[00:00:16.26] Mallory Dickerson: So, Hi, Natalia...ummm, I was wondering if you could introduce yourself by your whole name? I know you said you got married, yeah?

[00:00:22.24] Natalia Hess: Yes. Yes, my name is Natalia Hess Koffler.

[00:00:25.11] Mallory Dickerson: Okay, so it's really nice to meet you. Thank you for being here today.

[00:00:29.21] Natalia Hess: Thank you

[00:00:29.21] Mallory Dickerson: Um, so how did you get started in the food service industry?

[00:00:32.25] Natalia Hess: My family actually has a history in the restaurant business. My grandparents owned a few different bars and restaurants in Wisconsin where I am originally from. My mother and her siblings were raised in the restaurants, so we grew up with sort of this idea and appreciation about restaurant work, you know? It was hard work, but it was a lot of fun. You could make some good money, and so, when I was nineteen years old, I was looking for a job, and I started working as a server in a family owned restaurant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. That was really my first, you know, foot in the door to the restaurant industry, and sixteen years later, I'm still working in it...just at a different capacity.

[00:01:19.00] Mallory Dickerson: So, what position do you hold now in the industry?

[00:01:21.10] Natalia Hess: I'm currently a pastry chef and a kitchen manager at Freret Beer Room.

[00:01:26.09] Mallory Dickerson: Oh, wow! Okay. That's exciting!

[00:01:27.16] Natalia Hess: Mhmm

[00:01:28.01] Mallory Dickerson: So, what is your job entail? What is a day-to-day like for you?

[00:01:30.28] Natalia Hess: A lot of my job has to do with making sure that things are running smoothly in the kitchen, that we have all of the ingredients and products that we need in order to -- you know -- run service for the day or the evening, depending. I'm also the pastry chef, so I'm

in charge of that particular department. Um, it's a fairly small dessert menu, but I'm really happy with it, and people seem to respond well to it. So, I deal with a lot of product ordering, receiving. I deal with the different reps and purveyors that we work with. So, there's a lot of that, and beyond that, I'm also integral to the prep of the food and different things that we create.

[00:02:16.29] Mallory Dickerson: Alright, how do you know how much product to order? How do you gauge that?

[00:02:20.14] Natalia Hess: It's typically based on how busy we've been maybe in the week prior or, depending on the time of the year, or the year prior. Just this past weekend was Tulane's Homecoming. We seemed to be a pretty popular spot with the Tulane crowd, so we knew that we needed to up our pars for the weekend because we were going to be pretty busy and we were. We were probably, I'd say, double -- if not triple -- busy than we typically would have been.

[00:02:53.02] Mallory Dickerson: That's awesome

[00:02:53.02] Natalia Hess: So, we just knew to bring in extra of everything for the most part, and it was a pretty successful weekend I would have to say. It was a little hectic, but we got things done.

[00:03:04.23] Mallory Dickerson: That's awesome. Um, so, you've been in the industry now for sixteen years. What would you say your greatest success has been in the industry?

[00:03:11.24] Natalia Hess: I would have to say the transition from the front of the house to the back of the house. I worked as a server, I worked as a hostess, as an assistant manager, as a bartender. You know, essentially any position you can basically work in the front of the house, but when I moved to New Orleans in 2009, I knew that I was interested in getting into the back of the house. My older brother was a chef for a long time, and he was a big inspiration to me about wanting to transition into a different area. So, when I moved here, I applied for a job at the

Upperline restaurant -- which is kind of an institution here in New Orleans -- and I applied for a dishwasher job because I knew that more often than not, when it was busy or when things needed to be done, the dishwasher could be asked to do prep work. So, I figured that would be sort of my foot in the door to cooking instead of just washing the dishes, and as it turned out, it came a little sooner than anticipated. Within two weeks of working at the restaurant, I was already a line cook.

[00:04:17.03] Mallory Dickerson: Oh, wow!

[00:04:17.03] Natalia Hess: and I spent three years there. I essentially think of it as my culinary school training. It taught me how to be a line cook. It taught me how to work in a kitchen and knowing how to rely on others as well as being reliable to them. You know, the building of that sort of team rapport that you almost take for granted that your co-workers are there because they know to be there and same with you. So, I would definitely say working in the back of the house has been my greatest accomplishment, and then, almost -- you know -- all the different steps through that process.

[00:04:59.13] Mallory Dickerson: So, you said that your brother was a big inspiration for you. Why is that? What did he do?

[00:05:02.16] Natalia Hess: He's my older brother and we're pretty close. Growing up, he was a little bit more of a rebel. He wasn't going to go the traditional route. He started cooking when he was sixteen and just worked his way up through kitchens and eventually became a chef. You know, where people were clambering to eat his food and coming to see him at whatever restaurant he was working in, and I'd always wanted to work in the kitchen, but I was sort of the book worm. I was the one who was going to go to medical school or go to, you know, get a PHD in something, and I knew that I could've done that and I think I would've been successful, but it wasn't what I wanted to do. I knew that I think at some point, I would've reached a breaking

point where I would say "this isn't fulfilling to me. This isn't making me happy," and I can say without a doubt that the career that I'm in now is frustrating and it's difficult and you have to work your butt off, but I love it. You know, I wouldn't ask to do anything else. So...

[00:06:09.00] Mallory Dickerson: That's amazing. Um, what are some of your greatest challenges in the job, then? Some things that are difficult?

[00:06:15.09] Natalia Hess: I would have to say the development of skills over time. You know, the biggest thing is being able to learn from the people that you work with, and sometimes, you work with people that maybe don't have a whole lot to offer or, for whatever reason, aren't willing to share their knowledge. Um, for me, I think it's essential to what we do as cooks, that we teach the next generation of people coming up underneath us how to get to where we are, and so, that can be a little difficult at times. Being able to communicate effectively and hoping that people are hearing, and learning, and taking it to heart that you know it's important to have the basic skills to be a cook. You know, there's certain things that I think people assume are unimportant or non-essential somehow, but they're the building blocks to success, to be able to move seamlessly and work seamlessly without faltering, you know? So, that can be -- communicating effectively -- can be sometimes be a difficult thing.

[00:07:23.28] Mallory Dickerson: I bet. What kind of skills does a person need to become a chef?

[00:07:28.10] Natalia Hess: Honestly, above and beyond even knowing how to cook, to truly be a chef, you have to be able to lead people. Uh, anybody can cook. Anybody can be taught to cook, and anyone can be taught how food should taste, but it takes a special person, I think, to be able to almost put that aside and deal more with the organizational side of things. The day-to-day almost administrative, or even you know, things like the ordering or receiving. It can be a mundane task that some people might not be interested in, but if you have the patience,

you can do it, and that's the same way with the leadership. People can be difficult to work with sometimes, and you just need to learn a more effective way of getting your point across and encouraging them to come along with you, not demanding it, not you know yelling at them, or something like that. Show them the value in the information you're giving them. Show the value of that it will add to your organization. The value will add to your day. It will make it easier to get along, you know, and by being receptive.

[00:08:44.13] Mallory Dickerson: Mhmm. I think that's a very important skill not just for the industry, but for life.

[00:08:47.26] Natalia Hess: Right?

[00:08:49.07] Mallory Dickerson: Um, so you've been in this industry for awhile. How was it changed since you've started, would you say? Or has it even changed?

[00:08:55.17] Natalia Hess: It has changed. Just by fits and starts, it's changed. For a very long, long time, it's been a very male centric profession, which I've always thought was kind of ridiculous because women were the home cooks. Women created the food that most people ate day-in and day-out, and then they were shut out of this industry because they were perceived to not possess the skills to uh be apart of it. So, you know, that's definitely changed. I feel you see a lot more women in kitchens. Not just as -- you know -- dishwashers, or prep cooks, or what have you, but in positions of authority, or leadership, and I think that's fantastic. You know, I never imagined when I was 19 years old that when I was a server, that I was going to become a pastry chef and become a kitchen manager and have all these opportunities that I've had, you know? I would have to say that I guess the -- not the environment -- the atmosphere has changed some. Obviously, especially in the last few years with the whole "Time's up!" and "Me Too" and, you know, just addressing the rampant sexual abuse that seems to be present in not just our daily lives, but you know, in our jobs in particular. When I was nineteen in that first

restaurant, there was a girl that I worked with, and she was in highschool. She was sixteen years old and would come and work after school and just, you know, saving money for college, doing what everybody wants to do, and there was a cook that worked in our kitchen that would follow her to her car after every shift at 11, or midnight, or whatever time she was getting out of work. And, he would say suggestive things to her, and she would essentially run away and try to get away as fast as she could, and she talked to him and told him to stop doing it, and he wouldn't listen, and she talked to the manager and he did nothing about it. I talked to the manager because I felt, you know, as a sixteen year old girl, that maybe she needed someone to stand up for her, and I was a little bit of a loud mouth and thought, "okay, maybe I could get something done," and I talked to the manager, and nothing changed. So, finally, I cornered the cook in the walk-in, and I said that if I heard he followed her to her car one more time, he would be dealing with me and not with a sixteen year old girl. And...that is probably one of the more extreme examples of the sort of sexism and things that I've seen in the restaurant industry. I mean, it's still there. It's always there. It's..it's kind of hidden now. You know, people have to tamp down the jokes that they make, or the things that they say, which I suppose is a good thing in a way, you know? You don't have to listen to it all the time, but at the same time, it's knowing that the thought, that the thinking behind it hasn't changed. It's just "I can't say it. I still think it, but I can't say it". So, I think it needs to happen that the culture is changed, you know? Not just some sort of politically correct band-aid put on top of it. These people need to be taught that it's not appropriate, and what if you were treated that way? What if you discounted because you're just standing there, breathing, being a person, you know? Um, but I think, you know, as you get more and more strong, independent, forward-thinking people working in this industry, then it will change, you know? I have so much hope for the younger generations of people that have been exposed to a lot more information and a lot more humanity, you know? To be able to see each

other as people and not just as "you're a man and you're a woman". You're just a person that deserves to be respected, you know? You're here to do your job, and you shouldn't have to put up with garbage to be able to do that.

[00:13:03.19] Mallory Dickerson: Yeah, definitely. So, um, you still see sexism in the industry today?

[00:13:08.28] Natalia Hess: Yes, um, I think that I've been fortunate in finding work situations where I don't necessarily come across it too much. I think, also, me being in a position of leadership, you know? If i see anything or hear anything like that, you know, I can kind of shut it down. Um, but again, I've been fortunate, especially in the last few years, that it hasn't been too much of an issue. I think it ends up being more instances that I observe, rather than apart of, and I think that maybe that's a good thing that's it not maybe as rampant as it once was.

[00:13:50.26] Mallory Dickerson: Mhmm. Definitely. Um, on a lighter topic..

[00:13:55.15] Natalia Hess: Sure!

[00:13:55.15] Mallory Dickerson: Um, let's see...uh, so do you think the media impact with channels like the Food Network and restaurant travel shows affect your restaurant and cooking styles at all?

[00:14:11.22] Natalia Hess: I wouldn't necessarily say it affects the cooking style. I think it has absolutely affected the way that people market themselves. Social media, obviously, has a huge impact on every industry -- restaurants in particular -- because it's a visual medium, you know? Food is beautiful. You eat with your eyes before you ever taste it with your mouth, and so, social media makes that a really easy, and for the most part, free tool to advertise things. And then when it comes to the cooking shows, I think it's given people a broader understanding about food in general...that they're maybe less afraid of trying new things, and I think that's fantastic, you know? I was never taught to be afraid of food. I was never the kid with the picky eater stuff,

you know? My mom would feed us whatever she thought we should eat that was tasty and delicious, and for the most part, it worked out, you know? I don't really have any particular aversions, you know? And I think those cooking shows and the travel shows -- you know, Anthony Bourdain and the Andrew Zimmerman guy that eats the bugs and stuff -- I mean, it's crazy and weird, but at the same time, it's so adventurous, and it shows people what's in the world to see and experience. So, if it makes people more excited about food in the broader sense, you know, not just cheese burgers or spaghetti and meatballs, which are delicious, of course, but there's a lot more food in the world than just those things.

[00:15:45.07] Mallory Dickerson: Yeah, definitely. So, how often do you create new menu items?

[00:15:48.16] Natalia Hess: I would say, when it comes to the dessert menu, I change it up probably every month in a half, two months depending on how it usually tries to fall in line with whatever is in season and also the time of the year, you know? Anytime fall happens, you're going to end up with something, you know, sweet potato pie or pumpkin pie or something like that because I think people almost expect it, you know? It's the same way around Christmas time. I always try to do something that I think people -- that I think will warm their hearts, that will make them think of their grandma, or think of Christmas when they were a kid, and that's always been a big inspiration for me is my grandmother, in particular. She always did a huge spread of different cookies around Christmas. I mean, she'd probably make at least a dozen different cookies and just her kitchen would be full of them! And, so I have some of her recipe books that she used, and I'll look through and those will definitely inspire me. I might not use the exact recipe, but there are flavor combinations or different textures of things that might jump out at me that I can use. Um, so, you want to keep it fresh, you know? It's a funny thing because people come to restaurants because they don't want to cook themselves, because they want to be

excited a little bit, you know? They don't want to just eat the same old stuff, but then they also expect consistency because if you go to a restaurant and every time you go there it's different, or bad, or good, or what have you, why would you go back because you don't know what to expect. So, I don't change my menu too frequently because I want people to first of all, have it and then maybe tell their friends about it and say "oh, you should go there and try the chocolate whatever that she made". So, um, then when it comes to the general menu at our restaurant, it's a little more frequent that we would change it. Again, a lot of it has to do with whatever is in season at the time, but we'll change it as frequently as, you know, every week to every three weeks, just kinda depending. Sometimes it can be hard because, you know, all the cooks are re-learning things or learning new dishes, and it's "oh, we just got that one down! Now we're doing something Different?". But, I think it -- i don't know -- I think it motivates them and I think it keeps them on their toes, and you know, it expands their knowledge a little bit.

[00:18:13.05] Mallory Dickerson: That's awesome. So, is it difficult to prepare food with so many people having different food allergies like gluten free, dairy free, nut allergies?

[00:18:23.12] Natalia Hess: Uh, thankfully not so much. It is a fairly small segment of the population that has those particular food allergies or aversions. Um, we do make a point at my restaurant to offer vegan, vegetarian, and certain gluten-free items. We don't necessarily -- we're not catering specifically to those people, but we do know that they come in frequently, and so, we want them to be able to have something and enjoy their experience. I think a lot of times with people who are vegans or vegetarians or even lactose intolerant, they'll come to a place and they'll sort of throw something together that doesn't really have any thought or soul behind it, you know? Your food should have soul in it, and so, I think when you start off your menu with that idea in mind, you know, it makes it a lot easier. For me, in particular, when it comes to pastries, there are a lot of recipes that don't have gluten in it to begin with. So, I'll make a point

to always try and offer one of my three dessert options is gluten free or, you know, maybe if there's lactose or milk or something, it can be removed easily, you know, instead of an element that can be taken out without compromising the dish too much. You know, it the past I think it was a little frustrating when you'd get a ticket and say, "Well, they can't eat this! They can't eat that! Blah blah blah," and you kind of have to think about it. Then again, it forces you to be creative or you should want to be creative. Not to just be lazy and throw "oh, here's some grilled broccoli," you know? You want to them to have as good of time as anyone else that walks through the door. Just because they can't eat something or don't want to eat something, you shouldn't make them feel bad for it.

[00:20:19.12] Mallory Dickerson: As a vegetarian, I appreciate you!

[00:20:21.28] Natalia Hess: Haha, of course! Of course! And, if you can't be creative with vegetables, which have such an amazing array of colors, and flavors, and scents, and textures, then maybe you're not in the right business because vegetables are pretty, pretty diverse.

[00:20:37.24] Mallory Dickerson: I definitely think so. Um, can you tell me about a time where you had a difficult experience that you had to learn from in your job?

[00:20:46.23] Natalia Hess: I don't know if there's any one -- well, there is one I can think of. Um, so I'm primarily self-taught when it comes to pastry work. Again, I was very inspired by my grandmother, and the first opportunity I had to work just in pastry -- not being a line cook, not doing anything like that --was for a local company that produced ice cream and then they had daily, you know, cookies and desserts and things that were available for customers to buy. So, I was the baker. I was in charge of dessert production, and I quickly learned that while it is fulfilling, and hard work, and you can learn a lot, it was not what I wanted to do. I can bake, and I am a baker in the sense that, you know, it is a skill that I possess, but there's a big difference between pastry production in a restaurant kitchen as opposed to baking production, or you

know, a large-scale production. You have to wake up a lot earlier in the day, haha, then the majority of pastry chefs my age, and it can be a little repetitive in the you're making chocolate chip cookies everyday, you're making sugar cookies every day, and not that there's not something fun in that, but I think I got quickly burned out knowing that it wasn't where I should be, and thankfully, after I was no longer apart of that organization, a good friend of mine reached out to me and offered me a position as a pastry chef in his restaurant, and so, things fell in line as they should have been. That was the first time I think I had failed because I'm a pretty headstrong person, you know? I'll do all the research and get all the information I need, so that I'm very sure that I'm right and things are going how they're supposed to go. And, it's just, I think it took me a long time to realize that it wasn't right for me because I wanted to fight and prove that I could do it. I could do it, it just wasn't fulfilling. It wasn't making me happy, and unfortunately, I think it was showing, you know, that I wasn't as excited about it and wasn't as invested in it as I should have been, you know? Like I said, food should have soul in it, and when you're not -- when you don't care that much, it's hard to make your food taste good I think. [00:23:25.12] Mallory Dickerson: No, I totally agree. Um, so uh, has there ever been a time in the industry where you felt your ethics were tested, and how did you respond to that? [00:23:40.04] Natalia Hess: I don't know if there was ever a time where I felt morally compromised having to work with something especially when I was younger, when I didn't necessarily have any -- didn't have the power to say anything or didn't feel like I had the power to say anything. There were definitely times where, you know, we were treated badly because, for the most part, when I was growing up, servers were typically young women, you know? That was predominantly it, and there were definitely times and places where I worked where we were asked to go above and beyond -- and not just "oh, do it for the team," but just kind of an abusive situation where you shouldn't have been asked, or you know, like I said earlier, with the

girl that I worked with, you know, I had to step up for her because no one else was doing it, but then there were definitely times where I should've spoken up, and I didn't, or I felt that I couldn't. Um, and it wasn't any particular instance like "oh, someone said or did this," but again, I think it had more to do with the culture where the typically male leadership had all the say-so, and no one else had anything. If you wanted to, you couldn't, and I think those were some of the first times were I really felt helpless, you know? That I couldn't stand up for myself or couldn't stand up for someone else, and thankfully, I've grown and learned enough from all those experiences that I don't allow that to happen, you know? I will always stick up for the person that, you know, maybe is the underdog or maybe needs a boost, or whatever, and that's what will make the changes. Each person must individually say to themselves, "this is not right, and no one should have to put up with it, and I have the ability to speak against it," you know? If you get enough voices speaking against it, it's really hard for someone to keep working in that way, you know?

[00:25:51.17] Mallory Dickerson: Definitely. So, because there is so much sexism in the workplace, do you feel that male chefs are more recognized, praised, whatever? And do you think it's harder to get recognition as a woman?

[00:26:05.03] Natalia Hess: I would say that it can definitely be the case, you know? It's been the norm for such a long time that male chefs are in charge or they're almost defaulted as the leadership. You know, how could a woman be the one to speak with about this? Um, again, I've had -- thankfully, in the last few years -- less issues with that, but then I've also had some interesting experiences working with chefs where particularly -- say when it came to the John Besh situation that came to light recently -- there were people who were surprised or questioned, "oh, that's not right? You shouldn't say that or you shouldn't do that?". That was almost more surprising to me than the behavior. Like, you don't see that it's wrong? How did you not understand that it shouldn't be happening, you know? I think it has a lot to do with, you

know, the white patriarchy unfortunately. It's definitely a phrase that has been getting a lot of media attention, but if you were led to believe and raised to believe that all of your decisions are infallible and you're rightfully supposed to be the leader, I think it's really hard for people to question that, you know? It's how your raised. It's what your led to believe and it takes a lot of work to sort of circumvent those attitudes. Um, the chefs that I've worked with have -- except for one -- have all been male, and the first chef that I worked with, he was a character, you know? He had worked with the restaurant industry essentially his entire life. In his kitchen, there was rarely a female that would work. I think the last time before I was there as a line cook, the last female that had worked there was a dishwasher, you know? Not much responsibility other than making sure the dishes were done, and don't get me wrong. I'm not discounting that position at all because if you don't have a dishwasher, your kitchen doesn't run, and I can tell you that without question, but I knew that he didn't see me in the same light as the male line cooks. When something would go wrong and he would get upset, I would be sort of the scapegoat. He would yell at me or sort of take it out on me like, "well, you have to go do that because this wasn't right". Whether or not it had anything to do with me, I was the scapegoat, and he would call me on Monday morning -- which is one of the days we were closed -- he would call me on Monday morning and he would apologize. He would say, "Oh, I'm sorry I yelled at you,"" and I would think, "you didn't need to yell at me in the first place and now you're gonna call me an apologize, which doesn't change that you yelled at me for no reason, and that wasn't the first time and it wasn't the last time, you know? Part of the restaurant industry is the mentality that you have to take a certain level of abuse in order to be apart of it, in order to learn, and I think that's really toxic, you know? I, unfortunately, it came out of the classical French training system -- the Brigade system -- which is -- has been amazing in training chefs to be some of the best chefs in the entire world, but it also belittles them as people and teaches them that they should

be allowed to do that to people who work under them. And, uh, I'm hoping -- I am hopeful, that it will be changing, that it's not as common as it has been.

[00:30:04.18] Mallory Dickerson: So, with all the toxicity in the industry, how is mental health treated in the workplace?

[00:30:12.12] Natalia Hess: Hm. To be perfectly honest, it's treated with ignoring it and, more often than not, people developing drug or alcohol problems. Uh...it's an extremely stressful work environment, and I can attest from personal experience that sometimes the easiest way to deal with your night -- instead of talking to somebody or, you know, trying to find a healthy way to address any sort of conflicts that arose -- just go drink until you don't remember. And, I think because of that sort of extreme stress level that you get, that it's shrugged off, it's treated as "oh, well, that's just burning off steam. That's just whatever". It's not addressed as an actual problem that you've got an entire city full of people that, you know, halfway have a drug problem or an alcohol problem or whatever. I absolutely know that their were a few years earlier in my career where alcohol was used as a sort of coping mechanism to the stress of it, to the pressure from it. You know, maybe certain situations that were uncomfortable, you know? It's like "oh, we can laugh it off. Let's just have a drink and pretend that it didn't happen," you know? Then when it comes to healthcare in general, the only reason I have medical insurance is because I don't make enough money, and I qualify for medicaid in the state of Louisiana, which is fantastic because until we expanded medicaid -- what? two years ago -- I couldn't get medical insurance. I couldn't afford it out of pocket, and I was not eligible under the guidelines for the time for medicaid in Louisiana. And it's literally been a lifesaver in certain regards. Um...my sister recently had a pretty scary diagnosis, and the only reason she knew about it was because she had medicaid through the state, and if that wasn't there, maybe she never would have known about it, and how long would she have gone not knowing about it until it became so

much worse than it was? And then, even beyond healthcare, mental health care is even less available, you know? There are things like they might let you go to an appointment, but you still have to pay twenty-five dollars every time you show up, and for some people, it's just not feasible. And I find there's too many barriers in this country, in general, when it comes to healthcare, mental healthcare. How-how can you question why you have a country full of people that are upset and angry and, you know, disenfranchised when you don't give them the building blocks to be able to be happy and healthy, and you know, lead a seemingly normal life or whatever, you know? If you're constantly worried about your health, or constantly worried about your mental health, and you've got no way to address it, that doesn't get you better any faster. So, the restaurant industry is a funny little micro-cosmo that I said it has to -- you know -- i think a lot of it is ignoring the problem and drowning it in ways that feel good, or in the very least, allow you not to feel anything.

[00:33:48.02] Mallory Dickerson: Mhmm. So, is substance abuse -- is it openly talked about? Is it still considered taboo? Do people kind of push it under or hide it?

[00:33:54.21] Natalia Hess: I would say that it's -- to be perfectly honest -- it's-it's just accepted. No one really questions the drinking, in particular. Drugs use, maybe a little bit less, but you know, marijuana use -- which I firmly believe should be a legalized, you know, commodity, whether or not anyone else thinks that, whatever -- but the drinking is more of a problem, I think, than marijuana use. And then, when it comes to harder drugs, I think that cocaine is probably a fairly common one. Uh...I think it is chefs are driven by adrenaline a lot of the time, and that kind of helps amp up the adrenaline, you know? It's like "oh, well you got a little of that! It makes the day go by faster". Um, but I think, ultimately, it's just sort of accepted, you know? "Taboo" might be if someone were to have -- you know -- a heroin addiction or a meth addiction, but those particular drugs don't necessarily pair well with the restaurant industry because, you know, meth

makes you erratic, heroin puts you down. Those are not good traits to have when working in a restaurant. Not that there's any ideal drug that goes along with it, but there are definitely ones that are more common than others, but ultimately, alcohol is probably the most commonly abused substance in the restaurant industry without question.

[00:35:33.09] Mallory Dickerson: And alcohol, especially in New Orleans, it's everywhere. You can't get away from it.

[00:35:36.02] Natalia Hess: Exactly! Exactly, and people want to have a good time, and it's so easy to do.

[00:35:44.26] Mallory Dickerson: Mhmm. So, because of all the substance abuse, um, is there kind of any support system within the workplace? Do co-workers support one another through the abuse issues?

[00:35:56.03] Natalia Hess: That will totally be dependent on, I think, each individual workplace and sort of the chef and owner behind that, you know? It has, again, to do with the culture where some places it's...they would never question it as long as you show up to work, it doesn't matter how hungover you are, or how drunk you still might be. As long as you show up to work, that's all that matters, you know? Um, obviously, it's discouraged that you can't perform, you know? That's probably the biggest factor in why anybody would get involved is if you can't function, then, well, why are you here? Why are we paying you to be here? It's less about, I think, a person's well-being sometimes. Again, it's not always the place. The people I work for currently are very, very involved. You know, I have genuine friendships with the people I work with, and if someone where to obviously be having issues, you know, I don't think there would be any of us that didn't feel comfortable stepping forward and saying, "I want to be able to help you. There's clearly something going on, and you're not addressing it in a healthy way, and if we can help you do that, then that would be great". Um, so again, I don't want to make the blanket

statement that people are just allowed to suffer and allowed to, you know, have these problems, but I think more often than not, it comes down to a sort of bottom line idea. Like, well, if you can't be here, you can't be here, and that's the end of it. Not, "hey, what can I help you with to make it--to make you feel better, to be more comfortable, to be here and not be totally drunk or messed up every time you have to show up".

[00:37:47.20] Mallory Dickerson: And, how does that sort of treatment effect the workplace mentality, the workplace production, the function in general?

[00:37:54.27] Natalia Hess: Well, the minute you have anybody there that is not, you know, at least eighty percent, it starts to drag you down, you know? You're having to make up for whatever they can't do or whatever they're not capable of doing at that time. If it's slowing them down, you know, there's always some sort of deadline you're working towards. You know, service starts at five-thirty, so you have to be ready at five-thirty, and you know, when someone comes to work still drunk or hungover from the night before, then maybe they're not going to be ready be five-thirty, and that throws everyone off. Um, so you know, that would unfortunately be the driving force to making sure people aren't showing up to work messed up, so that everything runs smoothly, but it's ultimately business, so I guess that's what needs to happen.

[00:38:51.20] Mallory Dickerson: Um, so, because there can be some difficulties working with other people, do you prefer to work in a team, or do you prefer to work alone?

[00:38:59.17] Natalia Hess: I would -- I've had a unique experience being a pastry chef. For a lot of my career, it's involved me working alone. Um, I've never worked for a place where the pastry department was anyone but me, and so, I was responsible for everything, and it was usually me in the kitchen in the morning before anybody showed up, you know? Before the chef showed up or anybody. So, that time where I was by myself, and then suddenly a bunch of people would show up, and that would be super frustrating as someone who is very particular and keeps

things just so, you know? I'm very neat, and I know where everything is, and then, suddenly, you have a mess of people in there that are throwing off that whole thing, but I, ultimately, enjoy working with a team because when you have that support, there's less worry, there's less sort of frantic-ness that you can get. If you know you have those people to count on, then it kind of mitigates a lot of your anxieties, you know? Ideally, when you're in a kitchen, people shouldn't be on edge. People should be assured and ready to go, knowing everything is in its place and everyone knows there job, and everyone is there to support each other. I think there are sometimes -- particularly in maybe the bigger cities where maybe the culinary world could be very competitive, you know, and people are working twelve hour days and being paid barey ten dollars an hour that doesn't even cover there rent, let alone anything else, you know -- that can sort of create a "cut throat" sort of feeling where it's you against the world or you against everyone else. That should never be the mentality that's created, you know, because if your just a lone wolf or whatever, you're not going to get much done. But you a got a whole pack, you can get a whole lot done.

[00:41:14.29] Mallory Dickerson: That's very true.

[00:41:16.00] Natalia Hess: Yeah.

[00:41:16.23] Mallory Dickerson: Can you share an experience in a time where you had to collaborate with a team in order to resolve a conflict?

[00:41:23.24] Natalia Hess: I don't know if there's one in particular time that comes to mind. Honestly, it's something that happens day-in day-out. More often than not, I think it ends up being something like, you know, menu related where you create a dish, and it's not selling for whatever reason. So, you look at it, and sort of take it apart, and you try and figure out "well, oh, maybe they don't like this, or they don't like that," but I think, ideally, having different palettes and perspectives on it, it makes it a lot easier to come to a conclusion, you know? The chef that

I work with currently, he always makes sure that everyone tastes everything, you know? It's really important to know what you're working with. Even the most basic building blocks of a dish, you know, "this is what this sauce should taste like, and you should know how it tastes because you're going to be making it, and the customers should expect it to be able to taste like that," you know? So, that ends up, I think, being the most frequent way any sort of conflict will be resolved, is that having to do with something that isn't working. Particularly, when it comes to the menu, you know? And in my opinion, while I think that ultimately the menu is the chef's vision, it's the chef's creation, the fact that you have so many different hands involved in production, it takes away a little bit of that ownership, and it should. Everyone should be an owner of what we're doing, and it's not just "you work for me, and you do what I say," and that's the end of it. If someone's invested in the final product, then they're going to make sure that it's perfect every time, or as perfect as it can be.

[00:43:26.28] Mallory Dickerson: Definitely. So, do you ever find it difficult to balance cooperation with others and independent thinking?

[00:43:35.16] Mallory Dickerson: A little bit, a little bit. I mean, you'll -- you want to encourage people to, you know, question things, to do the research, to look into things. But at the same time, you almost want to encourage them to bring that information back with them, so that they can share it with the group. So, I mean, you definitely want people to do that sort of study, to do the research, to build up their background a little bit, but the whole point of it is to come together and share it with each other. So, independent thought is definitely important. As a very independent thinker myself, you know, I wouldn't be where I am today without it, but even larger than that, I wouldn't be where I am if it weren't for all the people that I've worked with.

[00:44:30.12] Mallory Dickerson: Yeah, you can definitely learn a lot from other people. Um, so, can you tell me some effective methods you've used to ensure that the proper procedures are followed for food preparation and serving?

[00:44:42.25] Natalia Hess: Number one is making sure that the people you're working with know the technique of any particular thing that you're making. It's one thing to say, "oh, here's your ingredients". That's great, but until they know what to do with those ingredients, it won't make any difference, you know? recipes are extremely important. As a pastry chef -- and people who bake, in particular -- are really tied to recipes. Mainly because a lot of what we do cannot happen without exact measurements, you know? There's a lot of science in what happens, and a lot of chemical reactions that take place, and if you don't have the right proportions, you're going to be disappointed, or it's going to taste like soap, or it's going to -- haha, you know -- there's any number of things that can happen. But, again, technique is so important because if you don't know how to cut that onion right, you're not going to get the final product that you want. And then, repetition, you know? There's -- we recently hired someone new, and she started learning how to make our aiolis, and most people don't realize that mayonnaise is a simple product that is created by putting egg yolks and oil together, and you know, a few other little things, but ideally, mostly it's just that. Now every time an aioli has to be made, I make sure she makes it because I think she needs to be able to make an aioli in her sleep, so that there's no question that anytime she makes it -- it doesn't matter what kind it is, what flavor it is, what color it is, whatever -- ultimately, you should end up with pretty much the same product. So, you know, technique, recipes, repetition are probably some of the most important skills you need to have in order to be successful.

[00:46:35.28] Mallory Dickerson: So, with all these skills and with how hectic the industry is, how do you organize, plan, and prioritize your work?

[00:46:43.24] Natalia Hess: That's come with a lot of training and years on the job. The biggest thing is prep lists. Writing things down is a really important thing. Especially because a lot of menu items will have multiple items within them, you know? We have the -- there's at least three different dishes on our menu that probably have five to seven ingredients -- separate ingredients that go together to create the final dish, and you never want to forget one because consistency is key. So, writing things down is a big thing that keeps me organized. I do a lot of brainstorming and thinking when I'm not at work, when it's quieter, and then I'm able to focus a little bit more, or my attention isn't being pulled in three different directions because I'm, you know, preparing three different things at once. Using your time as effectively as possible while you're at work is a big thing. Multitasking effectively is a big deal. I had a chef once that said, "Oh, well, you need to multitask," and I said, "well, I'm doing three different things when you're--when you thought that I was only doing one thing," you know? So, it's-it's kind being able to have your head on a swivel, while at the same time, knowing exactly what's going on, you know? It could be overwhelming for some people, but I think after several years in the industry, there's not as much of that sort of frantic-ness that comes with it. But, again, if you have a clear plan for what you're doing, if you have it written down, and you know how to do it, you're going to get through it at some point.

[00:48:28.23] Mallory Dickerson: Do you have any advice or words of wisdom for someone struggling in the food service industry or who wants to move up in the industry?

[00:48:35.26] Natalia Hess: I would say, uh, taking the time to read, taking the time off the clock to sort of inform yourself as best you can. Not being afraid to offer suggestions or step up when you need to step up. I'm not saying that someone needs to run their mouth or try to be, you know, the big man on campus or whatever, but I don't think -- I think there's been a lot of people who have been conditioned to be afraid to speak up and to want to be, you know, a voice that's

involved with what's happening. And, uh...but, you can only do that when you're informed, you know? If you come forward totally make believe, backwards ideas because you just pulled them out of thin air and don't have any basis in reality or knowledge, then I don't think it's going to get you very far, you know? Informing yourself, stepping up for yourself, working that little bit harder than maybe you think other people are working to prove you have what it takes, and I don't know. It's a stressful, crazy, hectic business to work in, and I -- like I said -- i can't imagine doing anything else. It's pretty wonderful.

[00:50:09.18] Mallory Dickerson: What's your favorite thing about working as a pastry chef?

[00:50:13.20] Natalia Hess: It's-it's honestly the way that people look when they taste my food. It's that moment when something -- when, you know -- when that fork goes in their mouth and they're tasting whatever I've created, and you know, their eyes close, and their shoulders lift, and they smile just a little bit, and before they can even say a word, I know that they enjoyed it. That's what i want, you know? I want to bring a smile to somebody's face, to remind them of a dessert their grandmother made, or to make them think of a time in their life that just gives them the warmest feeling, and if something like a chocolate cake could do that, that's pretty amazing.

[00:50:57.04] Mallory Dickerson: That's beautiful. Where do you hope to see the industry in the future?

[00:51:01.18] Natalia Hess: You know, like I said, I think that the culture is definitely moving in a forward direction. It's going to be a difficult process, I think, because as with any sort of change, a lot of times people are resistant to it. It's like "oh, well, we've been doing it this way for one-hundred and fifty years!". It turns out, that doesn't matter. If we've doing it wrong for the past one-hundred fifty years, then it needs to change. There's obviously more women involved in the industry in the last, you know, twenty to thirty years than there were in the hundred and fifty years before that. I think there are a lot more diverse voices that are, you know, thankfully

in the United States, we have such a wide range of cultures that are apart of society that, you know, you get to try so many different foods. I mean, in New Orleans itself, it's crazy about the different types of restaurants you could go to. Virtually any region in the world, you can find a restaurant that pairs with that -- that you can be sort of transported anywhere else. I think that as time goes on,you're going to have more of those available to people, you know? You have foods to the end of the Earth that you can try, and you can just walk down the street, and there you go. But. I'm hopeful that it will continue to go in a direction where it grows beyond, sort of, the classical male-centric world that it has been for a long time.

[00:52:44.19] Mallory Dickerson: Well, thank you for being such a positive force in the industry. It's been a pleasure interviewing you.

[00:52:50.03] Natalia Hess: This has been really fun! You've had really insightful questions, and I hope it helps somebody, somehow haha