

**Mary Beth Keefe
Granite Brewery
Toronto, Ontario**

Interviewers: Shayan Lallani and Gregory Naidopoulos

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Tasting the Global City: Multicultural Histories of Toronto's Cuisines

Gregory: So for the recoding, we are at Granite Brewery and it is September 30th and I am with...

Mary Beth: Mary Beth Keefe.

Gregory: And interviewing is...

Shayan: Shayan Lallani.

Gregory: And I'm Gregory Naidopoulos.

Gregory: First question that we would like to ask you is how actually did you get started brewing and when did you start?

Mary Beth: So this is my family's business, my dad started it 24 years ago and I have been involved since I was 13 years old. I'd come in and I'd help him fill casks and stuff, my payment would be chips and salsa. That was okay with me at the time. And then I started waitressing when I was 18 and then doing a bit of brewery work then as well. And I guess when I finished university I got more involved so I was about 23 then, then I went away for a few years travelling. I spent a lot of time in England and when I came back that's when I really got permanently involved because being in England made me realize what a good thing we had here. Just the pub life over there...real ales...we do English-style ales here so it was pretty fitting and that really got my juices going. I got serious when I came back so I've been head brewer now for...oh I don't even know...8 years maybe? 8 years or so.

Gregory: Okay.

Shayan: So would you say you've never had any formal training really, it was mainly your dad?

Mary Beth: Mostly learning from my dad; I got a scholarship through the Master Brewers Association of the Americas to do a course in Wisconsin, it was a two week program, mostly technical but it was pretty informative at the same time. I also did the Institute of Brewing and

Distilling exam; it's an independent study but it's a full exam so I have my general certificate in brewing with that. But aside from that and going for brew days with a couple of other breweries in Toronto, yeah this is it, just on the job.

Gregory: And you mentioned you went to England; how did that influence how you brew now?

Mary Beth: Well like I said we've always done the English-style ales here, that's like our traditional approach. The yeast that we use comes from England; I think it's about 200 years old or something, this particular strain of yeast. So I'm not sure the exact number of breweries in Canada that use it – I think it's something like 12 or 15 – so there's not a lot of us but it's a very specific style of brewing with the open fermenters, the one strain of yeast, and you just keep reusing that strain over and over again. So because of that – like I said – that's where the English ales come from, but as for spending time in England it just made me appreciate English ales a lot more because not a lot of breweries in Ontario do them, especially as their main style. It separates us from them so it makes us a bit different; we are, again, more traditional in that regard, but there's something to be said for tradition.

Shayan: Yeah, definitely.

Shayan: What would you say makes a beer aesthetically pleasing for you – a craft beer – in terms of just color, consistency, smell maybe, like what would your preference be?

Mary Beth: My preference, I'm a pretty big hop-head so I like IPAs a lot. I try to have more varied tastes but those are what I go for so I really like the West Coast American hops, the Citra, Cascade, the real citrusy hops. I like Galaxy from New Zealand and Nelson Sauvin from New Zealand as well. We use Galaxy here, and like I just did a big American IPA today so we don't just do English-style ales. The one-offs and seasonals we do, they're a bit different for sure. But,

yeah I don't know...I like stouts, I like everything, but the IPAs are what I tend gravitate towards.

Shayan: You guys do brew stouts here, right?

Mary Beth: Mhm.

Shayan: Because I frequent here and there's this one that tastes kind of like chocolate.

Mary Beth: Yep. That's one of the original three, the Keefe's Irish stout. Peculiar and Vespador are the three we started with.

Shayan: Yeah that one is really good.

Mary Beth: Mhm it is good.

Shayan: It's different.

Mary Beth: It's actually...cause we sell to other pubs now in the city; that's probably the most popular one.

Shayan: I know you mentioned your father pretty much got you into this, because Granite Brewery is his business, right?

Mary Beth: Yes.

Shayan: So would you say he was your only – for the lack of a better term – influence? Role model, maybe?

Mary Beth: Yeah, he's definitely been a role model for me, being the only girl, two brothers.

And, again, growing up with a brewpub in the family and saying your dad's a brewer, he makes beer for a living sounds pretty cool. So I think that's really what made me to begin with wanna get involved because I wanted to make beer for a living, and as glamorous as it sounds it's a dirty job...a very dirty job. It's something like 90% cleaning. But at the end of the day you still get to

drink the fruits of your labor which is pretty sweet. But yeah, he's definitely the reason why I got into it.

Gregory: When you were first starting off, what obstacles did you have when you started getting into brewing?

Mary Beth: I think the main thing cause we're a very hands-on brewery here, like everything we do is manual, so that was probably the biggest obstacle I guess. I got a lot stronger doing it; it took some time. But when I first started as soon as I got home I would have an hour and a half nap or something cause I'd be exhausted. It's a 10-hour day, you're on your feet the whole time, you're lifting heavy things all day. So that was the main thing I think. Even now it's a bit of a struggle; I have an eleven-month son and he doesn't like to sleep so I don't get to sleep and I still have my work to do so that's tough. But I'd say from the beginning being a woman was no problem; everyone was very supportive. And now there's tonnes of female brewers but back when I started there weren't very many of us but like I said everyone was really supportive so that was cool.

Shayan: That's always good to hear.

Mary Beth: For sure.

Shayan: It really helps.

Mary Beth: Yes.

Shayan: Do you participate in any collaborative brewing projects, or is it really just you guys?

Mary Beth: We do. We just did one with some Ontario hop farmers. As for different breweries we've done a couple of those but the opportunity just doesn't come up that much, and we don't really tend to seek out collaborations unless there's an event going on like Toronto Beer Week or Ontario Craft Beer Week, something like that. But we've worked with these hop farmers quite a

few times now, we just did a harvest ale with them. We like doing that because it's supporting local and they're really great people. And it's pretty cool to use hops that are just 45 minutes down the road.

Shayan: Did you participate in Beer Week at all, Granite Brewery?

Mary Beth: We did one event, a cask barbeque. That tends to be our event for Toronto Beer Week just because with the restaurant and just other parties going on, stuff like that, it's kind of hard to organize but yeah, it was a good turnout and a lot of fun. We had the harvest ale on for that so it was nice.

Gregory: So who do you market your beer towards? Or who drinks at Granite Brewery?

Mary Beth: My brother would probably be a better person to talk to about that cause he's our marketing guy but as for the customers here it varies quite a bit. We're getting more and more young people which is nice; for a long time it was families. We get a lot of older people here during the day which is good cause they don't have anywhere to go, they can have a couple pints with their lunch and chill out for a while. But now, ideally we'd like to hit the 19-30 year old market a bit more. I think though – I don't know the numbers – but just from observing around here it's definitely getting to that now which is good. And then, a lot of new pubs that are opening by younger people, they call us to get our beer too so we're becoming more known now; for a long time we weren't and now our name is going out there, which is good.

Shayan: You said your dad was a pretty big influence – your father was a pretty big influence – in the beginning of your brewing. But is there anything else – any other factors that played into you – I know you mentioned you really wanted to get into brewing, enough to do it for a living, but is there any reason why that was?

Mary Beth: I think one of the things that I was thinking of mostly was just keeping the business in the family. I've grown up with this place and yeah I love, it's kind of like my second home so it doesn't even feel like work for the most part, that was a big part of it too. Even with the waitressing and all that. And another thing. The other employees here, a lot of them have been here for like 15 years or something, so I know them really well too which just adds to that family aspect.

Shayan: Oh, yeah.

Mary Beth: So yeah, like I don't know. I played with the idea of getting into film; I took that in university, more analytical. That was always there too, but I kind of knew in the back of my mind that this is where I wanna end up. And I'm happy, I'm very happy.

Shayan: Yeah, and that's all that matters, right?

Mary Beth: Yeah, exactly.

Gregory: And you kind of mentioned that you're hitting more of the...or you're starting to hit more of the 19 to 30 year old demographic.

Mary Beth: Mhm.

Gregory: How do you think that demographic has changed from when you started to now, and maybe how is it going to change in the future?

Mary Beth: An example that I use is my youngest brother, he is 24 now. He and his friends, when they turned 19 they couldn't wait to have their beers after work. And talking to them now, I think there was something like 6-8 of them. All 24 [years old] now. Back when they were younger they would have Canadian or whatever, Labatt blue. They would be fine with that. Now they say "I can't even drink that because I am so used to drinking craft beer and you guys ruined that for me". So just hearing that... the fact that craft beer is so popular now as well, I think it is

a big factor in young people wanting to drink craft beer. Which is good. Very good. So I only see it getting better because as more and more craft breweries come into operation that just mean there are going to be more out there, more to choose from and yeah, we just hope to slowly take over the market. Yeah, I only see it going up.

Shayan: I didn't notice this, maybe 10 years ago people were more into the main stream beers. Why do you think more people are getting into craft beer?

Mary Beth: I think its taste is what they are going for.

Shayan: There is such a diverse range of tastes.

Mary Beth: Yeah, yeah, I know. And that's the thing. Like Molson Canadian, Labatt blue. They just taste the same. I was talking to some guy and his daughter who worked for Corona, I think? And she said "crafted breweries are kill us". I think it was Corona or Labatt... sorry I kinda went on a tangent. What was your original question?

Shayan: Why do you think craft beer is so popular now?

Mary Beth: Right. Uhhh I don't know. I don't know if it is that more and more opened up the marketing is better now. So they are getting their name out. People are interested in it. Whether it is people are more interested in supporting their local. Or just supporting local in general. Umm yeah, cause I could say well its trending. But, that doesn't really say how it became so.

Shayan: You said that people want to support their local breweries and I think that is a big aspect of that.

Mary Beth: Yeah, because well I guess there is still not too many brewery pubs around but, just the fact that all these bars are opening up now. It's just more prevalent now, so yeah. I would say in the last 6 years its defiantly been booming.

Gregory: Just to sort of wrap it up. What would you recommend for someone that wants to get into brewing or in other word how would they go about to start and learn?

Mary Beth: Honestly, I think the best way is to just do like I did. If you can get your foot in the door. There is the Niagara brewing college. Alota people take that course. It is one way to go for sure, but, I think if you're are able to I think just learning on the job is a really great way to do it. But, yeah that's tough because a lot of people want to get into it now. So I guess if you did do the college then... I think they pretty much guarantee a job placement. Which is good. It's just two years. So if you're just going to post-secondary and you have two years to spare, its good. But, like if you are older then it's a little bit tougher. I know people that have done it.

Shayan: So if you just wanna do home brewing then maybe college is the best way to go?

Mary Beth: Home brewing? No. There are so many books you can read. There are so many home brewers out there. Forums and clubs. So it's just really easy to get into that.

Gregory: Do you think that home brewing has lent to the new appreciation of craft brewing?

Mary Beth: Yes. And home brewing. Well I'm not an expert on home brewed beers. I just know I had some and they were amazing. They basically have their own little brewery. Whether its small scale with buckets or with the big power boys or even stainless steel vats that they have made out of old kegs or whatever. It's pretty amazing what they do. And I have done a few homebrews myself. And it's hard. It's like different then here, because you don't have everything. You can't monitor it as much. Especially the fermentation part. But, yeah home brewing is definitely.. like a lot of the brewers that are out there now were home brewers. So that's defiantly a way to get experience that way and then try and get your foot in the door.

Shayan: You mentioned your first brew was at 18, correct?

Mary Beth: Yeah, I came to help out when I was 18.

Shayan: How did it turn out?

Mary Beth: I think back then I never did a whole day. I would come and mash-in in the morning and id usually leave by like 10. So that was an indication that I was not 100 percent into it at the time. But, slowly, slowly, slowly I became more interested and more committed. And like I said when I came back from England I was like, ok, enough horsing around, it's time to get serious.

Gregory: Did your experience in England inspire you to get invest in brewing?

Mary Beth: Yes, I worked in a pub while I was there. Pub life in England... Im noticing its getting to be a little more like that now. Just everyone has their local that they go to. They go to by themselves. They end up talking to people there. The same people like whether its every day, every couple days, whatever. And like yeah, there is a big drinking problem in England, but that part of it was just nice, to feel so comfortable in a place. And we have that here because I'd say about 70 percent of our customers are regulars. It's not like they come by her by themselves and drink at the bar. But they come with their families once a week or whatever. And Yeah, I could see the similarities between the pub I was working at and here. Like I said, I realized what a good thing we had here and wanted to get involved.

Shayan: Would you say that when you were spending time in England visiting pubs and whatnot, would you say the pubs in England had a more social aspect than here?

Mary Beth: I found that as well. And that is what popped out so much for me in England. Here, like we have a few people that'll come in and will talk amongst themselves even though they don't come in together. I was in a small village, so that may be part of it? I'm not sure. Like I never went to a pub in London let's say, to witness if it was the same there. But I worked in small village. Well I guess it was the same as if it was your neighborhood pub. But, yeah, there is a difference for sure. It is definitely more solitary here.

Gregory: How does craft brewing develop a community?

Mary Beth: Well like I said we have our regulars. And they are the ones that keep us going.

There are some that come in and wanna try everything new on the menu, there are some that come in and want the same beer every time. And as a brewery we would be lost without them.

And I have had people say to me “this is such a great part of their community” they are so glad that it is here as a fixture. Cause it has been here for years. Just to have their support was really important. To have the neighbors come in and only be a 5 minute walk from their house.

Shayan: After that long it does become more like a community, like you said it’s been almost 25 years. So it becomes a place for everyone to gather and socialize.

Mary Beth: Yeah, definitely.

Shayan: Thank you so much.

Greg: We really appreciate your time.