



Alexx Chats to Jules Clancy

A: How did you come to be in food technology? Why did you decide to do that?

J: It's interesting Alexx, when I was leaving school, deciding what to do, I knew I really loved food. I really did think long and hard about becoming a chef but I also really wanted to go to university and I could see that whole career being a chef as very hard work and I always just wasn't very sociable so I was like surely there must be something else and so I was just looking around and I found this degree in food science that you could do through New South Wales University, I was like brilliant, I wanna go to Sydney and I also did toss up the idea of doing wine making but at the time you can only do it at Roseworthy in South Australia, I didn't wanna move to South Australia. So food science won out, I went to New South Wales Uni, had a great time, balance that with wanting a few things as well. And when I was there I got really interested coz I'm a bit of a creative soul. The thing that really interested me most was product development and working for companies developing new products for them to sell. When I finished the degree I kind of targeted product development roles and was lucky enough to pick one up with Kellogg's who were based in Botany in Sydney. So I started my career working for them.

A: Okay, so at Kellogg's you're obviously starting to learn the tricks of the trade. We pay a price on the shelf for products in the supermarket. How much of that actually goes in to the manufacturing of the product in terms of the stand on ingredients. Can you talk to us a little bit about that?

J: It is kind of hard to generalize because different industries and different products have a kind of different pricing structures. It was amazing that the average gross margin at the time for cereal was 50% so that's the margin that they're making after all the costs and then if you actually look at the materials cost it would be a very small percentage and then the cost to actually make the product so to get the product made on average it was probably maybe 30%, and then the rest would be all the sales and marketing cost and then a lot of profit. That really was challenging, working in an environment where we had such a small budget to spend on ingredients, on good quality ingredients, so we're looking any corners we could cut, any efficiencies we could get by buying in bulk or whatever and that was part of our job. It wasn't to be able, it was kind of part of business. You know it was a public listed company and so they're always looking to keep the panel looking healthy.

A: When you talk about cutting corners, what are some of the wackiest things you had to do while you stand down in the industry.

J: Probably like the most common thing in products like that are mostly sweet is when it comes to using expensive ingredients like apricot or raspberry or whatever. It's very rare they can actually afford to use real apricot or real raspberry so you're using other fruits, usually sultanas coz they're the cheapest fruit and then sometimes an apple as well, and then you add an apricot flavor. I was working on products that would actually that had little fruit pieces, and that fruit piece would have flavor added into it and then also if there were flakes or something, we'll also be spraying flavor on to the flakes. So when you open the box it smelled like really fruity and lovely. So that's where we could afford to kind of deliver that experience, there's no way we'll be able to do that with real apricots, it didn't feel great doing it at the time, I kind of I justified it by at the end the product tasted really good so that was the most important thing to me at the time. And in the ingredient list everything's declared so it's not like you're lying about the product, it's all there on the pack for people to see.

A: I find when I'm giving talks on additives or helping parents see the light in terms of just how to read an ingredient list, it's like here's the part of the product that I really want you to look at, which is this free and that free, full of vitamin D and all those flashy things on the front. This is the part they never want you to see and that's the ingredients in the little fineprint on the back and they just expect that you say additive free, preservative free – oh okay great. We just gotta dig deeper coz of the problems so many families are experiencing especially with their kids, with some of those additives.





You mentioned spraying apricot flavor on the flakes to give that kid of open the box and go wow.. What is the flavor, how does it get made? Are you preview to that or do you just say buying cheats with that apricot flavor and that's the supplier that supplies the apricot flavor, you just buy it and you don't ask questions?

J: The flavor and fragrance industry is a huge huge industry and there's quite a few really large companies that supply different flavors and it's not only to the food industry, they're supplying to cosmetics and pharmaceutical companies and something like that, it's huge. There's different types of flavors Alexx so they have like different categories so you can get what's called the natural flavors, that means that those flavors are made from ingredients that are sourced from natural, so they're not made in the lab, they're actually pressed from an apple or something and all the chemicals in those flavors naturally occur. So if it's an apple flavor, all the chemicals in that flavor would have to be naturally occurring in apples at some point in time. And I do see a product that has no artificial colors or flavors on it, you can still have these natural flavors added to them but it's nothing to do with real apple coz it's a mere, tiny fraction kind of thing and they're not necessarily just taking apple and squishing and this is the apple flavor. They're getting a little bit from here and a little bit from there, but as long as those chemicals are naturally occurring in apple, and the source of those chemicals isn't artificial and they would also claim that it's natural. And then they have thing that they call nature identical flavors, the chemicals appear naturally in nature but the ones that are actually used in the flavor have been manufactured in laboratory essentially and you've got artificial flavors which are all totally artificial, they're all just made in a lab and they happen to smell like and taste like whatever they're meant to smell like and taste like. And of course there's a huge difference in price between the natural ones and the artificial ones. It's a whole industry, it's a whole science of flavor. And it's actually pretty interesting and it's not all evil kind of thing like when that happens you get some interesting knowledge to sensory science is really how we taste and smell like those the guides in those industries that are really leading the way in terms of our understanding of that so it's not like all women do, that's a reality of processed foods.

A: Absolutely. And it just makes you think even though the natural flavor may have been born from things that exist in nature, it's like if we're not eating anything in its whole form from nature as nature intended, it's still a health risk that our bodies just don't understand what that is because we're not designed to eat broken up forms of things so it's a really interesting discussion where those two words might make one feel more comfortable than say artificial flavor but it still doesn't get you out of the woods in terms of a possible adverse health reaction if you're sensitive to anything that just isn't whole and really simple and easy for your body to recognize.

J: Absolutely. And while we're talking about this Alexx, one of the things that really sort of drove me mental when I was working in the food industry with the whole whole grain thing. I'm not sure whether the legislation's changed recently but when I was working, like if you had a box of cereal, as long as all the components of the cereal, like the right amount of brown, the right amount of germ or whatever, as long as they were all in the box at the end of the day, it didn't matter how they got there and you can claim it as being whole grain. Like we were making whole grain products where we're just using normal white flour but then we were talking in the endosperm and all the other bits in the end just a mix. The government will make you say that it was whole grain, like there's this really amazing technology that came along where they were able to grind fiber using these new meal kind of thing into like super fine. Do you know how fiber normally has that kind of texture, like chunkiness and stuff. So when we're developing kids' products you find it all brown but if you're developing a high fiber kids' cereal, it's really difficult to get the kids to like it, so they got this new technology, this new fiber that was just ground super finely and didn't have the texture and of course you cover it up with the use of different flavors so it was like they were able to get quite high fiber into these cereals and like technically we analyze this fiber would our body recognize this as fiber, well absolutely not. It definitely changed the way we process food, the physical structure is important not just the chemical structure, so I was starting to wreck my head when we were doing stuff like that, it just didn't seem very honest and I looked into me, and I also didn't that anyone was thinking about the repercussions of how it would affect the people that were eating the products. I don't eat grains hardly at all, these days at all and I think that the whole grain thing is a bit fast but any product labeled whole grain I'm really weary of them as well.

A: Absolutely, and I think we can put organic whole grain products in the same bucket there. You really have to know and trust the brand and know how they operate and get a sense of transparency because you say a lot of families switch over to





organic with a well-meaning heart, but if it's still processed and still factory made, it's still created in labs by food technologists, at the end of the day it's the same kind of thing. We gotta cut those costs, we gotta just try and get the things what we can get in here, to say what we wanna say on the label. Just because it's organic doesn't necessarily mean that a whole grain product is gonna be automatically better for you. I just remember going to a play date with my little guy, and a really gorgeous mom, she's a friend, she says come I've got a couple of treats they're gluten free. That thing is just a marketing right, so the marketing makes us think that that's good, but it was cheesy gluten free pasta so it's basically organic gluten free twisties. So it's still really processed food. We got to really work on the story we wanna tell ourselves when we shop and just simplify things really really big time and think is this real. With a bit of effort could I have made this in my kitchen myself? And if the answer is no to both of those then it's probably better to find something else.

J: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more Alexx . actually it's interesting that when you look a lot of gluten free products coz one of the great things about wheat and gluten is that it's like a high protein so when you're replacing it with gluten free flour they tend to have not have as much of protein and so actually gluten free products particularly stuff based on rice and so it spikes your blood sugar and cause all those kinds of problems, it doesn't have the gluten so it's not gonna cause those issues but it's gonna cause another problem kind of thing. So your filter is a really good one to look at when you're shopping that wheat.

A: So you finished up at Kellogg's obviously went on to do some wine making then of course a logical step but you came back to into food technology, was that on it?

J: I actually came back to Kellogg's enrolled for about 12 months and then I moved to Costa Islands.

A: Explain what it was like there.

J: Yeah I moved from cereal. Which is great fun and I want a piece of that chocolate. They actually make their own chocolate in Adelaide for all the chocolate products, so I actually learned how to make chocolate and they're one of the very few food manufacturers that still makes their own chocolate, most people outsource that to chocolate manufacturers. That was great fun, I had a really good time. I was really enjoying my job but I've just noticed I'll be out at parties and somebody's like oh what do you do and I'm like well you know I was developing tim-tams and they'd go oh wow. Eventually I find myself talking to the least healthy looking person generally, and he's super excited and really engaged and they know all this stuff about tim-tams and I was like something doesn't feel right. And the other thing was just how I started to feel in myself. Coz I've always been very fit, I'm a runner, I've done a marathon and even though I was still running a lot I just noticed that my waistline wasn't where I wanted to be. Part of the job would be have breakfast meetings where we'd be, like we need to taste 10 chocolate biscuits. Part of that job was to taste a lot of product, it just didn't feel right with me, the people that I was talking to that were big fans of the product weren't looking so great and I was like hang on something's not so great here. It took me a while but I just kind of realized that this wasn't a long term proposition for me like I didn't wanna be contributing to people's health in that way and to my own health in that way so I started to think about what else can I do. I always wanted to cook. I started a blog and I was kinda saying like maybe I could do this, turn it into a business and turn it into a career. And I didn't need to go and get a publishing deal or go down that traditional path maybe there was a different way. I'm so thankful to the internet coz it ended up there was a different way to do that and get into that career.

A: Fantastic. Maybe with tim-tams, just tell us a little bit about is it a flavor situation again in there, coz there's some pretty funky flavors out there, there's caramel, there's all sorts of flavors in that range, how did they get in there?

J: Yeas. Actually there's no flavors added into the actual biscuit base but there's colors. When I was working there actually were some artificial colors that were quite controversial added to the biscuit base and I just couldn't understand why they were ever there. Like we're using cocoa powder so we could have got whatever color that we wanted by changing the cocoa powder..





A: Hold on, are the colors cheaper than the cocoa powder? Did they allow you to use pressed cocoa powder?

J: It probably was just a lazy food technology kind of thing, if someone went oh I want this biscuit dark I'm just gonna add some red and some blue I'll make it brown that kind of thing. So when I was actually there we had a big project to get rid of the artificial colors and we had a directive of any new products we came up we had a label that contained colors and you have to be really mindful of trying to keep the flavors that we're using to a minimum as well. In tim-tams, the biscuits got, I haven't eaten a pack of tim-tams for a very long time, but in spite of this it would be on the packet that you'd be able to see, but even in the filling we were always using flavors in the fillings and the chocolate, they're actually made from real cocoa powder, and milk solids and sugar and all the good things, we would add vanilla but that's pretty traditional to add to chocolate anyway, so the chocolate was good, the rest of it not so good.

A: Did you ever come in contact with or talk about genetically modified ingredients in your time or was that not really being talked about yet as a controversial thing to have in a biscuit or a cereal...

J: Absolutely. Even when I was working for Kellogg's that was a huge thing because the legislation in Australia at the time was GM processed foods weren't allowed or if they were they had to be labeled. So Kellogg's stand was we didn't want to include any GM foods in our ingredients, in our products. And at the same time, Kellogg's had centralized their product development in the US, so we weren't doing a product development of our own, we're just getting whatever products were in the US, modifying them to make them a bit more Australian and then just most of the time we just ship them over from America. So I worked on trying to keep projects where we had to be really strict with them, and they actually had to change their formulas for us, and Europe is the same so they would be doing the same work for Europe. Just any product that had any soy in, they couldn't guarantee that it would be GM free so we had to get rid of any soy-based additive or ingredient in the product. It was a really hot topic and it cost Kellogg's Australia quite a bit more to have those specially formulated products. We made that decision for the Australian market, people would care so it was important to do that.

A: The time now where it doesn't need to be labeled per se, do you know where the products currently stand?

J: I have no idea. I did have a look up at the legislation, it does have to be labeled. Again, if you're concerned about GM look at the ingredients, it will tell you, I mean the information is there in the package.

A: I might even say, only because it's relevant right now for anyone who doesn't know how to find GM on the label, the only things that don't need to be labeled GM are the things that are so processed that they're nature identical to GM or non-GM counterparts or any oils or lecithin. So, soy lecithin is a really common one and so are all of the oils. So if you see soy bean oil, canola oil, corn oil, cotton seed oil, or sugar-based as well because the sugar is so refined that it's still the same looking in terms of profile under the microscope. So all of those things, like soft drinks which very often use sugar-based. They are or very highly likely because 80% of all of those crops in the world, if you look at the global picture of farming of those crops, GM, it's virtually impossible unless it's non-GM verified project with a label which really clearly states it's part of that organization who guarantees GM free or certified organic

A: Okay that was just an awesome little chat, it's really important for people to think about quite deeply, that there are hundreds of people in labs around trying to formulate things but actually, that's what I wanted to ask you about the biscuits. Can I ask you another question that we totally haven't prepared for? Let's see how we go. Bliss point, everyone talks about this bliss point and achieving that perfect feeling in the brain for like making you want another one and another one and another one, whether it's the texture, the flavor, combination of both, the sugar fat salt trio, did you guys ever work on that, did you know what that was, did you create products to create sensations for people or was it just flavor-testing and research that way.

J: It wasn't anything so highly organized. We would develop stuff that tasted good for us. If we want a target market what we think the target market would like and then we will test them with actual consumers. We just wanted stuff to taste as good as possible basically so people will keep buying it.





A: So where can we find you now, tell us a little bit of how people can connect with you.

J: Probably the best place is to come and check out the blog so it's thestonesoup.com and I put up a different article in mostly free recipes each week and it's coming up to my 10th blog birthday in December so there's a lot of recipes on there. The recipes on stonesoup mostly whole food stuff and really focused on simple and easy and quick, so it's all like mostly 5 ingredients per recipe and trying to cook stuff as quick as possible as well. So that's the best place and you're your usual social media [jules_stonesoup](#)...

