

Jason Davis & Jason Lee
Brewers, Freetail Brewing Company
San Antonio, Texas

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Foodways Texas

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

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Niko Tonks (NT): This is Niko Tonks recording for Foodways Texas. It is November the 5th, 2011. I am in San Antonio, Texas at the Freetail Brewing Company with Jason Davis. And for the record would you just say your name, what you do here and also your birthdate if you don't mind.

Jason Davis (JD): My name is Jason Davis. I am the head brewer at Freetail Brewing Company. And I was born October 10th, 1969.

NT: Alright so, my first set of questions is more or less about your personal history and how you ended up here being the head brewer. So I guess a good place to start would be when did you decide, if you decided in a coherent way, that beer and brewing was going to be what you were going to do?

JD: Pretty much when I started home brewing in '92. I knew that I, I really enjoyed it, and then it was just about a year later or so that, things started changing in Texas. The beer laws changed and uh, Waterloo Brewing Company opened up in 1993 and I got a job there in the kitchen in 1994 because, just washing dishes, just because I wanted to brew beer there. Which it's not necessarily a direct shot, but. [laughs]

NT: So you showed up and asked for any job possible with the intention of becoming the brewer?

JD: Yes. They had an ad in the paper for a dishwasher. So, I knew I was going to wash dishes for a while. I washed dishes for a few months and then I, I was a prep cook for like the rest of the year. And, the assistant brewer then got a job at Celis. That was Doug Hagedorn, and so Steve didn't have an assistant for a while and I bothered him enough to where he said, "Okay, I will teach you how to filter, because I could use some help on that".

NT: And Steve, for everyone out there who does not know, who's Steve?

JD: Steve Anderson was the head brewer at Waterloo and now he is the head brewer at Live Oak.

NT: So Waterloo, and I just a few months ago in Austin, I knew there was a Waterloo reunion, reunion party for people who worked there but also people who just sort of enjoyed going. And I know it's been closed for I think eleven years but it still seems like it holds kind of a special place in people's minds. Can you tell me just a little bit about, you know your experience, working there and what it was like and—

JD: Man, it was like the hub of downtown to me. It was the first brewpub in Texas after you know, since Prohibition. And it was huge, always had good crowds on the, every night, on the weekends. It was also a pretty huge operation to run so there were a lot of employees, a lot of

people came through there and it was like a family. And Billy Forrester the owner was just a great guy and then this past month we just celebrated the, it was the ten year anniversary of it closing. So, we brewed a batch of O. Henry's Porter here with Steve Anderson came down and brewed with us and we tried to recreate that, one of my favorite beers that they brewed, and it was a success.

NT: So how long did you actually work at Waterloo?

JD: I worked there for about three years, I think, I hired on at the end of '94. It was at the beginning of '96 that I started brewing with Steve and then it was about summer of '98 that I left Waterloo, so.

NT: And you left it for?

JD: I also went and worked at Celis after Waterloo.

NT: And that's another really interesting place in Austin in brewing history that, that many people don't know that much about is the Celis Brewery. And I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about, about the brewery and your experiences there.

JD: I think Celis opened up before Waterloo, it uh, Pierre Celis decided to bring his wit beer brewing traditions to Texas and I was, I was blown away by the beer and this was even before I was home brewing much. And when I finally got a chance to, to brew there, Steve pretty much referred me to this job opening and I was sort of overwhelmed by the size and scope of that brewery as compared to brewing at a brewpub level. Because we were making fifteen barrels at Waterloo and we were brewing about 100 barrels at a time at Celis and that was half a tank then, so then we double brew full batch and so that was a big step up for me but I just started off in the cellar there. And it was great, I learned a lot at Celis.

[00:05:07]

NT: Can you tell, I mean just so everyone can know who Pierre Celis was and why it was such a big deal that he started a brewery in Austin.

JD: Pierre is basically credited with reviving the wit beer style, which is now one of the most popular craft beer styles in the U.S., as far as production by different brewers trying to make the style. It had almost all but disappeared by the 60's, due to just stuff going on in Europe with World War II and losing Belgian breweries then. But he had as a child worked for a wit beer producer and he was a milk man. His family was in the dairy industry and he decided, I want to reproduce that white beer that we used to make in Loeven and he did it his back yard. He did it in his, basically his barn and the rest is history. He started his brewery, grow, grew gradually and eventually he sold his Belgian brewing operation to InBev. Which is now basically Hoegaarden beer was something that he left and he came to Austin. Which was just our good fortune anybody living in Austin at the time all of a sudden had this world class beer being made right in their backyard.

NT: And what, um, I guess I'm curious about where you, where you at Celis when they closed? Or how long did you end up working there?

JD: I worked at Celis from like I said I went there in the summer of '98 and it closed at the end of 2000. And I was there for about two years so I left just a few months before it closed. We knew it was going to be shutting down and I had the, I had job opening down here in San Antonio at the Laboratory.

NT: So what, I guess I'm curious and maybe it's a story that doesn't need to get retold or you don't actually know it but what, like what were the circumstances surrounding the actual closing of that, of Celis?

JD: Pierre Celis went into a partnership with Miller Brewing Company and I am not sure what year that began but it was a, it was a process where little by little Miller each year had more control, more controlling interest in Celis and at the end Celis had the, he had the option of buying it back or letting Miller take complete control. And he opted for letting them take complete control because it was, it was just a rough time and, and just the location of the brewery, the business park it was located in, the overhead of the brewery was just not, it wasn't working out. I was hard to make ends meet there.

NT: And I guess another question I'm always curious about is how, so you were a home brewer and then you were dishwasher and moved straight into brewing. What got you into home brewing?

JD: A friend of mine from high school moved to Austin in the early 90's and he was, his name is Joe Barfield and he basically founded Southwest brewing news and he worked at home brew, he worked at Austin Home Brew Supply at that time and it was owned by Dave Bone and he was gung-ho, he said, "I am coming over and we're going to brew a batch of beer at your house". He brought his equipment over and we brewed a batch of American pale, basically Sierra Nevada clone and it was awesome and I got myself a whole bunch of equipment and started brewing. I think I only brewed like one other, extract batch and then I went right to all grain. And I, my dad gave me a bunch of his wine making equipment from the 70's. And I, you know, a capper, some caps and everything. It was sort of a little legacy there. Mainly, I mainly remember making root beer with my dad in the 70's.

NT: And how long, how long did you, how long did it take home brewing before you, you knew. Okay I'm going to do this and get a dishwasher job so I can be a brewer?

JD: No very long, it, and it wasn't that I knew that I wanted to be a brewer for the rest of my life. I had no idea but once I had gotten that, gotten in at Waterloo, and, and the brewing job came open I pretty much dropped out of college and decided well this is, I'm already, I got the job that I want so why am I going to school now? [laughs] It took a long time after that to, to realize that I did want to finish my degree.

[00:09:59]

NT: Did you go back and finish it?

JD: I did because the, after Celis closed I worked at the Laboratory for a couple years and it shut down. When it shut down I, I decided well shoot there is nothing out here for me. There is not enough brewing opportunities in San Antonio so I may as well finish my degree. So I commuted back to UT and finished up.

NT: Are you from Austin originally?

JD: No, I'm from San Antonio. I grew up here, went to high school here and graduated in 1987 and went to UT.

NT: Okay and a question that I always like to ask people, is if there is a moment that sticks out in your mind and maybe we've already covered it with your friend came over and you brewed the Sierra Nevada Pale Ale clone but it there a moment that sticks out in your mind of having a beer and saying okay beer is maybe something more than you know, your Bud, Miller, Coors and this is an interesting thing that I know is going to be a part of my life.

JD: Right, it was not long before I did the home started, home brewing. It was probably, it was in the spring break of 1990. I went a visited another high school friend in Ithaca, New York and he broke open a bottle of Guinness Extra Stout and I had never had that before or anything that tasted like that so I was still a novice at that time. I was twenty years old and it was, it was some, it was a revelation, so, I think that would probably be the main. I had been trying what I could but there wasn't so much beer down in Texas but that was my first experience of a real tasty beer. [laughs]

NT: It seems like Guinness and Sierra Nevada can take credit for a lot of people in the craft brewing industry getting started.

JD: Exactly. Yeah Sierra, it was definitely another sign post on the other side of the spectrum. To me, Sierra Nevada tasted like really good strong ice tea with like a lot of lemon in it. [laughs] That was the closest thing I could compare it to at the time.

NT: That makes sense, it's a, it's an apt comparison. Okay so, I want to make the leap from you moving down here, back here to work at the Laboratory from that to when Freetail started which I believe is 2008. How did you get involved with Freetail?

JD: I met, I was, in between those two, I worked at the Blue Star Brewing company too for a little bit. I was working there when I went with Joey Villareal to the craft brewers conference in Austin. And, hold on just a second— [phone rings] So, let's see that was like 2007 I think and one of the, one of the guys up in Austin said "Well there's some guy here that says he's going to open up a brewpub in San Antonio" and I said, "Oh great." and I met Scott Metzger and he was the one going, he had the name of his potential brewery was the Wandering Butcher Brewing company cause Metzger means butcher so he, that was his original title and then he contacted, you know I ran into him at a home brew meeting here in San Antonio after that and I ran into

him at the Flying Saucer. He said, "Hey, I need to get your resume for the place." And I said "Sure," but I really, I didn't really think that was going to be something that I was going to be able to do. I couldn't imagine opening up a brewery from scratch but we did.

NT: So you've been here since before, since the inception basically?

JD: Yeah, yeah he sourced a used brewpub out of Philadelphia, it was a John Harbors had closed down. And it just so happens that the brew house was almost identical to the one at Waterloo it was the same manufacturer, same size and so that helped out. I was ready for that.

NT: I remember Steve, when he came down here and brewed with you, the O. Henry's Porter he was so excited because it was, he was like, "Oh it's the exact same beer, because it's the same system, you know, it's the same size, it's the same everything."

JD: And we used the same malt. We used Briess malt for that because that was Waterloo malt. [laughs]

NT: Okay so, since you have been here since the very beginning I can sort of guess that you have been centrally involved in deciding what kind of beer Freetail is going to make and what the place is going to look like. Can you tell me a little about your, your brewing philosophy or your ideas about what it is that you should make?

[00:14:46]

JD: Well, I guess that they are influenced by all of the brew pubs I've been at and especially Celis. We talked about this at like probably one of my interviews which basically involved drinking beer at the Flying Saucer or something. And he asked me, "If we, you know, if you get to, if I hire you, what beers are you going to make at my brewery?" and I hadn't really thought about it before but I laid out a list and I started, and I kept adding to that list over time, and it, and we ended up making all the beers that I said that we were going to make. And it started off with, I said I'd like to have three or four regular beers. Ones that we have year around, which was Freetail Ale, Rye Wit and LaRubia, our blonde. And I said like maybe the fourth one would be like a dark beer but Scott was, Scott was fine with that, which I was sort of surprised about and he was just like, let's just do three and then I want all the rest to be seasonal beers or rotating beers and that's what we've done. We only make three beers year around and Rye Wit is my, that's my favorite. It's, at Celis I pretty much fell in love with wit beer and it's the one that I will say is my desert island beer. And so that's what I'm trying to, I'm not trying to reproduce Celis wit, per say, but a wit beer that I would want to drink on a desert island if I was stuck there with only one beer.

NT: Can you tell me a little bit about wit beer and then also the rye wit that you make here?

JD: Um, as far as the history of wit beer? Or?

NT: Yeah, history and what you like about it, what did it tastes like? For, you know, for anyone that doesn't know.

JD: Well, part of it is definitely that it's, it's, at least the wit beer I like to make is, is one that's really drinkable, one that is lower gravity that you can drink a lot of. I think it's also really important to use raw wheat. I've had a lot of wit beers that I think have malted wheat and it doesn't have the same flavor profile. It doesn't have as mellow of a bread like finish that I like from wit beer. And then obviously the spicing on it is essential. We use the traditional spices here. We used orange peel and coriander and also using that in very low levels. You don't want to have a really super spicy wit beer. It just barely sort of compliments the spiciness from the yeast.

NT: So what does the rye add to that?

JD: The rye adds also another spicy complexity to it, I think. It seems a bit dryer with the rye in there and it give a little mouth feel.

NT: And about history, and maybe you are in a unique position to talk about this because you did work at Celis. What do you know about wit beer history?

JD: I just know I guess, I think what everybody else knows. What I sort of touched on earlier about how it was a style that fell out of the mainstream at least and Belgium. And it was, I don't think anybody else was making it basically when Pierre started making it again in the 60's. And, but now it's, you know, ever since Bluemoon came out it's become one of the most popular wheat beers at least in America. I don't know how much I can talk about the history.

NT: That's okay. So we're here today and I should say that today is the LaMuerta release party. The bottle release party, so there's a whole lot of people out in the brewpub. There's a big line of people buying bottles and when I walked in one of the first thing I noticed was that you have an enormous list of things on tap. First, how many beers do you have on tap today, do you know?

JD: Well, I know we have a total of twenty seven and some of them are guest beers. I think like five or six are guest beers.

NT: So you, essentially you have more than twenty beers that you made on tap today.

JD: Yeah, a lot of them are barrel ages beers, sour beers, we have fourteen barrels that we like to age sour beers in.

NT: And I guess, my, the question I was leading up to is, how do you arrive at a particular style that you want to brew? If you are always thinking of new things to brew and you have room for twenty beers to be on tap. What's your thought process for making up a new beer? [pause]
Tough question I guess.

[00:19:34]

JD: It's a tough one. Um, right now I think that, I don't know the exact number of different beers that we have made but it's hovering somewhere around fifty or sixty I think. And I don't know

how much I could say that they're so completely different because a lot of them are sort of varying IPAs because we have a big demand for IPAs here. But I mean I do tend towards Belgian styles so sometimes just simply the addition of Belgian yeast will be enough. Messing around with Belgian like deciding, okay I'm going to do an IPA with just Belgian malts, Belgian yeast and that's, it's fun to see what different, you know, the same, basically the same beer is if you just change a couple of ingredients. If you just change the maltster. We've done a few IPAs that way. A lot of the initial beers that we made are things that I brewed on a home brew level with a friend of mine who's got a fairly large home brewery. And so basically we still do pilot batches with him, so we can brew a barrel of this to see how it turns out and then scale it up from there if we need, if it turns out alright. So. Sometimes Scott just asks for you know something that we haven't done yet. You know? He'll page through a list of, you know, different beer styles and say, "Oh, well you haven't done a black IPA," well, we've done that now. [laughs]

NT: I just had it, it was delicious. Um, thinking about your friend who has a home brew system, um, and also I remember you mentioning earlier that the people who got here the earliest this morning, 4:00 am you said, won a silent auction to come in and help brew the beer. Can you tell me a little bit about things that you do to involve the community in the brew pub and also what, what that's like to have people from the community come in and help you do stuff like that.

JD: Well I've been a part of the Bexar Brewers in San Antonio, pretty much ever since I moved here in 2000. They started visiting me at the Laboratory and that's how I met them and once the Laboratory closed it was my, for a while it was my only outlet for brewing and just being, staying sort of in touch with everything and I, it was, it was a good learning experience for me too because I brewed with a lot of really good technical home brewers that knew what they were doing. They were into making gadgets and they were producing really good, and they're still making awesome beer. So, that was real helpful for getting to this point. And so I still keep them involved here at the brewery, they've come, and a lot of the different home brewers have come and helped us brew. We also will occasionally sell wort to home brewers they will take it home and ferment it and try a different yeast strain on it. And we even had a, the Bexar Brewers had a competition where everybody got some wort from Freetail and then they all had to do something different with it. Try to see who could make, like, the most interesting beer and so that was fun, seeing all the different stuff that you could do with Freetail Ale. And in fact it, one of those experiments basically became our Second Anniversary beer. Which was basically a Belgium Dubbel based on the Freetail recipe where we scaled it up and made it a little stronger and fermented it with Belgian yeast.

NT: Do you remember any other experiments from that or any other project that stand out?

JD: With the home brewers?

NT: Yeah, essentially with people taking wort home and doing something funky with it.

JD: Yeah, no, there's been all sorts of really good experiments with some the wort and in fact like one of the guys just opened up a bottle of spiced saison that he did off of our Pumpkin Saison from our first year which, and it held up really well. It was nice. Something else that we do with the Bexar Brewers they put on the Alamo City Cervezafest every year which is their

home brew competition and we have a category in there that we sponsor called "Funkiest of Show". Which is supposed to feature some of you know, basically their most interesting beers that they come up with and we don't try to, we don't, we basically just encourage them, you know, if it's really good and funky and you think that it's funky then send it in and then we will brew it here at the brewery on a large scale and hopefully enter it into the GABF. [Note: Great American Beer Festival] [laughs]

NT: And so speaking of funky, I have a couple of other questions before I forget about it, because I'm about to finish it. I'm drinking sort of a bright, lavender beer right now that I would describe as funky. Can you tell me just a little bit about what that is and where it came from?

[00:24:47]

JD: Yeah, you are drinking Prickly Realtail which the base beer from, that is a collaboration that we did with the brewers from Real Ale in Blanco. I have a long history with those guys just, you know, being in the brewing community here in Texas with Tim Schwartz, Erik Ogershok. Erik actually came down and brewed this batch with us. It's a strong wit beer with nopal cactus paddles in the mash. With agave nectar in the finish of the boil, uh, salt, cumin, coriander, lime peel, orange peel and that was the base beer for this prickly pear beer that we, where we aged it on prickly pears in a barrel, a wine barrel.

NT: And the wine barrel added this sort of this the, the funk sour that I'm getting off this?

JD: Right, yeah.

NT: Just because there's a bunch of bacteria in there floating around? And is that—

JD: And off the prickly pears, because we didn't do, we didn't try to sanitize the prickly pears. We just washed them and cut them up.

NT: And you mentioned before that you have what fourteen barrels that you age things in. And those barrels are they all sort of inoculated with various bacteria. Do they have individual characters?

JD: Well, we just got six of them in and we just filled six so, we're still seeing how those will be. But, yeah, we sort of some of them have been inoculated with different blends of wild yeast and bacteria and others just have gotten just the local blend of bacteria and terroir from Freetail basically. So we do, we know which are which. [laughs].

NT: So if you, if you have three barrels worth of beer and you're going to put it in three different barrels, do you have a sense before you put it in of what one might taste like versus the other?

JD: Right and some of them are, well most of them are wine barrels but we do have a couple of spirits barrels and so those have been to- or charred. So we put beers that would be more appropriate for the picking up the any char that might be left in there and but then the other stuff, we're just now getting to the point, since we have so many barrels that we can, instead of just

kegging up the barrels where we're going to take, like I said, the three barrels and blend them back together in a stainless tank and see how that goes.

NT: And, I guess while we're on the subject, does the LaMuerta come in contact with any of those spirit barrels does that ever happen?

JD: It has happened, with mixed results. [laughs]

NT: And just for people who aren't here can you tell us a little bit about A) La Muerta and B) this event that's happening right behind the door in front of me?

JD: Yeah, one of the beers that Scott, before we opened, mentioned that he wanted to make was an Imperial Stout called La Muerta. So, and I had already made an Imperial Stout using a little bit of smoked malt that I really liked and so that for me is the key of LaMuerta that we actually just increased the smoke level. Don't tell Scott. This year because for one thing it helped in my estimation, it helps preserve the beer. Smoked beers last a little longer and it is still so subtle because of all the other rich complex flavors in that beer. Because of the name La Muerta, we always release it every year on the first of November for Dia de los Muertos. We release it on draft then and then the first Saturday after that we release bottles.

NT: So he had the name La Muerta in his head. Do you know where that came from? Why La Muerta?

JD: No, I don't, I'm not exactly sure. Scott is half German, half Latino so he's got some, he's got a little, Latino blood going so, I'm not exactly sure where.

NT: It's a classic Texan mix right? Yeah?

JD: Yeah, he calls himself a Beanerschnitzel. I don't know if you can stay that on the radio. [laughs]

NT: It's in historical record now. The term Beanerschnitzel. Okay, so back to the one, one of the things that I was trying to get at before. What do you think it adds to the brewpub but also San Antonio to have things like the brewers, the home brewers club, be so involved with the business? With, to have that professional and amateur line be fuzzier than it might be otherwise?

JD: What do I add to San Antonio? I don't—

NT: Well what does, what does that back and forth, what do you think it adds to the business or also to the community?

[00:29:43]

JD: Um, I don't, it's a, I think maybe more than anything it just highlights it. Because I think it's a natural part of this type of business. I think everywhere you go you find that there is cross pollination between home brewers and local breweries. And it goes both ways it's not, you

know, when I, when I first, when I was working the Laboratory part of my meeting and getting to know the Bexar Brewers was every year when they did Teach A Friend To Brew Day, they would like to come and get yeast from the brewery and then they could take and they could pitch it to all the different worts that they created. And so, that was the beginning of that but they also like I said, they come help us on Brew Day, they'll help us mash out, they'll help us with bottling, and they'll loan me their bottler, they'll loan me a capper, they bring experience and lots of enthusiasm. And I think we try to honor it here a little bit more than maybe everywhere else. We definitely get a lot from them and we try to provide as much support for their events as we can.

NT: It seems like a rare thing. There aren't that many industries in the world where you would be encouraging amateur efforts to duplicate exactly what you're doing in house and have it, see it as a good thing.

JD: Right, well except for yeah, the thing about this industry the craft side of brewing is that it completely rest on the shoulders of the home brewers. Because, almost to a one all these, you know the Sierra Nevada's, the New Belgium, even Jim Koch at Boston Beer Company started off as home brewers. And, and that's what built this, this business.

NT: I have another sort of opened ended question that's sort of tangentially related to this topic. Would it, and it seems like, things like this bottle release party where a ton of people show up, you said you had 750 bottles and there was a line all the way around, all the way around the brew pub for people lining up to buy their three bottles. What do you think it is about, about beer that brings people into this kind of thing and makes it such a communal, social event, thing to do?

JD: Hmm. I think for one thing the reveling and the variety of different types of beer that's one thing. I know that's one thing that drove me from the beginning and just because when I first opened up, the joy of home, The Complete Joy of Homebrewing by Papazian and started reading just about beer styles that I had no idea existed. That there was, that beer was so tied into history and location and you know, geographical area that provided all these different styles. Just like speciation with the Galapagos or around the world. And now we're sort of experiencing that in the U.S. Because we're embracing all these different things that have been just sort of before in the last, you know the last centuries relegated to small parts of the world, but now we're uncovering things and creating new things. And so when people show up at 7:30am on a Saturday morning when we don't open till 11:30 with our bottles and they are all bringing different beer from around the country, from around the world to share with each other in the hopes of that maybe they're going to come across something else new. I think it, maybe it's something to do with that. [laughs]

NT: Yeah, it is an amazing scene out there with all the, all the empty bottles and rare stuff that you absolutely could never come by in the state of Texas. It was, it's a pretty incredible scene. Is that, how did that, has that always been a part of this bottle release thing? Does that happen more than once a year or?

JD: We do have several bottle releases a year but La Muerta is always the most attended. And it did, it pretty much started on the first one and it sort of, it's not, this is not the only brewery where this kind of thing happens. And, like Three Floyds has Dark Lord Day up in, the—

NT: It's in, it's outside of Chicago but it's in Indiana I think.

JD: Yeah, it's on the Indiana side of Chicago. But they, yeah they have bands out there and they have all kinds of beers from all over, they're serving all kinds of beers from all over the country. And it's one big festival and it is all centered on getting these rare bottles of their Imperial Stout and so I think that maybe, definitely the internet has, has helped build it all the Facebook and people, Beer Advocate, they talk about what they're going to do, what they're doing to bring, who's going, they ride share, they come from Houston, Austin, Dallas area. So, they came with a plan and it's definitely been building since the first one.

[00:34:59]

NT: Yeah, actually I saw, last night I was looking around and I saw a list of people who had decided they were going to come and they weren't even all from Texas I don't think. People from elsewhere came. I guess my, my last set of questions is about what you described before as the tree of Texas brewers. And I know from what we have been talking about that you've had, what I mean, good fortune, or whatever it is, to work at a lot of the places that, even if they have gone by the wayside are sort of central in Texas brewing history and in the last couple of years, Texas has sort of exploded in terms of new breweries that are emerging. And I am wondering if you have any thoughts on, on new versus old and connections between places that don't exist anymore and the new people that are coming up and the sense of community among professionals in the state.

JD: There's a great sense of community not only in the state, but nationwide, worldwide. Wherever you go when you're a brewer, you go to a brewer and they find out that you're a brewer and you get treated like a king. It's, it's great. So, there's that, and here in the state, we've just sort of, we've gotten underway with the, getting the Brewers Guild together and where we, it gives us the opportunity to share our resources, to share our knowledge and to also combine our resources to do things like the Texas Brewers Festival. Which just happened a month or so ago in Austin. And there's just a lot of sharing, like I mean, their, brewers are just like incomparable in how much they'll share in knowledge and resources whenever it's, you know, possible. We are constantly go up to Real Ale to get yeast, fresh yeast, to brew with down here. It's something, I raise a toast at the Real Ale dinner after they had just won their first Gold medal last year at the GABF saying you know it was really, you know, how happy I was that, that they had finally won this medal and remembering when Real Ale was just this little barnyard brewery and the, the original owner Philip and his son would come into Austin, every now and then to get yeast from Waterloo Brewing Company where I worked and we would fill a little Corney keg for them. And they'd take it back and make their Real Ale beers and now here I am at Freetail, going up with my Corney keg and getting it filled off the huge, you know, 480 barrel tanks that they've got going now. So it's awesome to see that kind of progression and that's just the way Texas is going now and it's great to see all these new breweries coming out. And it's great to see the older breweries helping them along their way. And if you ask any of those guys, the new brewers, they'll probably be able to tell you how much support they've gotten from the other guys.

NT: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask was whether you think that that, that's going to carry over to the next generation. If people are going to keep interfacing with those people that have come before them. It's kind of incredible, so. Um, I mean that's, I think we've addressed most of the, most of the things that I wanted to talk about. I am curious whether you, if there is anything that's on your mind in terms of personal history or things that are happening in Texas right now that you don't get a chance to talk about, that you want to put on the record.

JD: Not that I could think of right off the top of my head. [laughs] I'm thinking I need another beer right now. [laughs]

NT: Maybe we should take a break and think about it and get another beer. Alright, so for now, this is the end, but we might come back.

[END OF FIRST RECORDING] **[00:38:58]**

[BEGIN INTERVIEW SECOND RECORDING] **[00:00:00]**

NT: Okay, so we're back, still here November the 5th, 2011 at Freetail Brewing in San Antonio and I'm here now with Jason and John, who is the other brewer at Freetail. And, and Jason, you offered to introduce him for the record so.

JD: Yeah, this is John Lee and I don't know what his birthday is but—

Jason Lee (JL): January 3rd, 1975.

NT: There you go.

JD: He's a whipper snapper. I met John when I was actually between jobs. I was, I had the Laboratory had closed and I hadn't started working at Blue Star yet, but this guy was working at Blue Star and I was in there with a few [laughs], a few home brewers tasting the wares and this guy is walking around and he brought out some beer and he's like, "Oh you need to try this, you need to try this cask beer," you know, it's, try I think that Joey had a cask conditioned maibock with Simcoe hops, [laughs] which was my first exposure to Simcoe hops. [laughs] And, uh, and then little did I know that eventually that was going to work there with this guy alongside John Lee and take it from there John. How did you get to work at Blue Star?

JL: Well, I work up one day and decided that I was going to brew my own beer. And so in the act of brewing my own beer, I was drinking a lot of beer from Blue Star. I lived, at the time I lived in New Braunfels, so we were going down the river a lot and crappy beer in cans didn't cut it for us. So we would go to Blue Star a lot and fill up, at that time it was called a Tap-A-Draft, and it's basically like a three gallon plastic jug that you could fill up and, I mean a three liter, but it was a gallon and a half size and it had a little faucet on the front, a little, two little CO2 units, and you could just pour draft beer. And we would go down the river a couple times a week and we would go to Blue Star a couple times a week and Joey was just like, impressed I guess by the amount of beer that we would come and buy from them. So he was like, "What are you guys doing with all this?" "We're going down the river." Anyways I was a home brewer and so I

would come in and I would share some home brews with Joey and one day he just asked me if I would like a job working in the outside bar once a month that first Friday and I was like “Sure, I could use an extra 150 bucks a month.” And then from that I did that a little bit and then he had a brewing position open up inside his brewery and he offered it to me and I said, “Yeah man, I’d love that,” and so I started from Blue Star and I learned a lot of stuff with Joey down there and man, I don't know I probably but in four or five years at Blue Star and you know eventually it came to a point where it was like, I got to go somewhere else, but there was nowhere else to go so I just went away and then as Freetail started to evolve and develop I was like tugging on Jason's sleeve like, “Hey man, what’s going on over there at Freetail?” So, you know, when the whole, everything came down you know, I came in and Jason and I basically built this whole place together, like we took every single piece of equipment that you see here that was used and we broke it down and cleaned it up and put it back together. We got new stuff for what we needed and we put all the old stuff we could use in and we basically built all this. We put it all into place and since then we’ve just been rockin’ and rollin’, having lots of fun, you know, it’s hard to call it a job when you just hanging out with your friends all day.

NT: And I heard that you, um, blow the tap handles too, the glass tap handles.

JL: Yeah, actually before I was a brewer I was a glass blower for about ten years so, that was kind of the overlapping thing and glass blowing started to become more of a job to me, I felt like it was more of a production thing and it wasn't so creative and exciting so I kind of tried to find a new thing and beer just grabbed me and I just kind of, you know, flowed right into the beer world, per se.

NT: So, I guess I’ll ask you the same question that I asked Jason earlier. Is there, is there a moment in your mind that sticks out when you picked up a, picked up a beer for the first time when you were like, oh man beer is more than just crappy beer in cans and I want drink more of this and maybe I want to do it someday. Is there a moment that you have like that?

JL: Yeah, absolutely, for a while like back in ‘96, I was traveling in California and I was drinking. You know I was here in town I was into drinking Guinness or Shiner Bock or something like that. I got to California and I'm just basically living on the beaches and living in the woods and you know I’m drinking Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and you know, some Humboldt County Red Nectars. These different beers that are out there in California and there just, fascinated me. And I’m just like, “Man, that is the taste that I want.”

NT: I hate to toot my own horn but you said Guinness and I said “Yeah, Guinness and Sierra Nevada” and you said Sierra Nevada so obviously we are all in agreement here.

JL: Beers that bring you to the craft brew, you know table.

[00:05:02]

NT: So, another question I have, you guys are both here, obviously you probably both have your own ideas. How do you decide who gets to brew the next beer and how do the ideas get divied

up? Do you come in with different thoughts or are you working together on what gets made? I don't know who gets to answer this first, I don't know either—

JL: There's a couple different ways. One way is I pirate a beer recipe. The other way—

JD: How often do you do that?

JL: Twice a year maybe and this year it didn't happen because I got to go to GABF but—

JD: He gets to brew beer when I'm out of town. [laughs] He gets to brew what he wants to when I am out of town. He gets to brew plenty of beer—

JD: We collaborate on recipes and I mean, we also anything that is like, you know, really new or exciting, we'll do test batches at one of our friends that'll, he's got like, a barrel home brew system and we'll do a couple of test batches but, you know, I don't know they just kind of make themselves up and we're just here when they do it.

JL: John is my go to guy for when we're going to make a hoppy beer and I get John's input a lot on the hoppy stuff. And then also when we start doing our barrel aging when we do our little small batch stuff John's in charge of like, what kind of spice blend we're going to throw in the keg and all that kind of, you know. Yeah, so he is defiantly the, the king cellar man.

JD: Jason is the Dark Lord, he's been dubbed this name. He's the guy that brews the, he's always got a solid black beer.

JL: Dark Beer Ninja, I keep saying it's just the hard water we have down here. [laughs]

NT: Blends itself, it's, you're basically in Dublin right now, you're making stouts.

JD: Exactly.

NT: So, I keep meaning to ask this question I know we want to talk about it more about history and, and debts that maybe you feel you owe to people in the craft beer industry and I know that both of you worked at Blue Star so I don't know if that's a good place to start talking about, about your thoughts about where you've come from and where you're going. I don't know if you want to lead off Jason.

JD: Yeah well, pretty much Joey Villareal has been holding down the fort here in San Antonio for all these years. There are like, sixteen years now, that he's been open. And I knew, I met Joey when I worked at Waterloo. He hadn't really, he never remembered me, he [laughs] I kept, it took Joey like a few years before he remembered that I was that guy that was the brewer that was from Austin. You know? Joey, what Joey said to me when I was, I got a same as like as at Waterloo basically, I started waiting tables at Blue Star before I started brewing. John was brewing with Joey and Joey has always been basically the head brewer at Blue Star. But, what he said when I was waiting tables was, he said, "I'm going to have to go to confession if I don't get this guy into the brewery" because I worked at Celis. So it kept dawning on him that oh, this guy

needs to work at the brewery too so John and I got to work side by side there under Joey and so Joey was a good example of somebody who's been sort of laying the foundation here in Texas. But what I was talking about earlier about paying it forward just I've gotten so much support and help. I've learned so much from the brewers that have been around here for, Steve Anderson, starting with Steve Anderson for sure, because that was my first job. But then also Tim Shores when he was at Bitter End before he went to Real Ale. He, I didn't ever work with him at Bitter End but he always was supportive of me, moving forward, giving me advice. Brian Peters, at Uncle Billy's has been a big help for me and, and to honor that type of, that legacy, I, I continue to try to pass on any, any help, any support I can give to, to home brewers that are coming along to guys that are just interested. I get a lot of guys that volunteer just to come and help us for free, because they want to learn and so we try to accommodate as, that as much as we can. And we have even had a couple of folks who haven't had much brewing experience besides home brewing come through here and help us out and then go on to bigger and better things. To move out of state, to go work at another brewery and that makes us feel really good.

NT: Yeah, I mean I think that's, I think that is it. [pause] Alright, and I think we've covered pretty much everything that there is to cover and we even had a bonus interview. So, I want to say thanks to you guys and I appreciated it and yeah, thanks a lot.

JL: Yeah, thanks a lot man.

JD: Thanks a lot Niko, I'm glad you're doing this.

[END OF SECOND RECORDING]

[00:09:56]