

## The Conch-Tia Clark FINAL.mp3

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:00:05] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov and the host of this podcast The Conch. We are continuing our journey on this podcast, talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're uplifting some of the incredible people working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, the challenges they face and the triumphs they've achieved. Today, we are excited to have an amazing guest joining us, Tia Clark. Tia is a Charleston, South Carolina, native and food and beverage veteran who started Casual Crabbing with Tia. Welcome and thank you to you for joining me today on The Conch. Let's go.

**Tia Clark** [00:00:39] Yeah, thanks for having me, Julie.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:00:41] I'm so excited to finally get you off the pier, off the dock and into the studio to come and talk to me. I'm very, very excited about this.

**Tia Clark** [00:00:50] I am, too, because I also get a break from the dock, so I like that too.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:00:55] Yeah, you need a break every once in a while, right? So, I'm happy that we're able to make this happen. I want to hear all about your crabbing business. And I know you got into crabbing because you wanted to become healthy. Could you tell us a little bit about that journey?

**Tia Clark** [00:01:08] Yeah, absolutely. People always say, I got into it. Yes, I got into it because that's what it looks like everybody else. This is the greatest thing I've ever done in my entire life. But I joke and say I did not go quietly or easily. This whole journey is not the way that life goes for me. So, I wasn't believing it, although it was actually happening to me. Yeah, I was in food and beverage, and I quit smoking and I thought that, you know, I was doing something good for myself and then my health declined after a short period of time after quitting smoking and after multiple doctors and holistic PAs helped me by changing my diet and suggesting that I go outside and get active every day. So, a family member actually invited me to go crabbing for the first time. It wasn't like I said, you know, I want to do this thing, let me go crabbing. It was all of these health things that were happening and a suggestion for me to try to find a way to get active for 30 minutes a day. And then when I reconnected with some family, I mean, he didn't bat an eye. He said, come crabbing with me when I told him that. And one day of him taking me crabbing has changed everything about my life, physically, mentally. I mean, my whole soul was changed from that experience from just one day.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:02:32] So tell us about Casual Crabbing with Tia and what does it mean to casually crab? I love that name so much. What does that mean? And on your website, it says that the, quote, casual crabbing experience includes crabbing multiple ways. So, what are they? And just tell us about casual crabbing.

**Tia Clark** [00:02:49] Yeah, for sure. Casual Crabbing, which I did not come up with the name. Another way I didn't go easy, somebody else just came up with the name. A friend of mine did though. Casual Crabbing is me sharing my experience of building a relationship with the water. Not everybody crabs the way that I do. I caught my first blue crab five and a half years ago, so crabbing for me is different for everybody else because most people in Charleston have been crabbing growing up. So, when I talk to them about crabbing, it's about, oh, I did this with my family, I did this when I was younger. I didn't have that experience. My first experience was almost 40. So, when people come casually

crabbing, instantly they think they're getting on a boat, no boats, there's no boats involved. It's a land-based experience. And I'm trying to teach people that you don't need boats or to be rich to have an experience with the water. We do it the hard way. We take chicken and put it on a string, just like everybody started crabbing. The old school way of crabbing. And you slowly walk the crabs in and then you scoop up with a net. And then we use two ring-drop baskets as well, which are just baskets that we zip-tie or tie a piece of bait to the center of it and put weights on the outside of the basket so that it can help it sink as the tides are moving, and that basket sits there, the crabs come in and they're eating your bait and then you just pull on the string and close the basket up. It's like you're going on a hunt, you're playing this game and you're catching all these crabs. So, you're crabbing with a handline, crabbing with a wire mesh basket, and then we throw the cast net, and we cast for live bait. Sometimes you catch a crab that way as well. But then we really take the live bait and then we put that on our fishing poles and then we cast that out and we create something. I like to say, creating something out of nothing because when I started crabbing, I would go out with the cast net and sometimes I wouldn't even take bait and I would take it as a challenge. I wanted to see how much I could catch and what I could produce by what I was taking out of the water. So, I throw my cast net and I catch it and use that for bait and then whatever I caught that day. So that's what this experience is. It's me making people go out and we're actually working for it. Other people here in Charleston take commercial traps. If you're lucky enough to live on the water, you probably got a commercial crab pot sitting in the dock. You load it with bait early in the week and then you just pull it up on the weekend and there's your food. Nothing's wrong with that, but I'm trying to get up close and personal and learn about these crabs and learn what they do. So, me bringing people casually crabbing, we're actually working. We are out there, and we have all this gear and then we're casting, then we're fishing and we just it's a nonstop kind of action-packed playground next to the water.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:05:29] That's what it sounds like. It's a way, like you said at the beginning, you got healthy by, you know, creating this relationship on the water and tossing out those nets and creating something out of nothing, which, you know, is an amazing story, by the way. It's very inspirational. So, thank you for sharing that with us. So, you said they're blue crabs. What other kind of fish are there that you might be fishing with a rod.

**Tia Clark** [00:05:52] What might we catch if we're fishing?

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:05:53] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Tia Clark** [00:05:55] Anything we could catch whiting, we catch croaker, we catch trout, we catch redfish, flounder, sheepshead. I mean, it's brackish water. There's so much life in this water. You know, another thing about Casual Crabbing with Tia is, it's my love letter to my hometown because when people came to me and I started crabbing as my health journey, like I wanted to take people crabbing, so I would take friends out and they would always say stuff like, man I bet people would pay you money to do this. And instantly, like everybody that thinks, I went, Oh, that would be awesome. Yeah, I want to do that. That never was the case. My first response and my initial reaction to others suggesting that I offer crabbing or take other people crabbing was no because why would I let people come to my hometown and just take stuff out of the water? That is what I said. That was just my initial reaction. Well, when I started taking people crabbing, I started learning a little bit more about what I was doing. Well, everybody that comes out to take my experience 16 and up purchases a saltwater fishing license. That money goes to our Department of Natural Resources. It goes to programs like the SCORE program, which is the South

Carolina Oyster Recycling Enhancement Program. We need oysters in our water because no other life's going to live here without that. So just by people coming out to take my experience, they're already helping us to put life back in the water because we volunteer with SCORE and we build MWRs, which are manufactured wire reefs, RCTs, which are recycled crab traps, and we build artificial oyster reefs, and we participate in shoreline restoration all over our community. And just by people coming in to come crabbing with us, they're actually helping us put life back in the water. Although the whole purpose of them being there that day is to hopefully take some life out and have some dinner.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:07:48] That's a really great explanation of what kind of Casual Crabbing is. And I think I really love how you describe the evolution of going from no, I don't want to take people out there to take things out of the water to people are actually contributing to the water and to the community by doing these things. Sounds like an important evolution of thinking for sure.

**Tia Clark** [00:08:12] Oh it helped me. I mean, it really is like my head got cracked open. Because for me, you know, I'm now on the board of some really awesome organizations and towns like Charleston Water Keepers and the Sustainability Board with the Aquarium. I remember when I first was getting on the Water Keepers, one of the questions that was asked of me was, why don't you think people care about the water? And I remember that question coming to me and instantly without batting an eye, I just said, because they can't use it. Because it became clear to me that I live in this place where I crab with people every day that I could walk to my elementary, middle, and high school. All of my education is in walking distance where I give this experience. So why did I never go crabbing until I was 37? There is just like this really crazy kind of gap there that I'm trying to figure it out. None of it makes a lot of sense to me. But one thing is clear is that since that day, five and a half years ago, all I wanted to do was protect the water. And I can't help but think if I had had this at a young age, organic stewardship is what was built in me five and a half years ago. Nobody has to tell me anything to care about the water because I fell in love with crab and I was like, Oh my God, I want to do this every day. How can I make sure there's crab so I can do this every day? Like it starts you thinking into those things. Like, I just, I'll never look at the water the same way because of that.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:09:39] Yeah.

**Tia Clark** [00:09:40] And I just really feel like if we start building organic stewards from a young age, we won't have to have these fancy parties to try to ask people for money. Not saying that that's not necessary, just saying that, you know, man, it would be kind of crazy if people just automatically on their own want to care for the water and we didn't have to go to them and ask them to.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:10:02] Yeah, I think that's a really important thing. And I love the term organic stewardship and actually, you know, starting it from a young age and ensuring that people have access to these important systems like water systems and, you know, food systems, etc. And I think, you know, we had a gal on the program last season, Tanasia Swift, who works for the Billion Oyster Project. Are you familiar with that in New York City?

**Tia Clark** [00:10:29] No, I'm not.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:10:30] It's a great episode and I encourage you to listen to it. Tanasia works on restoring oyster populations in the New York Harbor and they work with

this school called the Harbor School, which is like a dedicated school for marine things. I don't exactly remember how it's phrased. They teach kids about the harbor, and they get diving lessons and licenses and it's just a really cool school. And so, Tanasia works on restoring these artificial reefs in the harbor to, you know, kind of restore for habitat restoration. Sounds a little bit similar to what you're doing with SCORE.

**Tia Clark** [00:11:08] Yes, very much is. I mean, and I didn't know any of these things. I didn't know any of these things. And then now I share them and everybody in the community is like, Oh, I didn't know that. And it's because of DNR has a stigma. You know, like every time people DNR, they think of the warden, and they don't think our resource is the place to get information like my tax dollars paid for that. Nobody thinks that.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:11:27] Is that DNR? Is that the Department of Natural Resources?

**Tia Clark** [00:11:31] Yes, that's the Department of Natural Resources. Any time people hear that, they only think of, like, the warden side of it. Because I didn't know that. You know, and the reason I say people do that is because I was one of those people before five and a half years ago. And I'm basing that on the fact that I didn't know we had an organization called Charleston Water Keepers. I Didn't know that one oyster filters 50 gallons of water a day. I didn't know that these oyster reefs are filtering our water, building habitats, protecting the grass. I didn't know any of that until I started. You know, it's like none of it.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:12:06] It's incredible when you do start to learn and unravel kind of how these sea creatures and critters and habitats are all so closely interconnected and intertwined. You can't have one without the other, right?

**Tia Clark** [00:12:18] No, you just can't. And I just have this sense of what happened to me. How could I have all this stuff under my nose and not know this you know? Everything about this journey is taking me back to my roots. My relationship with my mom was closer. The relationship with my family. Five and a half years ago was the first time I ever caught and prepared my own things in my life. Like now I'm trying to catch and prepare as much stuff as I can. It's just like when I say it feels like my head got cracked open it's like all this stuff comes rushing in.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:12:50] That's awesome. I mean, it just goes to show, you know, it's never too late to change your life, right?

**Tia Clark** [00:12:56] Never. I actually was just talking to my mom about this earlier because you never know, like, somebody right now could have this job that they have worked so long. They're ready to make the next step, maybe like them turn it into theirs, just like I was like I was in food and beverage. I thought my next steps were just to have my own place. And so, I got a bonus every year from this bar that I worked at, and I took my annual bonus. I had plans drawn up for this bar. I thought I was about to open my own bar. I still have the plans. And then my cousin took me crabbing less than six months later. And look at me now. So, it's like all that time, all the 20 years I put in before that in the food and beverage I thought was leading me into having. And within less than a year, this one thing happens that changed everything about my life.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:13:45] That 20 years of food and beverage experience certainly has helped you in dealing with tourists and, you know, entertainment and keeping everybody safe and all that.

**Tia Clark** [00:13:56] Oh, yeah. There's no way I would be able to do what I'm doing right now without those 20 years. I'm so grateful for it. It doesn't matter who the person, where you came from. It doesn't matter. All of those things go out the window anyway when we are on the water. Yeah, I'm just able to kind of handle all of these different personalities. You know, I think about that. I do. I think about the fact that these people that I go out crabbing with, that I'm like, if it wasn't the crabbing, we probably would never speak ever in life. We wouldn't have anything in common. It's like this neutral zone. Anybody, doesn't matter your age, nothing matters. When you get out in the space.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:14:34] I love that. That's similar to my experience. I think we talked about this before. I also worked at a sports fishery, and it was a very high end, fancy one. And we had guests come from all over the world. But we were in kind of the Russian part of Scandinavia, so very close to Finland and Norway. So, we would have like the king of Norway come once, I was like, I would never, ever have met you. Where would I meet a king of Norway? Never, anywhere. Yeah. Never.

**Tia Clark** [00:15:05] Never. No, no. That's how I feel.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:15:10] So I want to ask about your Airbnb Experience, Let's Go Crabbing, which is recognized as one of Airbnb's best in the world. So how did Casual Crabbing with Tia become an Airbnb Experience and then be recognized as one of the best in the world? And congratulations on that. That's incredible.

**Tia Clark** [00:15:29] Thank you. Thank you. Well, Casual Crabbing with Tia started as an Airbnb Experience. I got the business license but that was only to take one group of friends out. Everybody was asking me. People ask me for a year after my first time going, So I went crabbing with my cousin. And then I would go every day. I would post to social media. I would share like just my journey of like exploring the water because I didn't know what I was posting sometimes. It would be a post of whatever I caught in my cast net, but I didn't know what it was, so it would be just a picture of this thing going anybody know what this is? And then like some fishing buddies and stuff would start by commenting and, you know, so I'm just like building this thing of my health journey, not even of a business. And everybody saying, Tia, you should take me, take my cousins, take people, and I'm turning everybody down. I take my buddy and his brothers out. And I have a great experience with these guys, and I pack up and I go home. I just remember getting home and my phone going off and I looked at it and it was the guys from the day around the table with their family and all of the crabs and the kids and everybody, and they're picking crabs and they're eating. And I'm just like, Oh, that didn't end when they left the dock, I was just like, having this thing like, oh, I had no idea that was still going on. I still was like just stupid, just kinda dumb to the whole thing. I didn't think anything of it. After I take these guys out. A few weeks later, one of my other bar patrons sent me a link through that Facebook page that my friend Robby started. And that person said, Tia, you should check this out because Airbnb is going to launch this thing in Charleston called Airbnb Experiences. And so, I told my wife about it and I was like, you know, I don't want to do that. And she starts typing it up, the application, and she's typing it and telling her why I don't want to do it. She finishes the whole application. She says we just gotta submit it. I tell her nobody wants to crab with me. Just do it. She did it and Airbnb accepted it within I think less than two weeks they had accepted it. And it went live. And I hosted my first Airbnb Experience in July 2018, either late September, early October in 2018. I got this booking through Airbnb's Experience platform, and it was for a solo booker, just for one person. It happened to be when that person booked on that day that Airbnb had this event that had been set up. It was like the

host meetup. And so, this woman wanted to do this experience and I was like, Man, I was like, Can you come early? And I was trying to switch her times and she was like, No, we don't have to do the whole time. Can I just come for a little bit? And I was like, Okay, whatever. So, I booked this lady and she comes out, she actually brings another friend with her. And I'm giving the experience and I'm telling my story and halfway through the experience, I hear this woman say something to her friend about Airbnb. And I said, I'm sorry did you just say that you work for Airbnb? And she said, Yes, I'm the market manager for the Southeast region and you are coming to the host meet up tonight and you are going to stand up and tell everybody your story. And you are going to do these things. And I was like, Whoa, whoa, like hold on wait, what? It was like they secret shopped my experience or something.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:18:59] They totally did. They told did.

**Tia Clark** [00:19:01] They totally did but they really didn't. What it was is she said that I guess it was live outside of the state. So, once it became live in the States, they started sending the market managers around to all the areas and they wanted to know what the top things were in all of the regions and they wanted to actually do them themselves, not just read people's reviews. So, you know, it wasn't like she just did mine they were doing everybody's. She was like blown away by mine. And so I go to this host meetup, I tell my story. Afterwards, they made me stay, and then they did, they shot like this five-minute video, right? And I didn't think anything of this. And then, like, two weeks later, my market manager calls and she's like, Oh, my gosh, Tia, I'm so excited to tell you this. She's like, we were doing this internal thing with the top host. They have chosen you. They want to do a Zoom video with you, and then they're going to want to fly you up to San Francisco. And I'm like, Wait a minute, what? Like, I'm working in the bar. I'm like, hold on. Wait, what. What's going on? Like, everything's happening really fast, you know? And then I do this video, Jill, my market manager's manager calls me immediately afterward and she was like, you are coming to San Francisco after that video. She was like, you are going to be one of the people here. And then she was like, I'll call you back. I'll work out the logistics. And they booked my flight and they had me go out there for a week. But when I got there, I was the only person from the United States.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:20:21] What?

**Tia Clark** [00:20:22] It was Japan, Italy, South Africa, and me. Oh, and I was like, I don't know what's happening right now. There were all these meetings set up for us. But like cool meetings, like they wanted to meet us. They wanted to know about us. They wanted to know why we joined the platform. Has platform been helpful for us? You know, it was actually really interesting, and I thought important thing for me to actually go there because I was doing this on this platform that I really didn't know anything about. I didn't know how it worked. It was cool to now know that they were asking people for reviews because at the time they flew me out, I had over, I think 30 or 40 5-star reviews at a 100%. And now I have, I think it's like over 620 5-star reviews at 100%. Going out there was crazy because I didn't know why I was going out there. And then when I realized I was from the U.S., I was like, Oh my gosh, like, what's going on here? And by the time I come back home in a week, there are two articles that are coming out about me in the newspaper. And one of them says, South Carolina women chosen as top four in the world. And I was like, wait a minute, that is not what they told us. I told my wife. I said, that is not what they said. And I actually called the woman that wrote the thing. And I was like, Ma'am, that's not what they told me. I just got back from there and that lady said to me, she goes, Oh, well, I had to call Airbnb and have my story vetted and that's what they told me. And I said, Oh, I'm so

sorry I called you. I was like, what are you doing, Tia? I don't know how it works, you know, like, I didn't know. And I'm just like, completely green. Like, all these people are making up stories, and I didn't know what was happening. And when I got back, everybody was like, Oh my God, I bet you're going to quit your job now. And I was like, No chance. I'm not quitting. Actually, I say this, and this is what I said. I said, I am a gay Black woman over the age of 40 and everything in the world is invented. I am not quitting my job. That was my quote, right? That was it. I was like, that's not happening. And then I was like, I'm going to quit my job. And I quit. I just did because I kept trying to have my time. I kept trying to, you know, go to the water in the morning to have my peace, go to the bar in the evenings to work, to make money, to live. Go to the water in the morning. And those like just the back and forth of in and out of those emotions was just so exhausting. And yeah, I just wanted to give up at one point and my wife was so supportive. I'm just so lucky. If I didn't have a support system like that, I probably would have never taken the chance. She was like, you should just quit. I'd rather you be happier. Like, our time here is short, like, so I quit. And, you know, I've got a crew now.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:23:13] I was going to ask you about your crew. How many people do you have working with you?

**Tia Clark** [00:23:18] Right now it is eight people.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:23:23] That's great.

**Tia Clark** [00:23:23] It's fantastic.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:23:25] Yeah. So not only were you able to build this business to support yourself in your health journey and your relationship in general with the water, you're able to provide a place of work and employment for other people.

**Tia Clark** [00:23:38] Yeah. I mean, I never in my life would have imagined that this would be a thing. And I actually, like, feel a responsibility to these people for this to succeed because it means a lot that they believe in me to even like put their life's work in it, you know. It's not lost on me. The support that I have from the people that are with me right now. Very grateful for them.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:24:03] What happened for the Airbnb Experience during COVID. It was put on hold right for a while, I'm assuming.

**Tia Clark** [00:24:10] Yeah, actually. So that's a really interesting thing. So, everything started on Airbnb, and then when COVID hit, everything shut down. I think it was three days after the start of my 2020 season. So, I take six weeks off every year. And so, I had my six weeks off. I did all this crap. Got everything ready for the season, three days in and bam, everything gets shut down. And it became clear to me then that I was not in control, and I thought that I was in control. And the reason I say that is because we now have access to a private dock that we get the crab on. Well, when COVID hit, what did people want to do, go outside. We now had this awesome space outside so I could lower my normal group size and actually start hosting families and give people something positive to do during COVID. But they had no way to book me. So that's when I booked my own website and that's when casualcrabbingwithtia.com became a thing in 2020. And then that's when guests started booking with me. And right now, I mean, there's just been so much media around the experience and the story, which is amazing. But the amount of traffic that comes through my site now versus Airbnb is definitely more hours but that's

also because Airbnb didn't have a choice and they had to stop working when I was working.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:25:38] Right, yeah, exactly. No, that's interesting. I always like to ask a question of most of my guests, I try to ask a question about how they fared during COVID because I have a lot of seafood industry people on here and, you know, direct to consumer kind of ways of doing business started to become a thing. So, it's always interesting to hear how people adapted and then had to quickly adapt to the new reality, right.

**Tia Clark** [00:26:02] Yeah, I mean, like it was really something because at first, I was like very, very nervous about having people out. So, it was like one group at a time. But it would be like a family of five, you know, so it would make sense for me to be able to bring me and my crew out to do it. It wouldn't be like just one or two people. It'd be, alright, here's this family of five. We just have to really protect ourselves. Like this is a family that lives together. Like, like they're all going to be together, traveled here, one of them gets sick they're probably all going to be sick, so we have to protect ourselves. It really became an issue when we started doing the mixed groups and still trying to move through COVID, you know, like, that was a little tricky. We made it happen, but it was always better to just have like one big group. And that's what was happening. When we started promoting on social media, it was all about the people you were staying with. If you and your family want something to do, here is this thing now that you come and do outside with your family. You can go food for yourself. Like all this stuff, like we were so busy. That's when I really started hiring more crew because when COVID hit, it was just me and one other person, my co-host, Art. That was it. And then we got so busy that I had to hire dock hands immediately. And that's when we started bringing on Ryan and Connor and we started bringing everybody else in. In 2020, it was still just me and one other person.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:27:23] Good for you for getting through that because I know it wasn't easy.

**Tia Clark** [00:27:26] No, it definitely was not.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:27:28] So, you know, you mentioned when we're talking about the Airbnb Experience that people started writing articles about you and that's one of the things that I do in preparation for these conversations is read about whatever is on the internet. There's a lot written about you, so that was great because I was able to learn a lot about you before we even have this conversation. And, you know, and you mentioned the support of your wife and how, you know, your family has come up with the name Casual Crabbing and the importance of your family also. And so, I read that you grew up in a big Gullah-Geechee family, so I'd love to hear a little bit more about what was growing up like in this big family.

**Tia Clark** [00:28:08] Yeah, well, family first always. I mean, it was a big family. My great grandmother had 16 kids. Well, I hope you are sitting down.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:28:16] I am.

**Tia Clark** [00:28:17] Two of the 16 combined for 21. Wow. So, my family's large. My roots go deep right here in the heart of downtown Charleston. So, I'm a true Charleston native, is what I call it. And what that meant for me is eating a lot of blue crab. So that's the kicker. That's why I was so angry, I think. That's the thing for me. So much seafood, like living off



the land, you know, like, seafood and my family. My first memories are people like handfeeding me food because kids weren't allowed to just pick crab. You to be old enough and know what you were doing because one, you could hurt yourself. number two, you're going to waste the crab that we just spent good money on. So, they wouldn't let you at the table. But they will hand-feed you until you get to be that age. And we just ate crabs a lot. Like I mean, if I would have like put a bat signal for a crab up right now to my family saying, there ain't no way I'd (unintelligible). There ain't no way. Like, I mean, multiple times a week and just seafood. Strong heavy diet. As for me, that's what it was like being in a big Geechee family in downtown Charleston, which even more of a reason why I was so upset with myself, and I felt like an idiot. I keep saying that Katie tells me to stop saying that, but I really felt that way because I was like, do you know how much blue crab I ate in my life? How did I not know that there were blue crabs right here in this water and I could have been catching them myself all along. How did I not know that? Why did I not know that? I just asked all these things because after that first day that my cousin took me crabbing, I went home with crabs, shrimp, and fish. And I went home to cook this food. And one of the first things my wife said that I took so much offense to, she said, Oh, you know how to cook this? And I was like, Oh, yes, I know how to cook. I was like, Excuse me, like, yes. This is how I learned how to cook because of food like this. And then, even more like a slap in the face, I was like, what is wrong with me? Like, when I had that conversation with my wife, we'd been together for over ten years. I had never cooked blue crabs for her. I never cooked like the food that I grew up in that I know how to cook for her ever. I was in food and beverage and somewhere in there I lost my love for cooking for myself. And I lost my love of cooking food for my culture and my heritage. I just stopped doing those things and I didn't realize that until she said that to me.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:30:52] Did you find the answer to that question about why was it until you were 37?

**Tia Clark** [00:30:56] Why didn't I know?

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:30:57] Yeah.

**Tia Clark** [00:30:58] I think it's cultural. Yeah, because I went to my family. I was like, who's been crabbing? Have you been? Have you been crabbin'? Have you been crabbin'? And all of the male cousins. Everybody has been crabbing. Yeah. All of the women they're like, no, we cook the food, like they go get it and we cook it. It's like that hunter-gatherer, like kind of role kind of thing. It's weird for me to think of that. But all of the women are like, no, no, no, we didn't do it. We would cook it, but we didn't go and get it. And I was just like what? I'm thinking I would want to go get it. And this whole experience has taught me that I am a hunter-gatherer. I did not know that about myself. I did not know that I am a total hunter-gatherer. Like I want, need to go get this stuff like, it was the missing piece of the puzzle for me. But no, I didn't find out exactly why. I just blame it on that cultural thing of women in the kitchen cooking.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:31:54] Yeah, I think this leads into my next question kind of perfectly. So again, I mentioned, you know, I did some research about you in preparation for our conversation, and I read in People magazine, which by the way, I think you're the first person I've talked to who has ever been interviewed by People magazine. That's amazing. Quote, "food and beverage, like almost every industry, if we're being honest, is male dominated. Pretty much every single position I was in, there was a man in the role above me. I believe I got ahead because my mother and grandmother instilled in me a really good work ethic. Growing up, I was always the only girl. I didn't want to play with

dolls. I wanted to play sports. I was very active, so I was used to being the only woman and I know how not to give up." That's a great quote. So, I want to ask this follow up question. So SAGE is about building gender equality in the seafood sector. And you also worked for many years in the restaurant industry, which has similar challenges, of course. So, could you share one or two aspects of the seafood slash restaurant industry and their cultures that may contribute to inequality? And what are some of the things that the industry can do to lessen these inequalities?

**Tia Clark** [00:33:02] Oh, well, I mean, women are treated differently on the water all the time. I was just talking about this this morning on the water because I was like, why is that? Because even the people don't mean to do it, they do it. Because it's like if there's a girl throwing a ten-foot net off that thing, they're like, Man, look at that girl throwing that net. Why does it matter that the girl throwing the ten-foot net? You know, it's always that same thing. And I'm like, we have to go past something in your brain to get there, you know, like, you're not even aware of what your brain does or how you even react in the situations like for me, look at that sick throw of that net. Not look at this girl throwing this ten-foot net. Look at that sick throw of that net. How about that for a statement, you know? That's the stuff right there, that kind of gets society. I don't know how you would change that. Another thing that I kind of said in the people thing is nobody expects to see a woman in charge on the water. So, one thing that I deal with and, you know, it's Casual Crabbing with Tia and I'm the owner of the business while some of my crew are men. So, if I'm working on the dock and it's men as my support crew, there will be men that will walk right by me and go directly to the men and start asking them about my gear, pointing at them and asking about my stuff and now my crew, because I pointed out, and now my crew laughs about it and they're like, You need to go ask her. And then they'll send them back to me, kind of like, Yo, you came out here to me, but you need to go ask her. Yeah. Or for me, it's the thing where a man comes up and wants to tell me something that I need to do or something that I should do, you know, because they've obviously been on the water longer, so that's why they give me advice. I don't know what I'm doing. Another one is I get a lot of men that come on the docks that have been crabbing before that are taking the experience with their family. And you can kind of just tell from the start of the way, just the way that they're carrying themselves that they already feel like they know more than you do, and almost like they're here just to support their family and kinda too good to be here kind of thing. And then as our experience goes on because it's not just about crabbing, it's really educational and it's kind of in your face, there's just the same words in the same sentences that come out. Oh, really? Oh, I didn't know that they told me this. Oh. So, it's like all these reactions of. Oh, I don't actually know every single thing that I think I know. Or there is always room to learn more, you know, like. I feel like some of the most racist and sexist things that have ever been done to me in my life always come in the form of a compliment, and it doesn't make it any better. That's just the way that it goes. It almost makes it worse for me. It almost does.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:35:53] The comment around the guy who has crabbing experience and he's like thinks he knows everything. It resonates with me and my experience also working at the salmon lodge that I worked in, I mentioned, in the Arctic and every time there would be and I'm not joking, every time there would be a couple would come fishing, the woman would inevitably end up catching more fish because she was listening to her guide who was telling her like, Throw your fly that way or do this or whatever. And the guy was like, I got it. I got it under control. And he would always catch less fish than his wife.

**Tia Clark** [00:36:27] Oh my God, I can't believe you just said that.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:36:29] It's true.

**Tia Clark** [00:36:30] We laugh on the dock because people are scared to death to get pinched by crab. And there'll be women. And I'll be like, All right, you caught one, you're ready. And they'll be like, Oh, I don't know. And then I always lean in and I'm like, Listen, it'll be fine. Only men get pinched because they don't listen, and everything gets calmed down. It's like. I'll say, hey, don't put your hands under the apron to pick the crab up. And then the man will put his hand in the apron and get pinched. And I'm not saying this like something that I'm pulling out of the air. These are things that have happened.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:37:01] That happens.

**Tia Clark** [00:37:01] Yeah, they happen all the time. Sir, don't do this. They do that. Pinch!

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:37:06] That's amazing. You know, again, I mentioned I read a lot about you, and I got the impression in a lot of the interviews that you gave that you almost can't believe what you're doing. I mean, it sounds like it here, too. You're just like, this is so incredible how my life is, you know, gone in the past five years. It's changed my life. And you almost have this disbelief that this is happening to you, right? And yet you are honestly a real inspiration to me personally and a true role model I consider. And so that feeling of like, who am I to show people how to do this or, you know, this feeling like you're an imposter, right? I feel this way actually quite a bit. And I was curious, how do you deal with that sense of imposter syndrome? Do you have any tips or tricks to, like, calm that down?

**Tia Clark** [00:37:53] I appreciate that question. I really do. I appreciate that. I don't know how to calm that down. It constantly happens. I think you just have to stay into your space, like I am standing firm in this space. Like, you know what I mean? Like, I know now exactly what my goals are, what I want to see happen long after I'm dead, what I expect, you know, like I've got like, these plans, so I'm standing firm in this thing. The imposter syndrome that is going to come every single day. I wish there was a day I didn't feel like that. One thing that I do is I have mentors and friends and other businesswomen that I get to talk to. And, you know, they tell me the same things you said, they still feel that. And so, I hate that they still feel that. But what that does for me is let me know that it's okay for me to feel the way that I do, like I'm not so hard on myself and makes the failure feel a little bit less because I'm like, I'm watching these really strong people that I look up to and they're telling me that they feel that way. Well, then I know that I can do this. I know that this is okay. It's a natural thing. But I also feel like, I never want to sound ungrateful for my experience and my journey. It is hard freakin' work. And sometimes I get this in these spaces so where I'm like, have to step back because I'm like, you know, to somebody else, this may sound like I'm being ungrateful and I'm not. I'm grateful, but I also want to be able to share my feelings without feeling that way, so it's like I feel this weird kind of space of holding back. I guess, it's weird. It's like you got the imposter stuff and then I'm like, I want to share, I want to hold back. And then I've got to remind myself that I have no control over the whole journey, you know? This is something that I know. It brought me more joy than anything else in my entire life. And so, I'm going to work hard until the day that I die to continue to stay in that space because I never felt this kind of joy before. And I don't ever want it to end. And I know it's going to end sometime, but I just want to enjoy it while I'm here because I spent 37 years before not really having the best time living in my life, living in my skin. Now I'm enjoying that and so I let the imposter syndrome and all the other stuff go to the wayside. Even if it shows up. This is going to take a step to the back because I want to stay in the space that I'm in and all of that outweighs all of those other feelings.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:40:21] You're a true inspiration. I don't think there is an easy answer to that. I think the answer that you gave is pretty great, and I'm happy that you found something that you are an expert at and that brings you joy.

**Tia Clark** [00:40:35] I didn't know that. I didn't know you could be happy every day for work.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:40:38] Isn't it great?

**Tia Clark** [00:40:40] I didn't know that once you clock out and you go that like you're smiling and happy and all this stuff could happen. I didn't know that that was thing.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:40:49] Yeah, so this podcast is to inspire people working in or thinking about starting a career in the seafood sector. What advice would you give to someone who's thinking about starting their own business? And it doesn't necessarily have to be industry specific. So, what kind of advice would you give us?

**Tia Clark** [00:41:04] I mean, I think other people have probably said it honestly. It's just let's do it. And I mean, like. Do it. If the goal is like this huge, big thing. Day one, step one. Take one day, write it out. Take the next day, plan the steps. What's the rush? You already weren't doing it anyway. You know what I mean? Like, what's the point? Not like, you was doing it now you already ahead of the game because you weren't doing anything with it except having this idea in your head. Plus, our time here is short. It's so doggone short. And now that I know that we can, like I just said, work for joy and you can be happy in the stuff that you do. Why not do that? We're going to have to work. We have to work. Yeah. Have that work be something that you enjoy. Yeah. I just said this in another podcast, and I mean it like this is like another thing that I feel down in my soul, don't work for money. When I say that statement, I know that is not so easy to say that statement. Everybody, we are trained, we are conditioned to work for money. Yeah. If you work for joy, the money will come. I am happier, healthier, better off financially, all of that stuff because I'm not working for money, because I'm working for joy, for something that makes me happy and feeling a little selfish even though that I'm doing it. But I'm worrying about myself and the joy like I'm letting that drive me. Your first job always, I think about that, usually a teenager. You go ask your parents for something, for money, for something. They're like, oop, time to get a job. You need money for something. You know, it never is, let me get this job to, like, better myself. Let me get this job because it's going to make me happy. Now let me get this job because it's going to make everybody else happy too. And then from that, all this other stuff is going to come. Nobody says that.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:42:56] That's good advice. It's really good advice. And I don't think we hear that advice enough. I don't think I've even ever heard that, to be honest.

**Tia Clark** [00:43:03] Well, because it's hard because it's hard to do it. You've got to have a good support system. You've got to be so freaking vulnerable, like you have to be uncomfortable to get to that place. And everything that everybody does every day is to be comfortable. We live our lives for comfort all the way through. Yeah. I just feel like being the more vulnerable and the more uncomfortable I am, the more successful I am, the happier I am, and mentally and healthier I am, like all of it.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:43:32] I love that.

**Tia Clark** [00:43:33] You have to be scared. Like, scared shitless. I mean, like, seriously, like waking up. Like, am I doing the right decision? Like, oh, God. Like, kind of scared like that. And then all these other things happen. Yeah. It makes the joy so much more powerful.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:43:47] Yeah. We had this lady on the podcast. Her name's Stephanie Harris-Uyidi, and she's on Instagram as the Posh Pescatarian and so she does cookbooks and travel shows to seafood destinations. And she said her thing was "do it scared." That's exactly kind of what you were saying, like, do it scared. Do it and do it scared.

**Tia Clark** [00:44:07] Yes. I had a woman recently. She was from Canada, and she was with this family of six and she didn't want to pick up the crab. And she was like, no, no, no, no, no. I don't think I can do it. I don't think I can do this. And I'm like, You can. And she was like, No, Tia, I really can't. And then she started tearing up and I was like, oh, okay, well, let's talk about this. Is it because you're afraid of being pinched or what exactly is it? She was like, It's a little bit of that and then it's the people as well. And I was like, Oh, well, that's easy. I was like, Let's go. So, I grabbed the crab and me and her walk all the way up the dock. This woman's entire body was trembling. I've never seen somebody so scared. She was crying. Her whole body was shaking. But I went down that dock and I had that experience with her because I was like, being scared is fine. Like, be scared. But that is not a reason not to do stuff. Yeah, like it's not a reason not to do stuff. You're from Canada. Tell me where you're going to be next to this blue crab again to be able to pick this crab up and do this with your family. Like everybody in your family's had this experience and you came here to have this experience with them. Let me eliminate the things that are making you scared and we be able to have this experience. She appreciated that so much. And I am all for like be scared if it takes me 5,10 extra minutes to help you through this because you're scared, I'd rather do that because when people get over stuff they're scared of, it builds so much character in so many other ways. Like it helps them so much further in life. Having those experiences.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:45:35] You're a true teacher. Tia.

**Tia Clark** [00:45:37] I never knew it. Never knew.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:45:41] Finding new stuff out every day. We're nearing the end of our conversation, unfortunately because it's been amazing. I just want to give you an opportunity to uplift and amplify someone because, you know, this podcast is about uplifting and amplifying diverse voices in the seafood industry. So, I would love to give you the opportunity to uplift someone, so who would you love to uplift and why? It can be any industry. It can be anyone.

**Tia Clark** [00:46:06] Oh, man. Anyone that I want. All right, I know who I want to uplift. I want to uplift my friend John Barnhardt. My friend John is actually an Emmy award-winning cinematographer. He's been doing some stuff in his life and making some really hard personal decisions and choices to better his life. And I know how hard that is and how alone you feel when you go through those things. And he just recently hit a milestone in some things that he's doing. I know that he had some negative people throughout this journey, and I know how important it is to be supported by your tribe, whether it's chosen or the one you're birthed into, and I just want to let him know that he's not alone and to stay the course. And there's nothing wrong with feeling a little selfish to take care of yourself sometimes. And I want to thank him for being almost like a mentor for me

because watching him get over some of his thoughts gave me strength to tackle some of the things that I do as well.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:47:15] Well, thank you for that incredible shout out and I love it. So, again, we're at the end of our conversation, unfortunately. And I just want to reiterate. first of all, I'm so happy to see you again. And secondly, I'm so happy that you were able to join me. I need to make it out to Charleston someday, and I promise I will. I've never been there. So.

**Tia Clark** [00:47:37] It's beautiful.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:47:37] Will definitely come and have the Casual Crabbing experience with you. And again, I want to thank you for everything and for all your honesty and your openness. And I look forward to speaking to you again someday.

**Tia Clark** [00:47:50] Awesome, thank you so much, Julie, I really appreciate it.

**Julie Kuchepatov** [00:47:52] Thank you for tuning into 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.

**Crystal Sanders-Alvarado** [00:48:06] 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.