

**Interview with Jessica Muszynski  
14<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

**Location of Interview: Loyola University New Orleans  
6363 St. Charles Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70118**

**Interviewed by: Carrie Ledlow and Tara Simons      Cameras: Shaun Prats  
Audio: Shane Begg  
Interview length: 00:43:13**

**Abstract:** New Jersey native, with an Italian and Hungarian background, waiter/bartender Jessica Muszynski offers a unique take on the food industry and how it has evolved over the years. She discusses the importance of hospitality within the industry as well as how her extraverted nature plays a role in the work she does. The death of Anthony Bourdain weighs heavy on Muszynski's heart, as well as many other food industry workers that she knows, which leads to the discussion of mental health within the industry, support systems for workers who are struggling, and substance abuse problems in kitchens. Muszynski offers insight into her, and a few contemporaries', process of opening their new restaurant, Palm & Pine, in the French Quarter. She hopes that this restaurant will give her an opportunity to get even more familiar with the industry and demonstrate how important hospitality is within restaurants.

**Service Industry Collection  
Documentary and Oral History Studio  
Loyola University New Orleans**

© 2018 Loyola University New Orleans

[00:00:08.03] **Carrie Ledlow:** Hi

[00:00:08.10] **Jessica Muszynski:** Hi.

[00:00:10.06] **Carrie Ledlow:** Umm so, let's just like...cover the bases. Just like what's your name and where are you currently working at? And what do you do?

[00:00:15.27] **Jessica Muszynski:** So I'm supposed to say like names of restaurants and stuff like that?

[00:00:21.02] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:00:21.14] **Jessica Muszynski:** Like okay, I just didn't know the umm...protocol on that was. Uhh Jessica Muszynski. Everybody calls me "Jessie". And I am currently working at a wine bar called Vino Volo in the airport.

[00:00:32.08] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice!

[00:00:33.14] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yes it's something working at the airport.

[00:00:38.04] **Carrie Ledlow:** So umm how long have you been there?

[00:00:39.16] **Jessica Muszynski:** I've been there since April. Umm when I left...when I got there in April I had just left the French Quarter at a restaurant called Bayona, which I was at for about a year and a half. It was my second run there so...umm...I guess that's like the majority of the time I've worked as a waiter in the city is at that restaurant.

[00:00:59.01] **Carrie Ledlow:** Alright, cool so you work in waiting?

[00:01:00.26] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yes.

[00:01:01.15] **Carrie Ledlow:** Cool, cool, cool. Umm...so how long have you been doing that?

[00:01:05.03] **Jessica Muszynski:** I started by answering phones at a pizza place when I was seventeen. Like that was my first...restraunty job and then on and off through school...umm...I've done a couple of other things. I was a radio dj for a while, I was a film director's apprentice for a while, but I always come back to restaurants in one facet or another. So I finally kind of have put aside a lot of the things because just you know there's still some, some weirdness people think that if you wanna work in restaurants that's like but what are you really trying to do?

[00:01:37.24] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm.

[00:01:38.02] **Jessica Muszynski:** And so finally, maybe in the last six months have let that go to be like this is what I really want to do. This is what keeps coming back. This is where I feel the most comfortable so umm...yeah I just...Everything in the front of the house basically from management for-to hosting to waiter or bartender...all that stuff.

[00:02:00.09] **Carrie Ledlow:** What...do you think keeps bringing you back to it?

[00:02:02.11] **Jessica Muszynski:** I really have the love of hospitality. I'm about to be on the opening team for a new restaurant...umm friends of mine and i have been working on this for about two years. It's gonna be called Palm and Pine, 308 North Rampart. Hopefully it'll be open by Mardi Gras.

[00:02:16.16] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice!

[00:02:16.16] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm and you know really gonna focus on hospitality. My title there is going to be hospitality ambassador. So it's gonna kind of be like a little bit of a modern maitre-de position, where...umm...you know I'll be running the floor and stuff, but also doing the day-to-day social media and any sort of like offsite events where you go to like a tasting event and like everybody is at a table set up and stuff.

[00:02:41.19] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:02:41.19] **Jessica Muszynski:** So like just schmoozing people but I really love the hospitality aspect. I really want like to take care of the people who are in there to have dinner. I take it...I take it very seriously.

[00:02:52.06] **Carrie Ledlow:** That's really good! That's awesome...so you're...so I noticed when I was like, researching you, you're originally from New Jersey?

[00:02:58.15] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yes

[00:02:59.08] **Carrie Ledlow:** Cool.Wha-umm...what part?

[00:03:00.07] **Jessica Muszynski:** Trenton, New Jersey.

[00:03:02.11] **Carrie Ledlow:** Okay.

[00:03:02.20] **Jessica Muszynski:** And I have...a lot of my history was working at a place just outside of Trenton...uhh...called Rat's Restaurant. Which is the worst name for a restaurant ever, but when you have the super super rich owner, umm...he can do things like that. And...umm...it was on a thirty-five acre sculpture garden. This beautiful French restaurant and it had...gi-I mean just everything. We...like...it was a...public nonprofit so basically whatever money we needed we just kinda got from

the family? So we had all the finest things. We had table side like rolling gairdons, we had rolling cheese carts that had like thirty selections on it. It was like those crazy over the top...candy land...type of thing and uhh that was my...my major restaurant experience in New Jersey was working there.

[00:03:55.29] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice. What brought you down here?

[00:03:57.23] **Jessica Muszynski:** So I got laid off from there. I had switched...umm... from....working the floor to working in the offices for, as the umm...executive assistant to the GM and executive chef and then also doing HR for like the whole campus because there was an art school and....the people who worked for the sculpture garden and stuff like that. So...it was late 2009 and it was...there was the recession and they decided to basically outsource HR so I got laid off and I had been coming to New Orleans every couple of years since I turned twenty-one and I was just like well...I always said that I would move to New Orleans if I had the chance and like right now I can't even get another job in New Jersey...I'm gonna go back to waiting tables. I might as well go to New Orleans and see if it works. And I've been here seven years.

[00:04:47.04] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice.

[00:04:47.23] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yes.

[00:04:48.10] **Carrie Ledlow:** So...where did you like...did you go to college or anything? Or....

[00:04:52.12] **Jessica Muszynski:** I went. I just have a two year degree in radio.

[00:04:55.07] **Carrie Ledlow:** Okay

[00:04:55.07] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm...

[00:04:55.17] **Carrie Ledlow:** Cool.

[00:04:55.22] **Jessica Muszynski:** So I got that from community college there...

[00:04:57.29] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice

[00:04:57.29] **Jessica Muszynski:** In New Jersey. Restford County Community College.

[00:05:00.08] **Carrie Ledlow:** You think like, working in radio's kinda helped with like the hospitality aspect of like doing waiting?

[00:05:04.05] **Jessica Muszynski:** I think it had to do mostly with my personality. That like I really am that type of extrovert where...like if I am just in a bad mood and I'm at home alone and I'm rammy like I-I could go and sit at a coffee place. I don't even need to talk to people necessarily, but I just need to be around them. And so like that, like that wanting to deal with people that are like- so it was...umm...it was a talk radio station like a lifestyle talk station so umm I did music overnight, but I also was a producer for a couple talk shows during the day and umm...it just it gets your people, you're talking to people, but you're talking to hundreds of people a day which is the same thing that I do now. Ya know? For...just for maybe like five minutes each, but you do. You talk to like, you interact with so many people.

[00:05:51.01] **Carrie Ledlow:** Yeah I mean and....doing like waiting and stuff like that is all about like...a lot of good experiences that people will have is mostly with like their waiter because they don't really meet like the chefs-

[00:05:58.26] **Jessica Muszynski:** Right.

[00:05:58.26] **Carrie Ledlow:** and things like that. They always meet the people in the front.

[00:06:00.27] **Jessica Muszynski:** Exactly!

[00:06:01.18] **Carrie Ledlow:** So...what's been like your favorite restaurants working here?

[00:06:07.19] **Jessica Muszynski:** Bayona is definitely...a family. Like I moved on because it was just time for me to do something else for a while before I got into this new restaurant. But...you get this environment and I would say for like higher education I would kind of equate it to being in a sorority or a fraternity. Where there are people at restaurants for almost thirty years now. There are people that I've never worked with, but they're part of the family cause they worked at Bayona you know for five years, ten years ago and you know everybody still comes around and it just a very tight knit...umm...environment and plus obviously Susan Spicer, James Beard award winning chef. She is a trailblazer as far as...the time she came up like people who talk about chefs in this country put here in the same breath as umm like Alice Waters and things like that so she's very highly regarded. She is a kickass chef. She makes awesome food, she works incredibly hard. Yes so Bayona is definitely my favorite and it's in the French Quarter. A lot of people really crap on the Quarter, and I've also uhh...I got my tour guide license about two years ago. So I just-I-the Quarter is the heart of this city. Whether you like it or not. Like but that's where you go on Mardi Gras Day, that's where you go on Halloween, that's where you go when the Saints with the Superbowl. Like, yes it is something to work in the Quarter, it's its own like juggling acts between just what you encounter even before you get into the building. The drunk and/or bloody people that stumble into your restaurant-

[00:07:46.05] **Carrie Ledlow:** Right.

[00:07:46.05] **Jessica Muszynski:** You know parking, and just craziness, but it's-it's the heart of the city.

[00:07:52.00] **Carrie Ledlow:** So you would prefer like working in the French Quarter then other neighborhoods in the city?

[00:07:54.26] **Jessica Muszynski:** Mhmm. I worked Uptown at a couple of places, I-like I said I'm out in Kenner now which is not necessarily my thing.

[00:08:03.02] **Carrie Ledlow:** Kenner's Kenner

[00:08:03.02] **Jessica Muszynski:** It's...I mean it's the airport so it's great because everybody comes through the airport. You get to meet-I umm...I've met Jene Simmons, I've met umm...I met Maxine Waters.

[00:08:12.25] **Carrie Ledlow:** Oh wow.

[00:08:12.25] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yeah that was so cool. Umm...I totally elbowed one of my coworkers out of the way to take her order cause she didn't realize who it was. So like I physically...elbowed her out of the way so you get to see everybody, but yeah I-I prefer...yeah I prefer the environment in the Quarter. Maybe it's because people, even though the locals who are kinda comin into the Quarter.

[00:08:36.22] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhm.

[00:08:36.22] **Jessica Muszynski:** They're comin down there when they're lookin to have a good time.

[00:08:38.25] **Carrie Ledlow:** Right.

[00:08:39.10] **Jessica Muszynski:** So like...I guess that's what I like about it.

[00:08:42.08] **Carrie Ledlow:** Yeah I can definitely see that-I'm a local, too so like I definitely understand like everyone wants to go like to the Quarter when like they wanna have a good time and things like that.

[00:08:49.14] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yeah. I mean not that that's the only place obviously-

[00:08:52.15] **Carrie Ledlow:** Yeah

[00:08:52.15] **Jessica Muszynski:** We all have friends that come into the city and you're like you have-well you also have to get out of the French Quarter. It's like...going to New York and only ever going to Manhattan. You know?

[00:08:58.29] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm.

[00:08:59.22] **Jessica Muszynski:** But it's still...

[00:09:01.27] **Carrie Ledlow:** Do you think, like, so you've worked like different restaurants across the city.

[00:09:05.12] **Jessica Muszynski:** Mhmm.

[00:09:05.12] **Carrie Ledlow:** Do you notice like any sort of like different like...changes in like the cliques in different restaurants you've worked at? Depending on like the neighborhood they're in?

[00:09:12.02] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm...not necessarily based on the neighborhood. I mean...pretty much every restaurant has one what I would call home bar. That everybody feeds to if they're going out for drinks after work.

[00:09:24.11] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:09:24.11] **Carrie Ledlow:** Yeah.

[00:09:24.16] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm so that type of thing you'll see, but if I would say there's anything cliquey I would say it would be like restaurant group. Like...the Link Restaurant group people all kinda like hangout together, the-a lot of the Emeril's groups all hang out together and stuff like that.

[00:09:48.13] **Carrie Ledlow:** So like even if they leave like that restaurant, they always like come back to them? Or?

[00:09:52.24] **Jessica Muszynski:** I don't....not as much when you're not working there.

[00:09:58.12] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:09:58.12] **Jessica Muszynski:** But because I worked at Peach for a short time. I was only there for about six months, it just wasn't for me. Umm...and they very much like when they went out after work only hung out with the other Link Restaurant people. It was weird.

[00:10:15.07] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mmm that sounds really weird.

[00:10:17.02] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yeah...

[00:10:17.26] **Carrie Ledlow:** Umm...so what-are you working a lot of long hours like now or have you been working a lot of long hours doing like waiting-waiting?

[00:10:27.18] **Jessica Muszynski:** It depends-a lot of it depends on the time of year. Obviously in the summer, there's not as much going on you're gonna get cut a lot more often cause they just don't have the numbers to support a full staff.

[00:10:38.23] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhm

[00:10:38.23] **Jessica Muszynski:** So you get cut from a shift. And then you'll go into things like going into the holidays or going into Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest. Jazz Fest is the busiest time of the year. Where...you know you're working doubles maybe you get like...there's...there's been times where I've walked out of am I'm like I'm walking around the block. I will be gone for seven minutes. I am leaving this building because if not I will have been here fifteen hours from start to finish. You know type of an idea, but...it's also an environment where in that case yes fifteen hours from start to finish, but you also have your set up before the first shift, a break between lunch and dinner in this...uhh...restaurant. You know usually you would have staff meal a lot of the reason I think that restaurant staffs umm like bond so much is because you do sit and eat dinner together five nights a week. You know and that's...that's a way to bond with people no matter what. Breaking bread right?

[00:11:34.29] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm.

[00:11:34.29] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm, but yes so at the airport right now most of the shifts are ten hours. So I'm only working four days a week which is great. Those four days that are ten hours are not as great, but those other three days...make up for it.

[00:11:48.18] **Carrie Ledlow:** What do you usually do on your days off?

[00:11:51.16] **Jessica Muszynski:** If there's only two days during that I have off if I'm working a five day work week, umm... one day is like adulting day. Right? You gotta do your laundry and dishes and like the house cleaning and stuff like that. And then there's usually one day where I'm like nope it's my day off and...you know I'm not doing anything. Umm...my steady day off is Wednesday and so umm I'm always off on Wednesdays because I love Wednesdays at the square. In the spring, do you go to that?

[00:12:19.21] **Carrie Ledlow:** Uhh I've heard of it, but I actually haven't been.

[00:12:22.24] **Jessica Muszynski:** Oh my god it's so good. It is every Wednesday from like starts after Mardi Gras -

[00:12:28.06] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:12:28.06] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm and goes through like the beginning of June I think it's like twelve weeks and it's...two acts every night, it's free, it's just the best group of people like the crowd themselves, everybody dancing, enjoying themselves and having a good time. Umm so yeah whenever I can go and see music, that's definitely a priority.

[00:12:50.17] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice.

[00:12:50.17] **Jessica Muszynski:** Lot's of eating out, lots of happy hours...you know.

[00:12:54.15] **Carrie Ledlow:** Do you do a lot of cooking at home or do you mostly like go out and eat?

[00:12:56.22] **Jessica Muszynski:** I do both I love to cook. I've never cooked in a restaurant, that might change a little bit as I get into this new place because I kind of was just like anything that we need, like we're opening a restaurant, if you need me to peel potatoes man I'm in. Umm...but I just come from a long line of like, you know, women cooks. At my grandmother's knee learning how to make...everything. So I love cooking and it definitely- cooking puts me in touch with all like, the ladies in my family.

[00:13:24.03] **Carrie Ledlow:** What was your favorite thing you're grandma cooked?

[00:13:26.01] **Jessica Muszynski:** She makes lasagna for Christmas. Well made lasagna for Christmas. So now I have to have lasagna every Christmas, which is like...it was better, like it still taste good when I make it, but it was better when grandma made it.

[00:13:39.03] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm.

[00:13:39.15] **Jessica Muszynski:** But yeah, her lasagna was a whole...you had to make the gravy, and then you have assemble the lasagna and then it needs to like...sit for a day to gel. I don't know if anybody else actually believes that, but my grandmother did. Ummm...and then you can cook it.

[00:13:53.12] **Carrie Ledlow:** I mean it's always that phrase the longer it sits, the better it gets.

[00:13:55.07] **Jessica Muszynski:** Right, it's like yeah that's true, but she's like you just-it-I just put it all together. It needs to like...set.

[00:14:03.06] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice. Umm...so like with working long hours, do you feel, I mean not necc-not now I mean ten hour-they're still pretty long, ten hour shifts are still pretty long, but like do you feel like...a lot of like stress from doing all those shifts. Have you been able to balance out the stress a lot?

[00:14:19.00] **Jessica Muszynski:** I have a good time obviously you know? There's a decent amount of drinking involved in working in a restaurant. Umm...I uhh...yeah I get off of work and have a couple of drinks sometimes, a lot of times, you know I'm drinking for knowledge you know? I like-I like wine and I like liquor. I-I like knowing where my things come from, the history about them and...working in restaurants is definitely given me so much knowledge about things like that. Umm...but I-I-I think that there's a little bit of that...like those are work days, these are not work days you know? So you hangout and have some drinks and...get fun-I don't have a hard-like...I don't...yeah you're tired right? You work a double or even a ten hour shift if you're busy. But I worked at a desk once and I was like my back was sore and I was out of shape. So...my point of view is that like if my back is sore after working that-well my body is sore because I'm using it.

[00:15:31.26] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:15:31.26] **Jessica Muszynski:** So for me that just feels better.

[00:15:34.22] **Carrie Ledlow:** Okay. Do you notice like a lot of your coworkers having mmm...stress problems?

[00:15:40.18] **Jessica Muszynski:** Some of em. It-because you can get into this industry sometimes especially unfortunately back of the house because you don't interact with guests.

[00:15:49.20] **Carrie Ledlow:** Yeah.

[00:15:49.26] **Jessica Muszynski:** So, a lot of the people that do that are the opposite side right? So where I'm the extrovert, sorry, they are more the introverts that don't wanna with deal with anybody. So...sometimes when you know they get stressed...it-they just kinda turn inward more umm so you know there's problems, but unfortunately I have been dealing with somebody right now who's not in this city, but he was from our team at Beyona who is having a really hard time mentally and he's in a really dark place. He's in Colorado, in Denver, and he put something up on Facebook and literally everybody rallied around him and within twenty-four hours it was like, this is where you go for crisis care, if you need an airplane ticket back here we're gonna get it for you. Like so, you can be stressed like anything, but...you know if you're working in the right environment you're gonna have a team of people around you to help you outta that.

[00:16:54.15] **Carrie Ledlow:** So like it's based like I mean when people who are getting like really stressed or going into those dark times, it-there's really a good like family basis-

[00:17:01.21] **Jessica Muszynski:**Mhmm

[00:17:01.21] **Carrie Ledlow:** And like-

[00:17:03.16] **Jessica Muszynski:** Mhmm, and you'll have you know not full on interventions, but like that conversation with somebody where it's like I see ya, I see what you're doin.

[00:17:11.11] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:17:11.18] **Jessica Muszynski:** And so like maybe back that off just a little bit, like focus, what do you need? Do you need some time off? Do you need...health care? Do you-like....it-you kinda...it's such a...I don't wanna say strange industry, but it's-it's run so very differently then so many other industries-

[00:17:30.16] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:17:31.12] **Jessica Muszynski:** That there is definitely a feeling of...like we're gonna protect our own.

[00:17:36.02] **Carrie Ledlow:** Right-

[00:17:36.21] **Jessica Muszynski:** And rally around people when they need it.

[00:17:39.21] **Carrie Ledlow:** So have you like had a lot of experiences like...besides your friend in Colorado, like a lot of experience dealing with like...other people going through those dark times? Like how did you, deal with it?

[00:17:50.13] **Jessica Muszynski:** ...Trying to think...a lot of times when it happens, this-his case is...pretty extreme.

[00:18:03.19] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm.

[00:18:03.22] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm...a lot of times when I see it happening it's more just like people who are in a depression and in a funk. And you get the like...yeah maybe we're not gonna drink so much like why don't we...hey we both have off tomorrow why don't we go like the dogs and take a lap around Audubon Park?

[00:18:20.11] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:18:20.28] **Jessica Muszynski:** You know? Just try to kinda break the cycle.

[00:18:23.05] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mokay.

[00:18:24.29] **Jessica Muszynski:** Just getting off of work and drinking all of your troubles doesn't work every single night.

[00:18:29.06] **Carrie Ledlow:** Yeah. Like I've heard a lot of things and I've done a lot of research like there's a lo-heavy amount of like alcohol dependency-

[00:18:35.28] **Jessica Muszynski:** Mhmm

[00:18:35.28] **Carrie Ledlow:** in like...in chefs and in like wait staff and things like that. Is that something you've noticed?

[00:18:40.05] **Jessica Muszynski:** There's-I drink...more than somebody who probably works in an office.

[00:18:44.22] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:18:44.29] **Jessica Muszynski:** But I also like come home from work most nights and try to go right to bed. So that's, I mean, not that that's the only reason, but I guess that I- A: I'm in New Orleans and I'm in the restaurant industry like I-I am indeed a drinker. Umm...but...you know imagine getting done with you're nine-to-five or whatever and like you're literally going home and trying to get to bed within like an hour and a half of-after you've...had this...this day and when you're waiting tables so it's a very dynamic experience as far as what you're giving emotionally. Umm if you're doing it right. Not everybody is doing this. There's obviously plenty of people out there who are like ahh I hate you, whatever, here's your burrito, I'm out.

[00:19:24.05] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mhmm

[00:19:24.09] **Jessica Muszynski:** Umm, but I am not that person. I definitely...I'm trying to at least a little bit connect with every table I have and that could be about...oh like what other restaurant did you eat at or what are you in town for? Oh it's your birthday? Like just...anything. I'm always trying to connect and show that level of hospitality so...when you're done with those days sometimes like you're physically spent, you're also emotionally spent. Umm and so you know often times a couple of drinks, but I'll say like ninety percent of the time...I come home from work, I pour a glass of wine. First one's like did I even pour that? Umm...the second one is like, okay and ninety percent of the time I might wake up with half of that second drink like still on my nightstand cause...I never finished it so...like maybe some of it's just the ritual, too. Like people who smoke, I don't smoke...cigarettes...umm...but like

it's that stopping to take time for yourself type of thing. So...you know the drinking's a little bit of that, too.

[00:20:31.20] **Carrie Ledlow:** Okay

[00:20:31.20] **Jessica Muszynski:** But they also, like...if you...if you go out and get drunk afterwards. After work you get totally sloopy, the next day like you are not calling out. Every-like I have gone into work where...literally half of the restaurant has been hungover. But everybody shows up, and everybody does their job, and...like...so there's a strange professionalism to it.

[00:21:01.15] **Carrie Ledlow:** The profesional of being hungover.

[00:21:04.01] **Jessica Muszynski:** Professional-professional drinker.

[00:21:06.01] **Carrie Ledlow:** What's your favorite wine to drink, just as a side note?

[00:21:09.02] **Jessica Muszynski:** If I had to choose one wine altogether, I really like Priorat which is uhh...a region in Spain. It is volcanic soil predominately that area is printed with the grenache grape. And so it's like a bigger red wine, but because of the volcanic soil there's a lot of acid in the grapes.

[00:21:29.14] **Carrie Ledlow:** Mmm

[00:21:29.14] **Jessica Muszynski:** And it let's it be a big red wine that like kind of like finishes cris-not crisp not like a Saviougon Blanc or something, but like it's just like-like-like this big wine that doesn't have that like lingering tanic umm sitch so, priorats are my all time favorite.

[00:21:50.09] **Carrie Ledlow:** Nice I'll definitely have to try that.

[00:21:51.17] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yes you should.

[00:21:53.08] **Carrie Ledlow:** Umm, we're gonna take a break so we can like switch to the next interview person.

[00:21:56.12] **Jessica Muszynski:** Okay.

[00:21:58.08] **Tara Simons:** Alright, so...um...let's kind of switch topics from what we were talking about earlier but um, how do you think the food industry has changed since you started working?

[00:22:13.24] **Jessica Muszynski:** With the advent of celebrity chefs and things like food network and the cooking channel and stuff like that the guests are much more

intelligent than they were...well say...roughly twenty years ago I guess that's around how long I've been doing this. Um...both of like who the chefs are-people care who their chefs are-you know if you talk to your parents like maybe back then you knew like Julia Child or like some really really big names but not the name of every chef at ever you know 25 restaurants across the city so that is definitely changed, the guests knowledge of the ingredients- I remember when I was at the restaurant in New Jersey, Rats, serving um quinoa in one of our dishes and it was mind blowing, nobody knew who it-what it was i had to explain it to like every table in detail and now like literally I think like save a lot has quinoa so it's become much more um present it's a little bit different too... dining has become more casual over- especially maybe like the last 10 years less people want to go to your jacket required white tablecloth type of restaurants um even the biggest chefs in the world are opening places that have lovely food and ingredients um you know wines and liquors and service but they're also wood tablecloths and servers wearing jeans and stuff like that so that's changed the idea kind of of the guest knowing how to dine has changed again. Again if we go back to our parent's or grandparent's generations like you knew how to sit, which fork to use, where to put your hands like on the table and um things like that that people don't really know anymore. You'd be surprised how many grown adults that you- like- I'm so sorry sir I'd like to put your foo-your food down can you please take your phone off the table? And it's not- all the baby boomers would blame the millennials- it's not the millennials it's the baby boomers. So, that's the- the guests have definitely changed in those ways.

[00:24:31.01] **Tara Simons:** So do you think the- like- the um knowledge of food is a good thing? Or...?

[00:24:37.25] **Jessica Muszynski:** I absolutely do, I think that people are more willing to experiment and try things that are a little bit outside of their comfort zone. I recently went to um a restaurant in Houston and everything that they made had insects in it. I did not try- I tried a drink that had a salt rim that had been cured with mealworms so I did not eat any insects, I'm not saying that I would never do it, but that day was not the day. Uh...but you're seeing that and that restaurant is one of the top you know the 25 restaurants in downtown Houston and they're serving bugs every night and people are eating them so you don't hear as many people being like oh you know I don't eat that. Oh I've got a meat and potatoes, you know, palate people are definitely more interesting which is great because food's good like I- I don't under-understand people who are super picky. Everybody's got a couple of things, right? But like there's so much good food in the world like how can you not want to at least try it.

[00:25:46.12] **Tara Simons:** Yeah, so um, did you grow up like really loving food?

[00:25:51.22] **Jessica Muszynski:** Food is definitely...you know...that...food is love. I am Hungarian and Italian and the- the grandmoms cooking is- like- that is what I grew up doing and so...even though my parents like- I didn't have lamb until I was

26 because it was just never something that my parents ate. Um so we didn't try a lot of different stuff necessarily but...it was that whole- like anytime you walk in the door you know the first things that's happening is grandmom's you know pulling stuff out of the refrigerator to feed you. So yeah, I grew up- the kitchen is the center of the home, that's where everybody hangs out and that's where all the good stuff happens.

[00:26:35.17] **Tara Simons:** So you talked about your grandmother's favorite recipe but um and I- you said that you like to cook too so what is your favorite recipe to cook?

[00:26:44.18] **Jessica Muszynski:** What is my...I'm, working on my gumbo right now, being a Yankee. I'm still learning...um I have an ex boyfriend's mom's recipe that I've been trying to figure out so that's my current project. Um I have a chocolate stout cake recipe that I make that has caused fights in marriages because somebody ate the last piece. So I love that...I don't know, I'm kind- I'm kind of fickle like there's certain things that I make like if they're for like holidays like thanksgiving or easter. Um but it's really the act of cooking wh-especially...so all of the women in my family are gone, all the grandmoms my mom passed away uh more than 20 years ago and when I'm cooking I feel like I'm with them so it's like I could be making anything it- it could be omelettes for breakfast or something, or it could be a very in depth complicated multiple step dish but like it's just... that's how I get in touch with them these days.

[00:27:56.25] **Tara Simons:** Nice. So you did mention that you might be doing some cooking at the new restaurant that you and some friends are opening, is that something that you're like, that you're interested in?

[00:28:05.19] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yes because it's the part of the business that I don't know. I've worked in offices, I've worked all the different aspects of the front of the house, um, man I've done dishes, but I've never done anything cooking- wise so it would be something that I would love- 'cause I just- I wanna learn everything about you know the restaurant and the hospitality industry, so I think it would help me round out and you know see it from a different perspective.

[00:28:30.27] **Tara Simons:** So um going back to what you were saying earlier about just um being extraverted and working um, waiting tables and stuff like that. Um I know from personal experience always having to put on a happy face when interacting with customers can be tiring uh so like how do you deal with that?

[00:28:51.11] **Jessica Muszynski:** It's funny I um...was commiserating with a friend maybe about a month ago...where... I'm like I went through this time period where I would smile and it didn't feel like it was right on my face because I was just, you know, working through some stuff on my own, and so...you force- not force a smile, but you put on a smile at work and then like I was smiling again for my own reasons

and it was just like, oh, like this feels fake. So... I try to not overdo it too much like I'm a smiley person naturally so it's not difficult but... like I- I do, I try to make sure that I'm doing it for the right reasons 'cause if not I feel like you can lose yourself some. I've had that happen with dating too, I don't wanna say that I- like I flirt with the customers, but you're having banter, right? And you're being playful, and silly, and joking, and then sometimes I'll go to flirt with somebody that I actually like and I'm like, oh wait, am I working? What's going on, like this just feels disjointed. So, there's gotta be a way- and I'm figuring it out, I don't know the way, but like there's gotta be a way like to still keep a little bit of me for me.

[00:30:06.01] **Tara Simons:** Yeah so um going back to kind of the mental health discussion, you said that um most of like a lot of people you know are very supportive and stuff like that, have you ever come across people who are like really not supportive or like- aren't really um like- don't really like have a support system? Something like that?

[00:30:29.08] **Jessica Muszynski:** I tend to not stay those places, so if you look at my history, you'll see a couple spots that I was only at for like 4, 6 months and that would probably be one of those situations where like once you get settled into the job you're like, aw crap this is not the right spot for me. Okay, let me look for a new job and it takes you know a couple of months because you want to stay employed. So I tend to leave those houses, I definitely- as I was speaking about Bayona and um what I want for the new restaurant- for Palm & Pine, going forward, is really like... I want to hire people who are gonna be part of a team, part of a family, who have integrity. I had a great boss at Rat's, the restaurant in Jersey who was just like, "I can teach anybody how to wait tables. What I can't teach is somebody to have a good attitude."

[00:31:21.16] **Tara Simons:** Right.

[00:31:21.26] **Jessica Muszynski:** And so that's the type of places- because of my history and the person I am, that I gravitate to. I'm never gonna work in a house where you have coworkers that like steal from each other. Like, I- I've literally left wads of cash. I'm like, oh- oh good that's still here thank heavens. Like, that's more the type of place. So...I- I'm- I know that those other places are out there where it's cutthroat and nasty and undermining and such...but I...that's not for me.

[00:31:55.11] **Tara Simons:** Um so how do you think like especially since, in this like modern day and age, how do you think media has played a role in the like food industry?

[00:32:07.07] **Jessica Muszynski:** The example that comes to mind was when I was working at a restaurant um outside um- actually in Princeton, New Jersey, and the chef went absolutely- can I curse?

[00:32:24.23] **Tara Simons:** Yeah.

[00:32:25.03] **Jessica Muszynski:** -batshit crazy. He freaked the fuck out and started screaming at one of the servers, like...jumping up and down screaming she had taken a dish to the wrong table. That was it. It was...maybe supposed to go to table 12 it went to table 13 she had to bring it back to the kitchen, they had to make another one. This girl ended up having a panic attack walking out of that restaurant, never coming back. the guests at the table could hear him screaming at her, because this was not a big place and he was lettin loose. Um...and somebody actually said like, "oh my god do you hear that? Oh he's so serious." So, it's like the um... oh what's his name? Gordon...

[00:33:13.21] **Tara Simons:** Ramsay?

[00:33:14.09] **Jessica Muszynski:** Yes, it's the Gordon Ramsay affiliation where you know, people think that that's somehow is cute that that makes the chef better or more intense or more sought after where it really doesn't- there are highly talented chefs in this world that are extreme assholes, actually there's a guy um Marco Pierre White who is the reason that Gordon Ramsay is the way that he is because Marco actually- there's a picture of like a 17 year old Gordon Ramsay crying his eyes out because Marco had screamed at his so much during service. The guy is a brilliant chef and he's also a huge jerk. Like, so, it- it's interesting to see the- the- the public- I think we've switched away from that now un- unfortunately... \*sigh\* with Anthony Bourdain dying, I think that that really was a shift in the general public's kind of like thought on things....and that was...to- to take a tangent on my own...Anthony Bourdain dying was incredibly hard on all of us. It was like, god I can't- I'm not gonna cry. Um it was like we lost our pope. Anthony Bourdain...was a grunt, he was just like this kitchen dude and had...made it all the way to the top, and he was well-spoken and intelligent and well-read which you will find in restaurants all over. The people that I work with in restaurants are by far more intelligent than the people that I've worked with in offices. So, that's a whole other ball of wax. Um, but he always stuck up...like...you could go to Snake and Jake's and sit down next to Anthony Bourdain just getting off your shift and it would be like "oh yeah so what did ya'll do tonight?" "oh two twenty like that's great" like he was always that normal person that was like... our leader and him taking his own life- I actually know um...I know 2 people after that that kind of...they came out of it reasonably quickly but him taking his life put a lot of... chefs especially into a dark place.

[00:35:30.27] **Tara Simons:** So do you think after that whole thing...was there a bigger like, kind of like a shift in the mental health discussion within communities?

[00:35:42.14] **Jessica Muszynski:** There is- there's um- there's a couple people around the city that are really trying to work on making the...the industry...you know more give and take like that, um the guys who run Mopho and Maypop, uh the Gulatta brothers have a...um... like a- I don't know- a foundation nonprofit that

they're trying to start to really support um restaurant workers with substance abuse and just general like quality of life...um this year Tales of the Cocktail- are you familiar with this event? Tales of the Cocktail takes place every summer- every July here in New Orleans. It is an international bartender and cocktail convention. It's amazing. people come from all over the world to make drinks, you...I like- you'll take...I took a 2 hour long class as um- on Mezcal spirits this year, I took a class on sherries last year. It was- you know, coffee drinks and like just really they get into it and talk to you about the history and the people that make the products and things like that. Um, but this year for the first time they included a whole wellness part where anybody who had a wristband could go to the New Orleans Athletic Club and work out, they had yoga everyday. They had classes and panels on...you know how to support your staff and you know to see things mentally that are happening. So it really...it's awful that it took something like that to happen but it really has made people kind of like...open their eyes and maybe...just like commit to doing more.

[00:37:30.03] **Tara Simons:** That's good. Um...so um kind of switching gears, but it seems like a lot of times male chefs will get more acknowledgement for their work than women, um why do you think that is?

[00:37:46.11] **Jessica Muszynski:** So it's the same reason kind of that I will call myself a waiter...um and Susan Spicer was actually the person who um...you know did that...at first for me because men and women came to the restaurant industry overall historically from very different places. Most of the women- the original women that were bartenders were working in brothels and things like that so...they were...easy to look down upon...and not take as seriously. For men, it was a profession. It was something you know, there was plenty of fancy restaurants across this country you know throughout the '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s that only hired men because women are too emotional and too flighty and blah blah blah. So I think part of it is because of how the di- the two sexes both came to the industry. Um...and then just- even women being involved, I mean...there's still I mean it- it's not a 50/50 industry it's probably 25/75 and men get more...recognition...I don't know because it's...2018 and men still get more recognition? Which doesn't make sense because 90% of the time when you think about cooking in the home, it's mom or grandma, not to say that- my dad cooks you know like...pe- men...can cook too, everybody should cook but like...for some reason it became that men did it professionally and what women just- you know did it 'cause they had to. So, I- I think that has to do- you know look at- again to reference Susan Spicer, she opened her first restaurant the same time that Emeril Lagasse did...but Emeril is a- you know nationwide brand. And not even everybody in New Orleans knows who Susan is.

[00:39:48.14] **Tara Simons:** Right, yeah. So have you yourself experienced any sort of...like discrimination or like haven't gotten the recognition you deserve because of your gender?

[00:40:00.27] **Jessica Muszynski:** In...the professional arena...no. Obviously there's still a long way to go as far as...sexual discrimination or sexual harassment with tables.

[00:40:18.13] **Tara Simons:** Mhmm

[00:40:18.17] **Jessica Muszynski:** I've...I've had...more than- like you could get to situations where- you know maybe a guy's flirting with you and you're just like, "oh yeah no I'm- I'm at work" which is a great line, you don't have to say no, you can say I'm at work. And...you know it's really easy for them to turn around and be like "oh well that's coming out of your tip." And so things like that happen often, I had a coworker who...was bitten on the ass

[00:40:51.05] **Tara Simons:** Oh my god

[00:40:51.15] **Jessica Muszynski:** And we're talking fine dining white tablecloth restaurant. Like, these old guys were just drunk and belligerent and being...totally awful human beings and she reached over the table to clear something and one of the guys just turned his head and bit her. Um...so...that would be what I would say is the biggest difference between being a man or a woman in the industry today is that...I'm sure there's occasions when that happens to men, but it is far far less.

[00:41:29.16] **Tara Simons:** So, it's more like experiencing um like harassment or discrimination from like customers more than like professionals.

[00:41:39.09] **Jessica Muszynski:** I've never really seen anything where a woman wasn't put into a management position like um or given any sort of uh...you know- what can you do to really promote somebody like, you know, not kept from their good section like I- I haven't really seen that because...wh- when it comes to like what we see as the restaurant it's just that like we want to do our part to relieve you of your money and that is going to be the strongest worker. And I don't care if that's...you know...gay straight black white wh- now it's great you see more people who are able to go to work who are like openly trans you know, things like that. It doesn't matter, if you are a good worker, you are knowledgeable, you're good with the guests, you can turn tables I don't care what you look like and that's pretty much generally the rule.

[00:42:42.06] **Tara Simons:** That's good. And that's all the questions I have, so... it was really nice meeting you.

[00:42:46.27] **Jessica Muszynski:** It was so great doing this I really appreciate you guys, it's- the hospitality industry's in a weird place especially in this city and so I really appreciate you guys you know- for whatever reason even if it might be pushed by- by the professor for taking the time to do this.

[00:43:04.20] **Tara Simons:** I definitely learned a lot so...