Okay. I'm wondering, has Emily, Seaside with Emily been nominated?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:30:31] She has not been nominated, but she's been a guest on the show. So go ahead. Feel free to nominate her.

Megan Waldrep [00:30:36] Okay. I'm nominating Seaside with Emily because I love her aesthetic and how she addresses to her audience facts, information, how she goes to visit the actual farms and fisheries. And I love also to see her with her and her partner out what they're eating, you know, and it's a full circle of it all. And I love her passion. And she actually she reached out to me after the farm versus wild caught thing and she loved it. It was just really cool to see her feedback because she's also like, This is great this. I'm also wondering what people think. It's nice to communicate with women like you and Emily and Monique because behind the scenes they're learning and figuring out how we can better ourselves that are serving. At the end of the day, it's all about serving and making others feel confident and good and empowered, and that's all you can hope for. I'm just lucky to have found women like you to speak with and connect with.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:24] That's awesome. I totally agree. For some reason I think it had a lot to do with the COVID 19 pandemic, and for some reason I think we all were online more, of course. And so then we tried to build these alternative communities than what we were used to, just building them in person at events. That's a really big opener for me. I probably wouldn't have ever met you or Emily or well, maybe Emily because she

travels a lot again. But it seems like the breadth of people in our community has widened and we're able to actually meet each other, which is super awesome. And I do hope that we will be able to meet each other in person someday also because I like to meet people in person as well.

Megan Waldrep [00:32:00] Me too. So I just want to do one more. But I didn't want to be like it's I don't know if it's too close to home, but I mean, Monique, she's my girl. I got to give her as she is doing all the things up there in Maine. She was my first one. I didn't know if I was allowed to nominate since she had already been on the podcast. Monique Yes, she's crushing it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:17] Yeah, of course you can nominate whoever you want. And so, yes, both Emily and Monique have been on the podcast. Monique's another one that I would have never met probably had we not kind of bonded on the internet somehow. It was really odd, and I think that's an embrace the serendipity is that the phrase I used earlier.

Megan Waldrep [00:32:32] Yeah, something like.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:33] Or manifest the serendipity. I don't remember it, but that's the idea because you and Monique, like literally that's a serendipity moment right there. So I think that is so neat and I hope you guys get to connect in real life soon.

Megan Waldrep [00:32:46] Thank you, Me too. And us too for sure.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:48] For sure. Before we close out our conversation, I do need to ask you about something that you talked about on your Instagram, which was a product called Clone-a-Willy. So could you please tell me about Clone-a-Willy and what is it?

Megan Waldrep [00:33:02] Yes. I'm so glad you asked! I could talk about it forever. So Clone-a-Willy. It is a make your own dildo kit where you make a replica of your partner's penis. I mean, that's what it is right there. So how it started, let's see. I, Chris and I were nine months into dating long distance. We would go back and forth every month to see each other. But he said, Oh, I'm going to Alaska. I'll be gone for three and a half months. And I'm like, okay, three months is different than like a month. And also I mean I was 33 at the time living in California and basically said in very fine terms, like, I am a woman with needs. I just want to let you know that I'm sacrificing a lot. Just want to let you know I love you. And also I am sacrificing down here. And so he kind of looked at me and said, got it, was really quiet looking on his phone and says, Hey, look what I found. And he found a Clone-a-Willy. And I'm like, What in the world is this? And so we immediately went to the adult store in Santa Barbara and grabbed it and went home and made it, and it was a hot mess. We could not get it, but it was such a wonderful bonding experience. We had such a great time that we ended up doing it again and I made the big one and I love it because for me it's more than just it's more than just a dildo, okay? It's about attending to your needs as a woman. And honestly, your sexual needs is not something that is addressed, especially for women whose partners are gone for a long time, like in commercial fishing. And we shouldn't feel ashamed for wanting and needing certain things like.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:31] No.

Megan Waldrep [00:34:31] Like sexual needs is a very big one. So since the Clone-a-Willy, I have to say, I'm really excited about my next one. The next is Clone-a-Pussy.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:41] No stop.

Megan Waldrep [00:34:42] That's right. Yep. And I just said pussy for the second time out loud and I'm still getting used to it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:47] That's a thing that also exists for you to make for your fisherman.

Megan Waldrep [00:34:52] Yes, exactly. It's well, it's actually it's a thing to make for you, My goal with the Clone-a-Pussy, if you will, is to empower. For me personally, I'm like, what do I look like? Why have my exes and my partner and my doctor know what my lady parts look like, what my vulva looks like and I don't. I've done the compact mirror thing, but it's super awkward and your neck hurts and you can't really see what's going on. How as women are we able to really feel embodied and rooted in ourselves if there's still this important part of us that remains a mystery so hence Clone-a-Pussy. My whole thing with Clone-a-Pussy is let's clone our pussies, see what we look like and be like. Hell yeah, girl! You know what I mean? Like, we can do this. This is who we are. Like, for me, I'm going to keep mine in my desk drawer, pull it out from time to time and give myself a high five. I mean, that is the point of that Clone-a-Pussy. But there's also a masturbation sleeve that you can add to it to actually give it as a toy to give to your partner. But to be honest, commercial fisherman do not have time for that on a commercial fishing boat, let alone any space. So, no, no, no, no, no. You could do that and give that to them later or whatever. But for me, I'm like, this is for us. And so was the Clone-a-Willy. I mean, it's for us, but the experience of making one and I mean, that's just hilarious and I encourage any couple to try. Make sure the water temperature is 90 degrees. That's all I can say.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:07] 90 degrees. Good, good tip. But you get that at just any kind of store that sells those types of accouterments.

Megan Waldrep [00:36:15] Yes, but if you go to CloneAWilly.com and type in the code POCF, you get 20% off. So there you go.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:22] Good. Okay. We'll make sure you put that in the show notes as well. Well, that was really great. I'm really happy that you talk about that because this is the first for our show. So I'm really happy because you're right. I mean, we talked about mental health needs of partners, of commercial fishermen. We talked about other needs. But like you said, the sexual needs is something that no one talks about. And so I'm really, really happy that you brought that up and are working with trying to find solutions for that because I think that's incredibly great. And like you said, it's a great thing to do with your partner, but it's also fun to have it for after when they're gone, right?

Megan Waldrep [00:36:51] Absolutely. Yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:52] Really amazing. I thank you so much for sharing that and the code. I hope you see a spike in people getting those after this.

Megan Waldrep [00:36:58] Heck yeah, me too.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:37:01] So where can we find you online again? Please remind us of your blog.

Megan Waldrep [00:37:05] So the party that meganwaldrep.com. There's also [megan.waldrep](https://www.instagram.com/meganwaldrep) is my Instagram handle and then go to Facebook groups and go to Partners of Commercial Fishermen and it's a private group so you'll have to answer some questions and then you'll be let in. It's very exclusive. It's it's a safe space for partners to come in and be and do and ask questions and not feel silly. Yeah, I'm so excited to meet everyone.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:37:30] Do you moderate that group yourself or do you have someone help you do that?

Megan Waldrep [00:37:33] I do it myself.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:37:34] Wow, that's a lot of work.

Megan Waldrep [00:37:36] Yeah, it is. It is. And I always want to be there and I'm doing my best, the best I can. But one of my favorite parts of that community is people are asking questions and coming in and it's its own living thing.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:37:47] That's amazing. So tell me, Chris, your husband is currently fishing hot and heavy in Bristol Bay. And so what, what are you doing now for yourself?

Megan Waldrep [00:37:54] So currently sitting in a car at one of my one of my best girlfriend's house in Florida because every year when Chris goes to Bristol Bay, I use that time to take off and see my girlfriends and, since I'm a writer, I can work remotely. All I need is wi fi. So I take off for a few weeks and go visit friends and now I'm on my second stop. I'm in Ponte Vedra, Florida, 93 degrees and humid, and yeah.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:38:19] Well, look, we've come to an end of our conversation and I can't tell you how happy I am that this happened and I was able to get you on the show because I think your contribution to the seafood industry, as well as your, you know, real great, inquisitive mind and, and wonderful writing ability, is really, really beneficial to this whole industry and to everyone in it, honestly. And I just learned so much from you and just through your daily way of asking questions and sharing your knowledge. And I think you're so valuable and I really, really appreciate you taking the time to come on the show, and I look forward to continuing our conversation in the future.

Megan Waldrep [00:38:57] Julie, thank you. I'm a little choked up right now. Thank you very much. And I really feel honored to even be in this conversation with you and to be even considered as this conversation. I just can't tell you how much it means to me, so thank you.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:39:11] The feeling is likewise. Thank you so much. Thank you for tuning in to The Conch podcast. It would be amazing if you could take just two seconds to leave a review and share this podcast with your ocean loving friends. Thank you.

Speaker 3 [00:39:28] 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

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