

Name of Interviewee: Garrett Oliver
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THERESA MCCULLA: It's August 17, 2022. This is Theresa McCulla of the National Museum of American History. I'm interviewing Garrett Oliver, Brewmaster of Brooklyn Brewery, in Brooklyn, New York. This interview is part of the American Brewing History Initiative, a project to document and collect the history of beer and brewing in the United States. So, Garrett, where and when were you born?

GARRETT OLIVER: I was born in the [00:00:30] summer of 1962, so I am 60 this year, in Queens, New York.

TM: And what are the names of your parents and any siblings?

GO: Alexander and Joyce Oliver were my parents and I have two brothers, Roger and Stephen, both of them younger than me.

TM: And what did your parents do when you were growing up?

GO: My father was, at first he went to RISD, Rhode Island School of Design, after he came out of the Korean War and [00:01:00] he applied his art training to advertising, first at Sudler & Hennessy and then later for the most of his career at the sort of great Madison Avenue firm, Young & Rubicam. So he designed all kinds of campaigns, some television, a lot of print, you know, all sorts of media. So he was a commercial artist, if you like. [00:01:30] But, you know, sometimes he'd be down in Mexico or out in California directing a TV commercial. Sometimes he'd be at home, you know, working on storyboards or whatever else. My mother was at first a homemaker but then later went to work for the New York Academy of Sciences, where she became Assistant Membership Director. So at the time, you know, pre-internet, the Academy of Sciences was the major linking point [00:02:00] for scientists worldwide, including in the Soviet bloc. There was not, you know, really a way for somebody to get easily in touch with anybody else or find another scientist, especially if they were in another country. And this was kind of a conduit for information. And I'm sure it still is to an extent, but I'm not sure it still has the importance that it had in those days. And my mother was instrumental in doing the member services and tracking the membership, [00:02:30] et cetera. So, you know, she was running a department.

TM: And that was during the Cold War?

GO: Yeah. I mean, you know, or at least, yeah, I mean up through the '90s, you know, still.

TM: I'm curious, did your dad, did he work with particular kinds of products in his career?

GO: Oh yeah, everything from, you know, everything from, from Golf, you know, Gulf Oil to, you know, ALPO dog food to, I mean like everything, all sorts of things. Later,

[00:03:00] facing fairly direct racism at work, he left Y&R to start his own firm, you know, which was moderately successful for a time, but in the end he wasn't really a businessman, you know, he was an artist, and I don't think ever really found the right blend of trying to be the creative and also run the company.

TM: Did you feel like his career as an artist [00:03:30] but also as an advertiser, did it impact you in your career in kind of a nascent way?

GO: Oh, I mean absolutely. I mean, our house was just completely suffused with art, artwork. And my father being kind of a cool hunter as anybody in advertising, especially in those days, if you watch *Madmen*, especially like the early days or rather the later days, I recognize everything. I mean everything. They designed - I mean, [00:04:00] I recognize, like, literally recognize rooms and things like that. They, they really did copy, you know, photos of what places like Y&R looked like and felt like. And that had a big impact on me. I never wanted to go into advertising, but I think the fact that I went - you know, I would've denied it at the time, but the fact that I went into film, you know, I'm sure, I mean I had a different aim of what I was going to do, but it was visual art [00:04:30] basically, was, was what I was doing. Yeah.

TM: Interesting. And at what point did he leave the firm and then start his new - his own firm?

GO: It would have been about 1979, '80. Yeah.

TM: And so what was it like growing up in the neighborhood where you were? What was the - your immediate blocks, or your experience as a kid there?

GO: It was a middle-class, quiet, suburban-ish—it was Hollis, New York—suburban-ish, [00:05:00] African American neighborhood. Transitioning, I think, at the time from being more mixed. You know, in these days you had, you know, white flight and so as a neighborhood turning browner, you know, white folks would move further out. They moved to Long Island or wherever else and the neighborhood became pretty much almost 100 percent [00:05:30] African American. But it was very sort of quiet, well maintained, but the local schools were not great, you know, them being largely African American schools, you know, they were deprived the resources.

TM: And then I'm curious also what you remember eating and drinking in your house when you were growing up?

GO: By and large we had what I would consider to be [00:06:00] a very typical, you know, American, with some New York thrown in, you know, diet. My mother was like a standard cook of her time, '60s. And so we had a pretty limited diet when I look at what, what I eat now versus what I ate then. You know, the supermarket, [00:06:30] people think they remember the supermarket even from, say, 1980 or something. You're my age and you think you remember the supermarket, but you absolutely do not. If you go back and look at what a supermarket looked like in 1980, it is shocking. I mean, there are no fresh vegetables, you know, there's almost no fruit. There's two kinds of bread, there's five kinds of cheese, there's one kind of beer, you know, it was very, very limited. A lot of stuff was [00:07:00] frozen and, you know, you were in what I referred to as the

Matrix. You were in a world of lies and concoctions and chemicals purported to you to be food and this is the way that, that my mother cooked. I mean she did the best she could. You know, we ate some things that we thought of as ethnic: chili con carne, as we called it, sometimes it'd be sloppy joes, sometimes it'd be just like liver and onions, [00:07:30] which we hated. We would very rarely get a steak or something. But ground beef was, was always there, chicken was always there, fish was there, though it always frozen. You know, nobody had ever heard of salmon, you know, there was no salmon. There was tuna fish in a can. All vegetables were frozen, except for iceberg lettuce. And so now, you know, if you went out and we would vary occasionally for special occasions, you know, go to a real [00:08:00] restaurant or we'd go get pizza or whatever else. Coming home on the bus, you know, I might stop off and get some *zeppole*. So you would be - you know, we had one Italian neighbor who would at Christmas time bring over *struffoli*, which we called honey balls. They were kind of a Christmas treat. So we had some exposure to, you know, sort of other cultures.

But I would say that we had standard American food, except for the fact that my father's [00:08:30] main hobby was hunting. And what he hunted was birds: Chukar partridge, quail and pheasant. And we had dogs. And I don't know exactly how this happened but my father had an entire social network which was all about hunting. And these people lived upstate, they lived, you know, in what was then the countryside of Long Island. We competed in hunting [00:09:00] contests and this was a milieu that was 100 percent white, except for my father, almost entirely working-class. These were guys who worked at, you know, as construction workers and they worked in canneries and whatever else. And my father was very good friends of a lot of folks like this, which is one of the things that kind of gave us a look into a completely different world with which, you know, we had nothing to do [00:09:30] otherwise. And my father was a very, very good cook. I think he learned from chefs in the Army how to make great sauces and, you know, et cetera. So he would only cook occasionally, like once every couple of months or something. But as kids we just, like, lost our minds, you know, over his food, which my mother did not find terribly amusing given the fact that she was, you know, preparing food for us three times a day, which we clearly didn't really appreciate.

TM: Alright. And was [00:10:00] beer present in your home or in your community?

GO: Not really. I mean, it was present like at a, you know, at a cookout, you know, my father drank, you know, uh, scotches, you know, blended scotches, like, you know, Cutty Sark and, and Chivas Regal and stuff like that. But I don't recall seeing beer really around the house. It was more like if we're hanging out in a backyard with, you know, uncles, et cetera, he might drink some beer, but he wasn't particularly, you know, [00:10:30] drawn to it.

TM: And do you remember which brands at the time?

GO: Oh, I mean, it would be whatever probably the hosts had, so Miller High Life was probably the one that we saw the most.

TM: And so then where did you go to school, to high school and college, and which subjects did you study?

GO: Well, started off in elementary school in the neighborhood I grew up in. When I got to sixth grade my parents decided [00:11:00] the schools weren't good enough and had me bused, you know, to a white neighborhood, where I finished out elementary school and then went to junior high school in Bayside [Elementary School], Marie Curie [Middle School] 158, which became important because, you know, I fell under the - I won't say sway, like he was a swami or something, but the benevolent, uh, influence of a [00:11:30] teacher named Daniel Deitch. And, you know, Daniel recognized that I had a keen interest in science and as a result, brought me into the science lab to help run it. And from there, I won some science awards, I had like a 95 to 100 average in science classes.

But interestingly, when it came time for high school, [00:12:00] I was never informed by anybody at the school of the existence of the math science high schools like Stuyvesant [High School], which require an exam to get in. And when I, you know, Mr. Deitch told me, you know, well you should be in Stuyvesant, you're like a brilliant science student and I'd never heard of Stuyvesant and I went to talk to the guidance counselors. And they just said, oh, Stuyvesant, it's not for somebody like you. And I had a 95 to 100 [00:12:30] average, you know. And so I ignored them, and went to take the Stuyvesant test, which I easily passed and ended up there. I had skipped first grade because my mother had taught me to read and by the time I was five and got into kindergarten I could read the *New York Times*. And so when I showed up at first grade they were actually angry that I could read because they didn't [00:13:00] have anything to teach me because I already knew everything. So they skipped me after two weeks directly to second grade from kindergarten. And then a few weeks into that they wanted to skip me to third grade. My mother refused that but, you know, there was a fish-out-of-water sort of circumstance, you know, the entire time until I got, you know, basically to high school, because it makes a big difference a year, you know, of age difference when you're younger. But going to Stuyvesant [00:13:30] definitely changed my life because it was the first time I'd been somewhere where, when you were at Stuyvesant, the normal high school rules of the way people were and the stuff they cared about really didn't apply. You know, these are people who later were going to go on to run the jet propulsion lab at NASA and whatever else, you know, the smartest people in the room. And I went from being the smartest person in every room to being middling at best. [00:14:00] But what was thrilling is that nobody cared about anything but two things. One, you know, were you really, really, really smart? And two, could you hold a conversation? That's it. Nobody cared whether you were good looking. They didn't care whether you could throw a football. In fact, if you were really good at sports, people would laugh at you. Like, why are you wasting your time with garbage? And so I found myself [00:14:30] in an element where finally it's like I understood everybody and they understood me. I was a nerd and everybody in there was nerds. And so, you know, high school was in that regard like really great. When I graduated there, I went to Boston University and graduated from their film school and that's what I intended to do. At the time, I ran all the entertainment for Boston University [00:15:00] in my last year. So we put on major concerts, like we had the Ramones, we had - I put on a concert where R.E.M. was the opening band for the English Beat in April of 1983. And so - and I was putting on bands every week, which I later did semi-, I won't call it professionally, but semi. Well to do it professionally. [00:15:30] And so, graduated with a film degree, which I quickly realized qualified me to

drive any color cab that I wanted, you know. [Chuckles] And a friend of mine, my best friend said hey, you know, I'm moving to England, you can get through this thing called the British Universities North American Club, BUNAC, you can get a work permit for these few countries, including England. And he was like, I'm going to move to England. And I was like, wow, that sounds really cool. I loved a lot of things [00:16:00] that came out of English culture. I was really into punk rock at the time. I was into all these different things, so I also moved to London. I mean, we didn't live together. We lived across town from each other. But it was when I got to England, you know I took up a job stage managing, you know, rock bands, but also my friends were taking me to the pub. And it was at the pub that I discovered this stuff called beer. Now, when I'd been at college, you know, we drank beer but we didn't actually [00:16:30] like it. It was just there, you know, we drank whatever there was and whatever we could afford. So I still remember that Tuesday's Kamikaze night at Molly's, you know, all these, like, we just drank whatever we could get our hands on. The beer we could normally afford—Knickerbocker, Mickey's Big Mouth, these kind of like old brands, Haffenreffer, also known as the Green Death—they were pretty awful and if we had any extra spending money [00:17:00] we would buy Budweiser. Because Budweiser at least tasted like water, like it didn't have really any flavor to mention. And we thought that was great. If we could find a bottle of Guinness we would take, you know, pints or bottles - I would take one bottle of Guinness and split it into four Budweisers to try to get some kind of flavor into it. And it was only when I arrived in England for the first time I had beer that was just [00:17:30] great by itself. It just didn't need anything. It was weird because it was cask-conditioned British beer, so it was kind of flat and kind of warm as far as I was concerned, and had all these extra flavors that I was unfamiliar with, but I almost instantly fell in love with it and even among my friends, became, you know, somewhat expert on it.

TM: And can I ask, so before - and I [00:18:00] want to hear about that for sure, to back up a little bit - your switch from your interest in science to filmmaking, how did that come about?

GO: I thought of filmmaking, as you know, science was always, I thought at one point when I was a kid, for a long time, that I might be a veterinarian and that, that was probably my main ambition until I was like 14, 15. But then we had kind of [00:18:30] got to the point in the family life when my dogs, you know, died over time and I kind of came to realize that, like, I was not emotionally prepared to deal with animals dying. And this was going to be, you know, an everyday part of being a veterinarian and I was like, you know, this is like much more serious than what I had realized that it is and I don't think I can actually deal [00:19:00] with it. And so, you know, I started to kind of turn my attention more to the artistic side of what I wanted to do.

And to me the part of film that interested me the most in some ways was technical and so I was like, I was good at production, I understand process, you know, and how to get a result from a [00:19:30] situation. So it's almost like designing an experiment in the lab. This is what we're going to do. This is how it's laid out. I used to watch my father do storyboards. This is how we are going to get from here, from A to B, to produce this result. And I kind of felt like, you know, mentally you could do the same thing around a

concert, you could do the same thing around a music video. So, you know, there was a certain mindset that was, that was structural [00:20:00], that, you know, that really had led me in that direction.

TM: And I see, I see the thread to beer, eventually, to brewing. So in what year did you go to London then?

GO: 1983.

TM: 1983, okay. And then was there, was there a first beer or a first place or a first kind of experience of this real beer, as you call it, that you can remember?

GO: I don't remember the name of the pub. It was within a couple of blocks of Victoria Station, you know, and I had flown into Gatwick, [00:20:30] and I was carrying a huge duffel bag. I didn't know where I was going to live. I just knew that like the next day I was going to - I had a thing to, you know, to go to a hostel and that I was going to go to the BUNAC office and start looking for, you know, a place to live, et cetera. But I'm like, okay, I just had my first, you know, international flight by myself, et cetera. Like I'm going straight to a place, I'm going to have a beer. And I went to a pub and they gave me a pint of you know, this, looks like the size of a fish bowl, you know, [00:21:00] of amber liquid. I'd never seen a beer that color before. And, I tasted it and was like, it's kind of warm, it's kind of flat. And then there are all these waves of like fruit flavors, straw flavors, hay flavors, floral flavors. And I got to the bottom of it and I was like, I don't know if I like that, I better have another one to find out. And that was the first pint of like, you know, real beer I ever had. Except for Guinness, which I did start drinking probably when I was 16. Nobody asked too many questions [00:21:30] back then. If you had a little fuzzy mustache, that was good enough and I drank at an old, well known bar at that time called Chumley's. I was a regular and we drank Guinness.

TM: All right, great. And then was also the experience of being in the pub different from your - from being in the States, in a way?

GO: Oh yeah. I mean the pub, you know, the pub bears, I mean you probably know those but you know, the pub bears little resemble into any American institution or [00:22:00] bar. You might find somewhere here and there an American place that really feels like a pub. But it's kind of hard. I mean, like, you can physically recreate the space, but what you can't recreate is the kind of mindset that surrounds the pub. The pub is basically a state of mind rather than - and in British English you would say like, "I'm going down the pub." And that would be a normal thing to [00:22:30] say and it doesn't matter which pub it is, you're just going down to the pub, like, "I'm off to the pub." You would never, as an American say, "I'm going to the bar," people would say, "What bar?" right? But, you know, so the bar is not a state of mind, the pub is a state of mind and a state of being. And so it's a very, very different place and I just found it spectacular.

TM: And would you mind talking a little bit about what the state of being is? What is that?

GO: I mean, you know, a place where nobody is asking [00:23:00] you - I mean, it literally is the pub, you know, means public house and it literally is like, when you were

there, it's essentially your home. If you decide to sit there for an hour with your pint, no one's going to come and read the newspaper. No one's going to come bother you. They're not going to say, hey, you're occupying this seat for a long time, aren't you going to get another drink, whatever else. You had to go to the bar. There was no table service, and you kind of made your own atmosphere. Often, there was no [00:23:30] music. It was just a completely different place where I was like, wow.

And I paid very close attention to the quality of the beer and we would decide where we were going to be, where we were going to stay, depending on the beer quality. I mean, it mattered whether we liked the room, but really the cask-conditioned beer, it needed to be kept properly. And if the pints were what we called spot-on, like they're just, you know, banging, absolutely happening, then we were definitely not moving, [00:24:00] like, that is the place we're going to stay all night. And you'd start very early because the pubs shut by 10:30, 11. So, you know, by 5:30, 6 o'clock, you were already at the pub. And so, you know that whole thing of the quality of the beer being important and being kind of the center of your evening—you might not spend much time talking about it, but nobody in my friend group was really going to put up with beer that wasn't good. We would just move. It's like, [00:24:30] there was a pub virtually at every corner and if you didn't find what you were looking for, it's like, we're out of here.

TM: And so then what was the, the process like for, kind of, for learning more about beer in England and then traveling elsewhere and developing this knowledge and passion?

GO: Well, I mean, there were so many pubs and so many breweries, you know we were used to a world where there was basically one kind of beer, pretty much, and then there were a bunch of different names. One was slightly better than another, but it was yellow, it was fizzy [00:25:00] and it either tasted kind of crappy or it tasted like water and there wasn't that much going on. But you had things like Batemans, that tasted kind of like banana bread. You had the almost austere severity of Young's at the time. You had Fuller's who were kind of more full-bodied you know, and, and fruity. If you could find it, you got Adnams which had all these, you know, almost like a sea air kind of [00:25:30] salinity, you know, coming, through it. So, Samuel Smiths, which had this great toffee-ish earthy, quality. And so, you know, the pubs would be branded, of course, you know, with the names of the breweries. Then I came to know, you know, their beers. I found the names of the beers to be really entertaining. I remember Samuel Smith's had a beer called Nourishing Strong Stout. I was like, wow that sounds, you know, that sounds *awesome*, Nourishing Strong [00:26:00] Stout. And so, you know, within, you know, six months or so my friends would look to me to say, okay, like, where should we go drinking? I have a - still have a great friend, you know, John, who took me around knowing, seeing that I was really into it and he would take me, he was like, okay, the beer at this place is like very good, the publican knows what he's doing, and they would take me around and I was really [00:26:30] focused on it.

TM: Great. And so what was your path eventually back to the States and to beer?

GO: Well my, you know, the work permit, you know, ran out, and so I had to come back. And I got back and when I went to the bars they said Bud Light, you know, [Chuckles] Bud, Bud Light, Miller, Miller Lite, Coors, Coors Light, and Heineken. And I was like,

oh no, and I, you know, complained bitterly. [00:27:00] And then November 9 of 1984, I was at the opening for Manhattan Brewing Company. So Mark Witty, you know, who had been the, you know, quality manager, assistant brewmaster for Samuel Smith's, had moved, you know, from England to New York to start a brewery that did cask-conditioned-type British beer on the hand pump. And to me this was a [00:27:30] miracle because I mean, finally I could get some beer again, you know, I don't remember exactly which month I moved back. I think it was like September or October and it was months without anything that I really wanted to drink until finally this place. And it was enormous. The floors were covered in sawdust and, you know, the pints were the British-style pints, that size and type, and he was brewing beers that were really based upon the beers that he had been brewing at Samuel Smith's, and they were terrific. So I started looking [00:28:00] at that, but that was the only place I could get a decent beer. I couldn't buy this in a, you know, in a supermarket or something. And then, so over that Christmas, you know, the same best friend who had been with - you know in England at the same time that I was, bought me a homebrewing kit for Christmas. I have most of the homebrewing kit sitting over there because it just got returned from the museum [Museum of Food and Drink] exhibit. And it had the regular stuff from those days. It was a glass carboy and glass fermentation lock and a copy of Charlie Papazian's *Complete Joy of Home Brewing*, and I started making beer at home. And I started making beer at home not because I was interested in making beer. I had no interest in making beer. I was interested in having beer and the only way to have the beer was to make it yourself. And the same would have been true back then in most neighborhoods—if you wanted a real loaf of bread and, you know, you had been to [00:29:00] France and you had real bread, you know, this was the way to get it. You had to learn how to make bread.

And although I might have hated Ronald Reagan, but one thing that he did was when he deregulated the airlines, there was a knock-on effect, you know, which is that the prices for airline tickets overseas dropped precipitously and the average American was able to, say, take a modest vacation in some place like [00:29:30] Paris. And, you know, it had the same effect on almost everybody that it had it on me. You know, I mean the food in England was pretty terrible. But when I got to, to Paris, you know, and I spent, actually at the end, you know, the middle to the end, kind of the end of my time, you know, in England, I got an Inter Rail Pass which was different than the Eurail Pass because the Inter Rail Pass was one you could only get if you were a European resident, which I was officially. And therefore [00:30:00] I got the pass that would take me into the Communist countries which the Eurail Pass would not. And so I went to Czechoslovakia, I went to Hungary, I went to East Germany, I went through Germany, Belgium, and France, made this grand, month-long swing.

And so, you know, I get to Germany and I see these tall glasses of Weissbier. I'm like, I don't know what that is, but I certainly have to try it. I had Lambics for the first time in [00:30:30] Belgium, you know, and I'm going and discovering that all these different countries have different beer. There were cheese shops like in France. I had never even heard of a cheese--, the idea of a cheese shop in 1984. I remember there was a *Saturday Night Live* episode where what the sketch was that this guy was running a Scotch tape store and the idea of a cheese shop would have been almost exactly the same as a Scotch tape store. There were five cheeses. How could you possibly have a cheese shop?

The idea was ridiculous. And I go in [00:31:00] there and there were these things covered in mold and they have smells and whatever else. We were used to Cracker Barrel cheddar, you know, there was American cheese that was, you know, Polly-O ricotta, you know, there was not even goat cheese or something. I mean, you know, we had nothing. And I started to realize what I kind of, you know, the Matrix - it's like I took the red pill and I realized that, you know, most of the food life that I had lived in the United States was just a [00:31:30] lie, it was all lies. You know, the bread that I was eating wasn't bread. The cheese that I was eating wasn't cheese. The beer that I was drinking wasn't beer. And I went to Europe and I discovered, you know, this whole thing. Now, other people, Alice Waters on down, had the same experience in the '70s or early '80s, went back to California, and started the California food movement. As I'm sure you've heard from a great many of the people you've interviewed, [00:32:00] you hear the same story over and over again. It's like, I went to Europe. Oh my God, I came back, I started doing this thing. And so my story really isn't much different than any of those, except for the part—and many others have a similar story—where, like, I actually lived there and got ingrained with it. So when I got back I started homebrewing and took a liking to it. [00:32:30] And then I started doing beer classes.

TM: So I wanted to ask really quick, so you mentioned you had Charlie Papazian's book.

GO: Yes.

TM: Did you use - were there other books or were there homebrew shops or clubs that where you learned about brewing?

GO: There was Fred Eckhardt's book, which I also had. Charlie's book was the main kind of bible of the day. But, you know, I found of course this is way pre-internet, so there [00:33:00] wasn't really a great way to get a lot of information. I don't remember when *Zymurgy* first appeared, but, you know, I started to get that in. But what, the main thing that happened was I met this guy named Morgan Wright, and Morgan was an optician who came to one of the classes that I had started teaching about beer at what was called Peter Kump's [New York] Cooking School. These days it's called [00:33:30] The Institute [of] Culinary Education. And actually, it's the other way around. I went to his - he had a beer class and I went to his beer class. And then he told me that he was planning to start a homebrewing club and that this homebrewing club was starting up.

And so I guess it would have been like 1985, the first meeting of the New York City Homebrewers Guild [00:34:00] happened. And it took place on Governor's Island, which at the time was a closed Coast Guard facility. So the president, the first president of the Homebrewers Guild, was a Coast Guardsman. And so we were able, through him giving us a special pass, to go and have this meeting on Governor's Island, which was very exotic [00:34:30] back then because like nobody could go to Governor's Island. And we had our first meeting there and eventually settled into having meetings largely in the East Village here in New York. And people would bring their beers, and that's when I actually found a community around making beer and being able to swap recipes, and we got outside of just the book learning.

I was also [00:35:00] still constantly traveling. So I would go back to England all the

time and I would buy kits and I would buy yeast. You could literally go to Boots, which is, you know, I don't know if you're familiar, but they are a big, they call it chemist, it's a pharmacy, but they had a whole homebrewing section. And so the Boots yeast was much, dried yeast, was much better than anything the you could get because homebrewing was pretty big, you know, in the [00:35:30] UK. And I would bring back yeast, not just for myself but even for the other club members because they'd had my beers and they were like, wow, you know, your yeast character is great, it produces a very fruity kind of British style-ale, whereas that was hard to get. Back in those days we had really only dry yeast that you get your hands on. And so, yeah, I mean eventually I became President of the New York City Homebrewers Guild and ran it for some years. We had a newsletter called [00:36:00] "The Written Wort," which we thought was very clever. And, you know, the club grew to be well over 100 members. We had, we had big competitions and things like that. In the latter part of those days, not only did Mark Witty sometimes judge our homebrewing competitions, so did Phil Markowski, who had started [00:36:30] at New England Brew[ing Company]. And I think the last year that I was still a homebrewer, he actually came as a professional brewer and judged with us. He is one of the few that I know personally, who's been around longer than me.

TM: And so as you were learning and improving your brewing, what would you say were the most challenging aspects to learn? And then what were the most pleasurable parts of brewing?

GO: The [00:37:00] challenging aspects, I mean there were things that were physically challenging—finding enough bottles and cleaning them up, you know, for, you know, for your bottling procedure, you know, and stuff like that. But I think that an advantage that I had is the fact that I had traveled. I had had a lot of these beer styles. They were not widely sold in New York, you know, but I was willing to search them out. And I remember beers that are now long gone, even in England, [00:37:30] I mean you used to sell beers like Tolly Cobbold, just really old school British beers in New York. And I - one thing I do have, I think, is a very good memory for flavor. I can remember something that I ate somewhere, you know, 40 years ago, like it was yesterday, like every part of it, like, it was a picture in a frame in front of me. I may not remember the name of somebody I met yesterday, but I do remember [Laughs], I do remember that and I have a very [00:38:00] like fixated idea for flavor. So, you know, I think that that served me later because I could literally put that flavor memory in front of myself and look to go in that direction and I would remember exactly what it tasted like and smelled like. And this is kind of a weird aside, but believe it or not, this is way before obviously 9/11 or whatever else, courier companies like DHL, [00:38:30] they needed, you know, they would hire freelance couriers. So I was able, and most of my friends were artists, you know, I was like bouncing around from here to there. I worked largely at HBO, but I could get time off suddenly and they would allow you to fly for free. But the way that it worked is that basically you carried only carry-on luggage and they would have like two huge sacks of mail [00:39:00] that were going overnight, say, to England. That was your luggage. They would put it in as your luggage. You would just carry a manifest of what was in there. When you got to the other end you had to go to the customs office, you hand the manifest over. I guess they looked in the bags and then they just let you go. So I would go back to England two or three times a year, which meant that as somebody in

their twenties, in their early twenties who didn't really have any money, I could keep going back and, you know, [00:39:30] like kind of re-upping my memory of like what these beers were like. You know, which became important for my being able to reproduce beers and these types of styles later.

TM: Right. And you brought yeast back I'm assuming?

GO: Brought yeast back and everything else. Yeah. And so, in the days when we were, we had the homebrewing club and I was there, I first met, the beer writer, Michael Jackson. And, [00:40:00] over time, you know, he became a very good friend of mine and a really great influence.

TM: And so then how did you come to work in beer?

GO: So, 1989 I went to see Mark Witty about something or other, you know, having to do with our homebrewing club and I'm like, oh how's it going? And he's like, well, things are a bit rough right now, because my assistant just left. And by that time I was working in a [00:40:30] law office. I had taken it at first as a temp job, but I had converted it into a job job. I wore basically a suit to work every day. I worked for a major law firm. I worked in the managing attorney's office. I ran a thing called Managing Attorney 2000. Gives you some idea of how, like, ooh, it's futuristic. And it was like an Intranet, you know, that told all of the hundreds of attorneys at Rogers & [00:41:00] Wells where they need to be at any given time. So if somebody filed a motion, you would have, fifteen days later, last day to answer this motion will be on this day and we'd send out the notices and everybody had like a calendar in the computer. Which was futuristic at the time. And that's what I did. And so I had a window office on the 52nd floor. You know, I liked my boss, you know, I would occasionally take off and go to England and he was fine with that and everything was good. And Mark Witty [00:41:30] says my assistant just left. And I virtually grabbed him by the collar and said I have to have that job. And so a couple of weeks later, I've gone, my income has dropped 75 percent. It's July, there's no air conditioning, and I'm in a room full of boiling liquid. A few weeks later, you know, I had an accident and burned several square inches of skin off my left arm. [00:42:00] I still have kind of a scar, you know, over here.

And at first I have to say, like I thought maybe I had made a really dreadful mistake. I had a degree in film, I had worked in an office, people paid me a lot of money. Now, I was working for a fraction of that money and I was essentially a janitor and a plumber, et cetera. But over time, you know, I really [00:42:30] came to love the work. And being able -- and it was a brewpub, in a way, I mean the brewery was upstairs, but to go downstairs and just actually see people enjoying what you just did was like a brand new thing. And I really think that there's nothing quite like it except for like being a chef or maybe I have friends who are in fairly major bands, like, [00:43:00] you're with them and you're in a supermarket and, you know, their song comes on and, you know, it's kind of a thing.

And so it was really, you know, very special. Eventually - we brewed mostly British style beers. Among the things we did brew though, is we started, based on Michael Jackson's work, to start to brew like traditional versions of things like Old Ale and IPA. [00:43:30]

So we were brewing 6.5 percent, you know, very bitter, highly dry-hopped, you know, IPAs, you know, in like 1990, 1991. And there were almost none of those, certainly there were none in England or maybe one or two. And so, you know, that was a very early influence. And then Mark moved on. Oh, do you have another question?

TM: [00:44:00] No, no, go ahead.

GO: And then Mark moved to California and I became head brewer beginning of '93. And so, you know, I started to make some changes. We branched out into, you know, into other styles. We started to brew Weissbier for example and had a tank that we - an enclosed tank. What I was doing was open fermentation, so it was, you know, [00:44:30] British-style open fermentation. We collected the yeast from the surface. It was very zen. But, you know, started to do more things that were outside of the overall British milieu. Not that we had done nothing before. I mean, I remember making Oktoberfest, which was my first professional recipe under Mark's watch. But, you know, now it was mine. There was a period in there, you know, of nine months where the brewery closed and some [00:45:00] pieces were taken out. I was rehired by new ownership to keep going. And I'm trying to remember exactly, you know, in between what period that was, but, kind of rebuilt some parts of the brewery. Then the plan was, well at a certain point in 1994, I found out that the owner of [00:45:30] Manhattan Brewing Company had canceled everyone's health insurance without telling them, which is a felony. So I was like, I need to move on. I was talking to David Bruce, who had come to me, famous - you know, you probably know who he is, of Bruce's Brewery. I knew his breweries, I knew his beer. And he wanted me to come with him and his investors and buy Manhattan Brewing Company and open up a string of brewpubs [00:46:00]. So this became my plan. I quit Manhattan Brewing Company. Well, there was a period where this was - I was working on this with David. And then Steve Hindy came to me, and I knew him through the homebrewing circuit, and said that he wanted me to come Brooklyn Brewery. At the time we didn't have a brewery. And I'm like, well there's no brewery for me to work at, it's contract brew. And he said, well, you know, you'd [00:46:30] be coming over to build the brewery. And, you know, over time he talked me into this idea. And I talked to the guys who were going to invest in doing this brewpub chain to instead invest in Brooklyn Brewery. So when I came to Brooklyn Brewery in '94, I came with a few things. I came with the recipe for Black Chocolate Stout, which I brewed on July 4 of 1994, a day when [00:47:00] the brewery was closed. I clandestinely brewed, you know, this kind of as an example to Steve and Tom, you know, the owners of Brooklyn Brewery at the time, what I would do for, you know, our holiday beer. And they said that's it, you've got to come over and do this with us. And so kind of, I came on, I think officially in September of '9-, you know, of '94 it was the fall anyway. And the first project [00:47:30] was Black Chocolate Stout which we brewed, ten percent imperial stout, brewed at F.X. Matt in Utica. And, and believe you me, it was a, you know, it was a whole, like, different experience. This was a 500-barrel kettle. It was a full, rigged system. Brooklyn Brewery already had a brewmaster named Bill Molar, who was like an old line brewer, had [00:48:00] worked for these grand old breweries, but this was my recipe. So we kind of had an uneasy but respectful relationship there. And then brewing in somebody else's plant. But we brewed Black Chocolate Stout and it became a sensation. It was all sold out within two weeks.

TM: And so when you, when you were at Manhattan Brewing Company and then during your years there and as you came to Brooklyn, were you first - would you say you were first doing English styles [00:48:30] primarily, and then began to develop your own styles or recipes?

GO: Yeah, I would say that certainly that's where we started. 1995 was East India Pale Ale, based on again, original books and also Michael's work. But I have books from the 1840s and really kind of like reproducing stuff that, you know, no one had seen before. By the late '90s we were brewing Belgian styles where nobody did. [00:49:00] And whether this is true or not, I'm told by British beer historians that it's true, in 1997, you know, we became the first brewery in the world to do collaborations. And, the first one was with Brakspear, at Henley-on-Thames. And, you know, this was like a brand new [00:49:30] idea but I was used to going back and forth. In England I was really into these beers. I wanted - and the idea of me brewing in a British brewery was, like very important to me.

So, you know, I went over and did this and we brewed this great beer. That brewery, the physical site was sold before their brewmaster could come and brew with us. But from there we went on to a series of brewing with foreign brewers, [00:50:00] either here or there or both. So J.W. Lees, La Chouffe, you know, all these various people. The - I'm trying to remember the name of the brewery. I'm remembering the pub, Fat Cat, in England, in Sheffield. This is an interesting story. So Dave Wickett. [00:50:30] And, I just had a brain fart. But Dave Wickett owned a pub in Rochester, New York. In my Manhattan Brewing Company days, he used to come down and we would make cask beer for him. In 2004, out of the blue, having not heard from him for many years, I got a call and said, hey, this is Dave Wickett, how are you doing? Like, great. I was like, how are things Dave? He was like, [00:51:00] well, they're really busy since we won Champion Beer of Britain. And I'm like, what are you talking about? He was like, we just won Champion Beer of Britain at the Great British Beer Festival. And I said, I know I actually sat final panel, you know, I was one of the six people to choose Champion Beer of Britain. He said yeah, well, Kelham Island and Pale Rider. I was like, what does that have to do with you? He was like, I own it. I had no idea that this guy not only owned kind of a British beer pub in Rochester, New York, for which I used to provide [00:51:30] cask beer, but he also owned a brewery in Sheffield, England.

And by that time I had, you know, become within the Campaign for Real Ale, I was one of the people who, you know, was the top of like this tasting tier where, you know, I went on to judge Champion Beer of Britain seven times. And Michael Jackson was instrumental in getting me into that room, because certainly at the time [00:52:00] people - I mean, no Black person had ever been seen in those rooms. I was a young man. They had no idea like who I was and Michael stood for my bona fides in that situation until folks like Roger Protz, et cetera, came to know me and trusted I knew what I was talking about. And for me to be judging in the early 2000s, Champion Beer of Britain was just really an extraordinary, you know, an extraordinary thing.

But anyway, as Michael used to say, I digress. [Chuckles] [00:52:30] So I became good friends with him. I brewed at Kelham Island. Through him I met his then business partner

at the Thornbridge Brewery, who are, unfortunately, Dave Wickett, passed about ten years ago. But the guys from Thornbridge are still very good friends of mine, who I see like every year, et cetera. And so the whole idea of [00:53:00] the collaboration, you know, being something that grew into or out of friendships that were real was like a real thing for me. Like, brewing with Hans-Peter Drexel from Schneider [Bräu], and we brewed the *Hopfen-Weisse*, which was probably the most famous of our collaborations. But me and my family and him and his family went on vacation together in Italy. I mean this was not like a casual thing, it was real.

TM: And [00:53:30] so when you, when you do a collaboration and I'm sure it's changed over time, how does that work with two people, two sets of ideas? Is it that someone has a concept, the other person suggests ingredients, or what's the kind of nitty-gritty of it?

GO: There's all kinds of ways that it can, that it can work. But I mean I find that the most fruitful collaborations, the best ones, are when you end up doing something that neither of you would have [00:54:00] or could have done by yourselves. I find the whole thing of, hey, here we are, we took a photo, and we made a hazy IPA, we're here with our buds and you have, you know, everybody's 27, they all come from the same cultural background, they all have the same beard and tattoos. And I'm kind of like, this is not a collaboration, this is just a recipe and a photo op. Like the most recent collaboration that we did was with Vinny Cilurzo of [00:54:30] Russian River and we've been talking about doing this beer for ten years. And he took the coolship wort that, you know, came from his coolship in Windsor. Shipped all 30 barrels in IBC totes across the country at 52 degrees. We brewed a very similar wort here, but ten times as much. We blended his wort, not quite fermenting into our wort and barrel-fermented it here so that it's 100 percent Sonoma County, you know, [00:55:00] microbiology, but 90 percent brewing and entirely finished, fermented, re-fermented in the bottle here in Brooklyn. That's a collaboration. You know, I couldn't do that beer without him and it would've been very different, you know, without me. And this is an expression of our friendship and the things that we love and the places that we've been, and the kind of work we want to do.

TM: What's that beer called?

GO: It's called Refraction.

TM: Refraction.

GO: The original name that we had for it [00:55:31] was the Sonoma Louvers. Because I had this very, almost filmic idea of the louvers were open in, in his coolship room and the wind would blow in through the louvers. And so if like the wind blew in through the louvers, but the breeze exited in Brooklyn, like through a wormhole, you know. And so for years we called this the Sonoma Louvers. But I think the sales staff were like, the Sonoma Louvers? So it became Refraction because of the names of course, like [00:56:00] Intinction, you know, Beatification, that they have. But also the idea that this beer was like Russian River refracted through a Brooklyn lens and it comes out as a rainbow on the other side. And so, you know, that was kind of the idea, you know, for the name.

TM: Either ideas I think would make for good label art.

GO: Oh yeah.

TM: I can imagine, but so. Well, and you know, your description of your - the first part of your career, which has been so long, [00:56:30] it's been very global, of course. Which is interesting because, you know, I talk to so many microbrewers or craft brewers who think of microbrewing and craft brewing as a very American thing and an American idea and you know this, this effort to kind of build an American - or revive the American beer industry. So I'm curious when you were starting out at Manhattan Beer Company, did you feel kind of oriented really toward English beer or was it Michael Jackson, or were [00:57:00] you aware that - did you feel like you were part of a kind of American microbrewing movement that was starting?

GO: I didn't feel like I was part of that, but I think that we certainly had a pretty well founded inferiority complex versus Europe. And so in 1994, in my last days, you know, as brewmaster of Manhattan Brewing Company, I went over to speak at a conference, you know, in London, an IPA conference. [00:57:30] I still have the program and everything else. You know, I put it on Instagram a while back, people found it fascinating, and all the great brewers of England were there, you know, it was at The Porter Tun Room, Whitbread Porter Tun Room in London, and I brought over a keg of our IPA, which was called Rough Draft. And it was this, you know, bitter, 6.5 percent pale, dry-hopped IPA. [00:58:00] And I spoke on the history of IPA, you know, in England in 1994 in front of these brewers. And they tasted, you know, the beer and they said, well that's very interesting and sort of funny, but no one's ever going to drink something like that. Of course, within a few years they were all starting to brew IPA in the original style. So, you know, as I traveled around I got a chance to see, you know, [00:58:30] the American brewing movement starts to move away from the European base. And then as I traveled further, you know, it became almost like time travel, you know, say in 2010, you know, I would go to Japan and I would find that in Japan it was 1993, you know, for their evolution of the beer. And then you go to Brazil and they'd be in [00:59:00] a different year. And you go to Italy and they would be in 2040 and in 1995 at the same time somehow. But we almost knew what was going to happen in these countries before it happened. Like we had already done the time travel and could say, well I know what's going to happen in your future. So when I proposed, you know, a beer collaboration to the guys at Thornbridge, I said we're [00:59:30] going to take from a natural cider maker a set of wild yeast from their lees and the sediments from their barrels. We're going to add it to this Belgian-style type beer that we make, which we'll brew in England, and then the wild yeast will take it over, and we will end up with something like this. And I had 5, 6, 7 examples. And the guys at Thornbridge, they said, this is brilliant, it's really beautiful stuff. But I mean, frankly, the British market isn't really ready for something like this. [01:00:00] And I said yeah, but this is going to take like a year and a half. And by the time, you know, by the time this beer actually comes out, you will have moved as a market into the pathway and we will land in the sweet spot. And I said but look, you know, I'll - there will be about 1,600 cases and we can prorate it. So if at the time you only want 300 cases then we'll take, you know, the other 1,300 [01:00:30] cases and we'll prorate the costs and you'll only pay for, you know, the beer

that you actually want and that you feel you could sell. When the beer was ready a year and a half later I asked them, so how many cases do you guys want? And they're like, we want all 1,600 cases. [Laughing] And they're like, how many cases do you want? And of course we just split it in half. But it was true, like, I could see the arc of British brewing, which had accelerated and was moving towards natural, interesting fermentation, which, [01:01:00] they weren't there yet, but I knew they were going to arrive there and I could see when they would get there.

TM: I'm sure it varies by place, by culture, but how do you think influence travels globally? Is it someone bringing a beer from one place to another? Is it collaborations? Is it kind of the top level down, you know, distributors are bringing different things into different places?

GO: I think it all has effects. I mean, you wouldn't have people brewing the so-called Italian Pilsner style in the United States if B. United [01:01:30] had not, you know, brought their Italian program back, what, ten, more than ten years ago. And I actually introduced that program before anybody had it at National Geographic, because I used to do National Geographic Live when Michael gave it up. We would do 300, 350, 400 people, you know, Nat Geo Live in DC, you know, and did that for quite a few years and that was, you know, one year, you know, we did like the craft beers of Italy and nobody [01:02:00] had heard of them before and we just like blew everybody away.

So importers matter, travel matters, you know now I kind of feel like we are, you know, I mean I've been out there saying some things, some of which have been misinterpreted. I have no problem with hazy IPAs. I drink them all the time. I like them when they're well made. I did not expect them to grow to have [01:02:30] this kind of hegemony that they have. And what I find regrettable right now is that there is, you know, a kind of parochialism that has crept into craft beer. And IPA now is kind of what Chardonnay and Merlot were in 1998. You know, you go into a bar and you ask, I'll have a Chardonnay, I'll have a Merlot. And Chardonnay is white wine and Merlot is red wine and they were the only two grapes that anybody knew [01:03:00] and they would ask for them literally by name, just to get. And now a lot of people think that craft beer is IPA. We started craft beer in order to have variety, and the variety has actually been driven out of the market. And many of the great beers that we cut our teeth on are, are barely available. I mean, you know, Duvel used to be on every decent restaurant list everywhere in the city. You could buy it literally at a bodega and now you can't find these Belgian beers. [01:03:30] Everything is out of style that's not American, you know, and I think that's really unfortunate. Because I think a lot of people are kind of losing that range of variety. It's like deciding that you're only going to play hot jazz and it's like, well, like, hot jazz is great but like, you, there's a lot of other music, you know. [Laughs]

TM: And why do you think - what can - what is the reason for the meteoric rise of IPA and hazy IPA?

GO: I think it's a confluence of a number of different things. It is [01:04:00] people who have gotten into, you know, the industry you know with no memory of a time when we didn't have variety. And so they are joining a club and this is a way of being in the club. And then social media, which has helped really stamp a visual style, you know, onto

everything. And you know [01:04:30] you really have craft beer following fashion in a way. And they don't think of it as fashion, but it is fashion. It's the same as a hem line moving up and down or, you know, ties getting skinny or wider. Even, you know, take something like the, the Teku glass or the Ice Man Pour you know, where you pour to like - these things had their fashion and they're already gone. Like I haven't seen anybody pour - remember the foamless pour up to the edge of the glass? That was like a year [01:05:00] and a half, every Instagram photo was poured up to the edge. It's gone. People have thought, well this is the way it is and then a year and a half later, that's not the way that it is. Fashions run through in yeast strains. For a while it was Chico all the way, you know, we had to have this very linear kind of thing. And you hung the hops atop of it, and then two or three years later everybody wants like Burton, you know, London III, fruity, et cetera. And so now I think that in the [01:05:30] United States the trajectory to some extent is not predictable because, you know, I think that there are outside influences and then you also have people who are like 25 and they simply, things that were meaningful to me are not meaningful to them. For example, refermentation in the bottle, that presentation, you know, the big bottle, you know, the cork. And we got to a point where people were like, well, I can't drink it by myself. It's like, it's nine percent, [01:06:00] it's a big bottle. I can't drink it by myself. And I was like what the hell is wrong with you? Why would you want to drink it by yourself? Don't you have any friends? And the answer is no. [Laughter] Like no they don't have any friends, and they don't have people they're spending time with. And the idea of drinking this as being a solo activity, you know, you want, you know, a 16-ounce or 19.2-ounce can of eight-percent IPA that you intend to drink by yourself. And I'm like, wow, [01:06:30] that is really kind of sad, you know.

TM: Yeah it's also, there's a bit of a tension between that but the influence of social media and purportedly you are on social media to, to show others what you're doing, to communicate with others, but.

GO: Well, but you kind of come to realize that because you're engaged in fashion, there are things that you can do. There are things that I can do that would be horrid for a younger brewer to do. There are things that they can do that I can't do or won't be accepted. [01:07:00] I mean, we've had people leave us, go to the great hazy IPA breweries, and then come back to work for us. We know all their recipes, we know all the procedures. We can do this all day, everyday. But even if I were to make - and I think it's a great beer, say, I were to make, you know, Trillium [Brewing Co.] or Tree House [Brewing Co.] or [WeldWerks Brewing Co.] Juicy Bits and I were to make it exactly the same and I say, here it is, [unintelligible]. [01:07:30] No one is going to wait in line to get that beer from us at Brooklyn Brewery. The beer doesn't really even matter anymore. You know, what people are consuming is the brand, you know. And so, to remain, to have your beer remain interesting, relevant, you kind of have to follow your own star. Because it's like I can't show up now as the cool kid because I [01:08:00] am 60, you know, and no matter what I do, no matter what this tastes like, no one is going to do that. However, there are things that I can do that other people can't do. And I think that as you grow into the elder statesman role, if you like, you know, and you have some gravitas that you can bring to things, you're better served by leaning in that direction. And we, we brew hazy IPA and we really [01:08:30] enjoy it and it sells well, but it's just not going to

be that thing.

TM: You're still pretty cool, honestly, so. [Laughter] And so if you had to describe the Brooklyn Brewery brand, what is that and how has it changed over time?

GO: I think that we project our culture here, which is not parochial, which is worldwide, which is, stretches its culture everywhere because we brought everywhere into, you know, into this place, [01:09:00] you know, New York City, you know. New York City in like 1880 would've had the most interesting beer culture in the whole world. There were so many IPA breweries in New York City that there was a New York Burtonizing company that existed just to sell brewing salts to Pale Ale and IPA brewers. We had brewers that made sour beers, we had brewers that made nothing but Weissbier, you know. As you know well, we had forty-eight breweries in Brooklyn. They made 15 percent or so of all the beer in the United States. [01:09:30] We also had heavy import of all the great other beers of the day, whether the Guinness, Bass, whatever else.

If you had gone to England or gone to Germany or gone to Belgium, you would have seen none of this. They had their beer and nobody else's. We had everybody else's, not everybody else's, but a lot of other people's beers, plus this very wide range and that blend of both the lager traditions and the sort of British ale tradition. [01:10:00] So, you know, I kind of think of Brooklyn culturally as being that classical melting pot and that we have, you know, taken it in and then pushed it back out. We were already making Saisons in the late '90s. You know, we beat Hoegaarden at the World Beer Cup in the Witbier category in 2000, you know. So these are things that, like, these were barely known styles [01:10:30] and we would arrive first because we were already familiar.

We also at the time had an import arm, not import arm, but a distribution arm that sold 200-plus beers. So we had these beers readily available, all of Trappist and everything else. We had an office across the street where I could just go grab them. So the Brooklyn style, really, from a kind of cultural point of view, I call it kinetic optimism. You know, it's, [01:11:00] it's bright, it's optimistic. And we genuinely believe that in what we do, in a small way, we can make your life slightly better every day. And that is kind of what I feel like, you know, the job of a modern brewer is. And why I wrote *Brewmaster's Table* and, you know, why I worked on the Oxford book [*The Oxford Companion to Beer*]. If we can just make dinner or, you know, your time out drinking with your friends or your [01:11:30] family, a little bit more interesting, a little bit better every day, just a little bit, that, in and of itself, gives you a better life. I compare it to somebody - if somebody took you to your first baseball game or they played you your first Coltrane record and on that day a little door swings open, on the other side of that door is a better life. Now you have jazz. You didn't know jazz. Now you do know jazz. And you will have jazz for the rest of your life and it's going to be [01:12:00] almost free. That's unbelievable, you know. So if you can teach somebody about craft beer and they didn't know about it before and you're just like, would you like to walk through this door? Then they're often running, they're going to have their whole rest of their life that they can, you know, have that. And I think it's just beautiful work.

TM: Have you felt like consumers have always been receptive and excited? Or are there styles that you felt like you've had to kind of pull them along a bit more?

GO: [01:12:30] What I learned over time is that if you give people respect, you know, then they are very, very openminded. You know, we have a tendency to, when we gain an expertise to talk down to people and, you know, I think we've all had it at various points. I remember teaching at ICE one time and I mean [01:13:00] literally these were the people in the room. We had four young women who came in and I asked them, oh, so what are you guys, at the beginning of class, what are you guys drink-? It's like, oh, we don't really like beer. And we were like, oh well, what do you drink normally? Like, Coors Light if we have to. And it's like, well why are you here? It's like, well it's a beer class, we figure we're going to meet some guys. I mean literally this is what they said. I'm seeing a lady in the back. She's got a blue rinse, you know, and she's probably 65. There's another guy back there. He looks like he's 75. And I'm like, what's that dude [01:13:30] doing here? I had an idea of who the craft beer drinker was and I'm like, I'm bringing Gueuze, I'm bringing Schlenkerla smoked beer, I have, you know, I don't know if everybody can handle all this, you know, maybe I should think about - but I put stuff in front of people and said, this is why it's interesting, this is why you want to know about it, this is where it comes from, this is the history, et cetera. And what I found out at the end, first of all, the four women who said they didn't like beer, they wanted the biggest, funkier things, they're like, [01:14:00] where can I get this and this and this and this? These are awesome. You know, the lady in the blue rinse, her favorite thing was Black Chocolate Stout. She's like imperial stouts are great, I love them, you know, et cetera. The 75-year-old guy in the back came and told me a story of how, he was like, I haven't had a beer like this Trappist beer for, oh, like 40 years, 50 years. I'm like, well, what are you talking about? He was like, well, I was stationed, you know, in Belgium after World War II and we used to drink these beers [01:14:30] all the time and, man, this really brings - and I realize that I'm looking at people and I'm judging them exactly the way people would look at me as a Black man and judge that I didn't know anything about beer, and what was I doing here or whatever else and I was doing it, you know. And it was obviously unintentional but I had brought all this stuff with me, you know, this baggage and I kind of realized, if you tell people like, look, I don't know [01:15:00] whether you're going to like this, but it really is interesting. Then people would open their minds up. And even if they didn't like something, they were very glad they had tried it and that you had trusted them to try it. And we have based what we do at Brooklyn Brewery on the overall idea that people have good taste and that your taste is not better than theirs. You know, that's like super important. That, and understanding that people pay money, it's actual money, for [01:15:30] beer. You know, the arrogance of people that I've seen, it's like, oh, our beer is full of diacetyl, but we're new and like, you guys shouldn't be so tough on us. It's like, somebody spent \$12, \$16, \$18 on that six-pack. That might be their hourly wage. They might have worked at a job they don't even like for an hour to get the money to buy your beer. You had better come with respect, you know, like you cannot go out there [01:16:00] and give people garbage, you know?

TM: Well, because that closes the door, you know, going forward as well.

GO: Yeah, but it also means you're a bad person. [Laughter] I mean, I mean people make mistakes. Sure, but I mean I've seen people out there, craft brewers, who are like unapologetic about putting out people, writing to them on Twitter and saying, well, your beer is sour, your cans explode, or whatever else and they're like, well we're new. We -

you know like it's craft beer. And it's like no, that just means you can't [01:16:30] brew, that's not craft beer. And you're sitting there telling people that they shouldn't be surprised if your cans explode in a week. And like, that's - you just don't have respect for anybody, [unintelligible] your customers.

TM: Right. So here at Brooklyn, are there-, you've mentioned the Chocolate Stout, are there other really landmark or mile marker beers? What would you kind of point to, looking back, you know, the things that you've brewed over time that —

GO: Oh of ours?[01:17:00] Oh, man. I mean, Local One, which we no longer produce, but that was a you know, more or less a Tripel, somewhere between a strong Saison and a Tripel and a Belgian Strong Golden that we started brewing in 2006. And, that's when we started doing bottle re-fermentation. And I had met a young man named Bert Van Hecke, you know, who had been the brewmaster. He was [01:17:30] like very young, 24, 25, but he was brewmaster of St. Bernardus. And I had discovered that very few of the beers that I thought of as being bottle-conditioned were actually bottle-conditioned.

But it was the truly bottle-conditioned ones that were my favorites. And so I brought Bert in to basically take over the brewhouse for three days and show us how to do re-fermentation in the bottle in a brewery. Because there was nowhere to [01:18:00] read in any language about how to do that. I mean when I went to the universities, Weihenstephan or Doemens or wherever else, they said, oh we don't teach that, you know, this is stuff that's been passed down in families. Nobody talks about this. We do it, but nobody talks about it and we don't teach it. And so later, after doing this beer, I started teaching it. But this was like a moment where I had never done anything like this before. I said to, you know, our staff, it was like we got - [01:18:30] I bought a bottling machine that was a gravity bottler, because it was a way of burning the boats. We were either going to learn re-fermentation in the bottle or we were going to die here. Like there's - we can't lose our nerve and decide we're going to carbonate the beer and put it in the bottle because we can't do it on this bottling line. We *have* to learn how to do this. And I said to my team, it's like we're going to be - we're used to being very good at what we do and now we're not going to be good anymore. And we're going to [01:19:00] be very, very uncomfortable and this is going to be somewhat unpleasant. But on the better, on the other side of this learning experience is we're going to be a completely different and better brewery. And so everybody try to be cool with each other, you know, manage your frustrations. I'm handing my authority over to this person from Belgium and he is the brewmaster for the next three days, and I want you to listen.

And we became a different brewery after that, you know, and our - [01:19:30] the level of our creativity and the way that we brought in, you know, creativity from other members of the team and allowed them to design their own beers and we had release parties for them and all kinds of stuff. It's been like really, you know, for me, like very, very meaningful and very touching to be there when one of my brewers puts their first actual beer that they ever did, 100-percent themselves, on the table and on our taps and have a party around it and give a [01:20:00] speech. It's beautiful.

TM: Nice. So I have a few questions and I'm going to start to wrap up.

GO: Okay.

TM: I want to be respectful of your time. You're also a writer passionate about food. *Brewmaster's Table* you wrote in 2013.

GO: 2003.

TM: I'm sorry, 2003, right. And so what prompted you to write that book, would you say?

GO: It was seeing the fact that, like, I would do beer dinners as a way of promotion and seeing that, you know, as much as I love [01:20:30] wine and I drink lots of wine, I know a lot about wine, half my friends are in the wine business, but that, you know, beer was much more accessible, it didn't cost nearly as much and that beer was actually, from a culinary point of view, much more versatile. It could do more things. I mean, I've done probably thirty beer-versus-wine-with-cheese competitions against sommeliers over the years. I lost once, you know. [Laughter] I mean, it's - and she was [01:21:00] very good, I mean, but, you know, it's almost impossible to beat beer with cheese or even with a wide variety of foods.

And at the time, back in the early 2000s, you had the rise of Food Network and everything else. You could see that, like, the food was getting respect and the beer wasn't getting respect. And by tying, you know, our star to its culinary possibilities, I thought that that glow would reflect on to beer. [01:21:30] And also through the beer dinners, I was just seeing, kind of, flavor revelations that, you know, on an everyday basis, literally, people would be able to afford this product, if you're sort of middle class, you're talking about a few dollars to make dinner better every day. And this was information that literally was going to be life changing in a tiny way. But, like I said, to have dinner a little bit better everyday for the rest of your life is a really big deal. [01:22:00] You're going to be eating a lot of dinners, so.

TM: And thinking a bit more in the recent past of the COVID-19 pandemic, which we are still experiencing, would you say that the pandemic will have lasting effects on your brewery's operations or on how you do business?

GO: It's hard to say. We're certainly in a period where not as many people are visiting New York City and therefore fewer are coming to the brewery. Draft is not [01:22:30] 100-percent back, and that was the powerhouse of our business. We were 50-plus-percent draft. And so as draft has not quite come back to its previous levels, we are trying to work our way through all of that. How long does that last and in what ways do we need to change what we're doing? Is a thing that we're still figuring out. If the 750 [ml] bottle was dead before [01:23:00] or dying before, it's certainly dead after a pandemic. People literally couldn't see their friends. Things have moved into cans. We're about to get a canning line shortly. We've been using mobile canners. And so, yeah, I think that there will be lasting effects, whether it is the, you know, can-ification, you know, and other things. I think it's very difficult to tell exactly what it's going to be. Right now a lot of the more creative things have been somewhat [01:23:30] curtailed, because we have to figure out how are we going to, as a larger company, do TT-, direct-to-consumer when

we are in 35 countries? The number two market for Brooklyn Brewery outside of the New York City area is France. You know, if you go to Paris you'll see us everywhere. If you go to Stockholm, you'll see us everywhere. And those markets are very, very important to us too. So we look at ourselves, despite being relatively small, you know, as a [01:24:00] global brand that is present and hopefully relevant in all of these places.

And we have to think of ourselves, you know, in that kind of framework. And what does that mean for the future, post-, you know, post-COVID, whenever post-COVID really is? Now, a month ago, a month and a half ago, we just did the 25th anniversary of North Bar in Leeds and we had a, you know, a rapturous reception. Just went [01:24:30] with our friends with the Four Horsemen [Brewery] to do dinners in London that were very well attended. So I see that coming back. I would like to get - I mean, we're still kind of like, okay, rebuild our, the main part of our business and focusing on that. But at the same time I'd love to get back to more of the experimental fun stuff.

We're making beers from grains like fonio, et cetera, and bringing in, you know, other cultures [01:25:00] and grains that people are unfamiliar with but, you know, have great implications for the future. You know, in our work, and the stuff we've been doing with Run The Jewels and the upcoming beer, Yolélé, with Whole Foods. These are really meaningful projects to me.

TM: Great. And then even more recently, in 2020, you created the Michael James Jackson Foundation for Brewing and Distilling. Could you talk for a moment about how you came up with that idea and how that came about?

GO: [01:25:30] Well, you know, I mean it originally grows out of there was, you know, a - going back twenty years, there was a Michael Jackson Scholarship Fund, which was administrated by the American Institute of Wine and Food. After leaving Brooklyn Brewery, Tom Potter ran the AIWF and therefore was administrating this fund and it was, you know, it was a Michael Jackson Scholarship for Brewing and Distilling. In 2019, [01:26:00] you know, he got in touch with me, Tom did, and said hey, you know, AIWF has wrapped up but we still have \$35,000 in this Michael Jackson, would you help me, you know, administrate this money and, you know, give it away, do the scholarships. And I said yes, but I have a proviso and that is that I would like these scholarships to go predominantly to people of color, because I'm not seeing us in the industry. I teach at CIA, Culinary Institute [of America], and I don't see many people of color [01:26:30] in the classes. And I don't just want to give this, you know, to people who are all the same as everyone else who's in there. I would like this to have an impact. And at first he was a bit, a little bit resistant, but he eventually agreed to that. And then two things happened. I went to Fresh Fest, now known as Barrel and Flow, in Pittsburgh in 2019 and I saw like [01:27:00] 1,000, you know, people of color drinking craft beer, you know, just as geeky as anybody else, you know, out there. And saw the pure joy that was, you know, that was being missed in the rest of the world and all the talent that was missing. We were not having people come to me and say, hey Garrett, I'd like a brewing job. I mean, I'd hired dozens of brewers and I hadn't had a single African [01:27:30] American applicant, you know, in 30 years, for a brewing job. And I'd always told myself that, well this is not my fault, people just, they might not be interested or they don't know, or whatever else, I got

a job to -, I've got to run the brewery. I'm not, you know, this is not my job. But then I realized at a certain point, I flipped the question around and said, well what if it was my fault? Just, you know, [unintelligible] what if it was my fault, how would it be my fault? And then I looked at, what are my requirements? [01:28:00] I required two to three years of experience or I would like you to show me a certificate that says you have, you know, gone to brewing school of some sort, ABG [American Brewers Guild], Siebel, whatever, so that you know what you're doing and you're not going to ruin our beer, you're not going to kill any of your teammates.

So, two to three years of experience with less than one percent of people working in brewhouses being people of color, where were we going to find people with two to three [01:28:30] years of experience? Or the certificate for this class? Great class, costs \$10,000. African Americans have ten percent of the family assets of European Americans in the United States. So that \$10,000, which may be, somebody of a different background might borrow from an uncle, is almost impossible for African Americans to get their hands on. And I kind of realized that if I could just toggle this one switch we could [01:29:00] change a lot of things very quickly. And so the original Michael Jackson fund migrated and became the seed money for the Foundation. Michael Jackson's family were very strongly behind it. Michael was an active, anti-racist. And I think the word active is important. He didn't just do this for me, he did it for others too, and it was noticed. I want people to remember Michael and his work, but [01:29:30] I also would like to see that joy that I saw from a very mixed group of people I saw last weekend at Barrel and Flow, I want to see that throughout all of craft beer, so that we can fully inhabit, you know, the legacy of what it is that we're doing and bring that energy into the rest of craft beer. Because you know [01:30:00] so far it's been kind of weird and isolated, but there is a culture growing which, within it, that has its own thing going on. And in the last year we put more people of color through Siebel than had been there in the previous ten years. So, you know, what we're actually doing, we're literally changing the complexion of brewing. We can see, you know, people getting jobs [01:30:30] like Enrique Leyva, who a year ago was working in a little brewery in Vietnam, took Master Brewers [Program] through us at UC, Davis, and it's now working as a brewer at Russian River. You know we're changing things very quickly. And the people that we're putting - you know, we're giving the backing to, are they're like scary smart, they're so spectacular. And they are going to be the future, you know, along with everybody else, which I think is great.

TM: Right, awesome. [01:31:00] Would you say that your own experiences as an African American man in beer have changed over time?

GO: They have. I mean at first people would walk right past me and, you know, shake the hand of my assistant and say, hi, Garrett. And he'd be like, oh no, that's Garrett over there. Like they wouldn't even - like, I was invisible. Then once you had, you know, the internet was everywhere and people [01:31:30] started to know me. That happened less because everybody knew what I looked like. But I never forgot that, you know, and so, you know, my experience has changed. But if you look at pictures of me from like, say the early 2000s or something, I was almost always in a suit. I was in a suit. I wore a tie because, one, this was the traditional dress of a brewer. And, two, I circumvented the stupid questions that people intended to [01:32:00] ask me. So, are you making beer at

home, like in your bathtub or something like that? You know, most brewers, frankly, dress like small children, you know, and you come and you say, well why am I not getting respect? It's like, you're wearing a ratty tee-shirt and, like, cargo shorts and whatever else and you want somebody to believe that you make something delicious. Now, look at the chef. The chef is here in his whites. Look at a guy [01:32:30] like Angelo Gaja who shows up in a suit. And I remember meeting Angelo and he said, his bottles were \$200 in 1990, you know, and he said, like Angelo, you know, some of the other people dress like farmers, why do you dress like this? And he said, [Italian accent] if you want people to understand that your wines are delicious, perhaps you should look delicious [Laughter]. I was like - and so I presented in this way to get people to take me seriously. And you know, [01:33:00] also, they were in my clothes. I liked them. I don't show up that way anymore. I show up in a more casual fashion because I, as a person or authority, if you like, carry the gravitas, you know, and with the age and the books and whatever else, without needing all of these props. But those props were necessary at the time, essentially as armor, you know, against, you know, people's ignorance. [01:33:30] And I am glad that other African Americans and other people of color hopefully are not going to have to go through that, you know.

TM: And do you - in what ways is the context different when you travel, when you are in taprooms or pubs in different places? Is the dynamic - does it feel similar, different?

GO: It is different. I mean, people are in different places in the, you know, in the evolutions of their beer culture, which I think is no longer quite linear. And it's [01:34:00] very worldwide now that social media ties every place to every place else. Everybody knows what everybody else is doing. So we got to a point where you go to, like, you know, someplace in China and they were - they're like, yeah, we love Brooklyn Lager, but where's all your sour beers? Where's your barrel program and whatever else? This was like years ago and we're like, oh shit they've already gotten here. They're looking for - they only started having craft beer, they already want a barrel program. And so those things [01:34:30] have changed. But I think that you show up with two things, one for good or ill, you show up as the American, you know, and being the American, whether you think it should or not, carries weight. It carries weight, it carries politics.

And so the work that I was doing, you know, up until a few years ago, especially in Sweden and Norway, where we were running - I was running brewers conferences together with our sister breweries, you know, [01:35:00] who've now been bought by Carlsberg. But, I mean, we founded those breweries together with them and we ran, you know, two, three day technical conferences that were only for working brewers within those countries. And in many places we were the first place that brought together all the brewers, you know, in Sweden, in Norway, in Japan, like, we become a focal point for connection, you know, which is something that I, you know, I think is great. And it's part of that [01:35:30] kinetic optimism. We can show up anywhere and be at home, you know, because we belong everywhere as New Yorkers.

TM: Great, okay. Two last questions, thank you. And so the - you mentioned when we were talking previously about brewers having a religion. Could you please explain what that means?

GO: Well, I mean, a religion really is the things that you believe, the things that you feel like you have to do, and the things that you [01:36:00] won't do, right? That's kind of like, what do you believe? What do you have in your heart that made you want to be a brewer in the first place? And that when people look at you they can see the flame in your eyes, like what is that? And it is interesting because I find that religion can be fundamentalist, but it can also be flexible. So I found it very [01:36:30] interesting. For example, a few years back, I forget the name of the beer, it probably would come to you, but there was a beer that Sierra Nevada started to make that had hop oil in it. They had already done Torpedo and they had this new beer with hop oil. And I was talking to one of their people and I said, this is fascinating because you guys have always been the guys that were 100-percent whole hops, right? No pellets, no nothing. And then you went straight to something with hop oil. The thing is that, you know, [01:37:00] the hop oil was being - that they were just throwing the hop oil themselves from their own plots of land, you know, from their own hops. And I said, you were able to change your religion. Your religion said we do not partake of the cloven hoof. We are not using these other hop products, but you feel like it's fine to add the oil because the oil is still you. And therefore you kind of change your religion slightly. And the same way that people [01:37:30] will pick and choose the bits that they want of Catholicism. It's like, well, I believe in that part. I don't believe in this part, you know, and I'm going to take two from a column A and two from column B. And then, you know, depending on the circumstances, you know, what you believed, you know, say you don't believe in choice and then somebody that is close to you, you know, needs to make that choice. And your religion that [01:38:00] you thought that you had might change, you know, or you get shown - I mean, a good example for me, you know, I had a guy who came and said, we're starting this new brewery it's going to be 100-percent estate grown grain. Even if it's not malted, we're going to add enzymes and we're going to convert, you know, this, this beer could be 100-percent wheat from this one place.

And I'm like, okay, that's an interesting idea. I don't use enzymes. I don't believe in enzymes. [01:38:30] And I don't. And he's like yeah, but the thing that you can't do is you can't make a beer that comes, you can't go to a farm and make a beer with 100-percent grain only from that place, because you require enzymes from malt to get that job done. I don't. I can represent pure terroir from this place. And I'm like, that's a pretty interesting religion. [Laughter] I mean. And with this religion, it comes with certain powers that, that are [01:39:00] different. I need to think a little bit harder about this. You know, maybe there are circumstances in which one should use an enzyme. You know, we now do here and there use terpenes, for example, in beers where, like non-alcoholic beers where, you know, normal dry-hopping methods don't work. And so depending on your circumstances, I would've been completely against, like, no hop products, you know, fundamentalist. And then it's like, you know, like how [01:39:30] do I not go completely to the dark side but also get the job done, you know, in a way that feels honest to me?

TM: Alright, well, thanks for that explanation. So last question is a simple one, but a big one. So thinking about your career, your history, but your work now, what would you say you value most about what you do?

GO: I mean, for me personally, the just - [01:40:00] I can't remember, well I do

remember who it was, Chris Newman at a place called Sylvanaqua Farms, and I will steal this from him openly. You know, he had a thing in a recent Instagram post where he said, community is the deliverable. And I think that that is a really sort of great starting point. When you, if you back yourself up to community being the deliverable of the work that you're doing, everything else can flow through that. [01:40:30] And whether it's the beers that you make, the chances that I've had, the places I've been, the people that I've met, the people I will meet, I mean, no one's going to hear this beforehand so I will tell you, in a couple of weeks I am going to be knighted by the Brewers of Belgium.

TM: Congratulations.

GO: I become a Knight of the Mash Fork, or the *Ridderschap*, at a ceremony in Grand-Place in Brussels.

TM: Wow.

GO: [01:41:00] And this is very meaningful to me. It is also equally meaningful to me to be sitting there in an interview with people who, a week or two from now will win, you know, the scholarship through the MJF and we will send these people on a career trajectory that they might not have been able to achieve alone, you know. And [01:41:30] in both of these things, you know, I think there is a truism which is that, to me the most toxic idea in American life, one of the most toxic ideas, is the idea of the self-made man. People believe that they are special and they arrived here somewhere alone. You arrive alone. You did it all yourself and that this is a thing that should be expected of you and that you should expect of yourself.

[01:42:00] And this is not only not true, it's also horrible [Laughter], you know, the idea that you should expect to drink alone, arrive alone, work alone, you know, and be singular. The history of human brewing is 20,000 years. And, you know, you get an opportunity, if you're lucky, to throw your little rock and you make a [01:42:30] splash, but very shortly thereafter the rock is gone. The splash is gone. You know, you're gone, your brewery is gone, but the river keeps flowing. The river is the only thing that actually matters, you know, and you get your time with it, but that's it. And that's the beautiful part. If you think that you're the beautiful part, you don't understand what it is.

TM: Perfect. Thank you. Thank you so much for [01:43:00] your very thoughtful and expert work.

GO: Much appreciated.