

Interview with Ray Bauer

Interviewed by Russ Magnaghi

Soo Brewing Company, Sault Ste. Marie, MI

June 23, 2014

Russ Magnaghi (RM): Interview with Ray Bauer, Sault St. Marie, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014. The topic is the Soo Brewing Company as part of the ongoing project. Okay, Ray, the first question that I always ask so that we have some idea is your birthday.

Ray Bauer (RB): May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1965.

RM: Okay and could you tell us how you got—kind of your background and how you got into brewing.

RB: Well, I brewed my first beer in 1990. A friend of mine from college bought me a home brew kit as a Christmas gift and we tried that a couple of times, didn't particularly like it. It seemed like a whole lot of work and back then, the ingredients were not what they are today for home brewers. Home brewing, back then, unless you were really into it and really had the whereabouts to get the good ingredients and I don't know where you would've got them at that time or I would've done it. It wasn't really all that great, not like it is today. Well, I guess, through the internet, ingredients are readily available. Back then, you had to go through your local home brew supply store. I was living in North Carolina at that time. I don't even think there was a home brew supply store around where I lived. So, it just seemed way more trouble than it's worth. So, I gave it up for a while and I'd say I probably brewed maybe three batches back then, gave it up for about ten years. My father died in 2002 and at his funeral, a cousin of his was kind of waxing nostalgic about the family and how they used to brew and how they were born

in Germany, not my dad or his cousins but their parents were born in Germany. He talked about how, for special occasions, people home on military leave and stuff like that, there were big families and there were always special occasions that they would bring out the homemade beer and the wine and have these long wooden tables and put them in the yard and everybody would just come over and it would be a good time. It made me want to try and get back in touch with that aspect of my heritage so, I started brewing again right away. I brewed a lot from that point on because I really wanted to get it down. I brewed in the middle of the last decade from like 2004 to 2010, I brewed probably—I averaged 45 batches a year which is right under what is allowed by law. I think you're only allowed something like 50 five gallon batches per household per year and I was doing about 45. So, I brewed several hundred beers before I became a professional. I will say that my background is a little bit odd and how I learned how to brew is odd, I think, because it's a way that I had not really heard of. There was no home brewing in the Soo that I knew of. Nobody was really out there doing it, as far as I know. We had, a little bit later on, there was a wine and home brew supply shop in town called Superior Taste and they didn't really know too many people who were brewing. There's a guy out in Dafter who evidently brewed and was very good at it and I actually bought a lot of equipment off of him eventually. I can't remember his name—\_\_\_\_\_, I can't remember his first name anymore. I got 13 carboys, the whole system and a bunch of stuff for like \$250 so, it was insane because carboys go for 40 bucks a piece probably. Anyway, how I learned the craft though is that I learned through scientific method where I started with extracts and, at that time, there were five different types of extract available to me and obviously, there are four ingredients in beer so, I would brew what I call the—

RM: Explain the four ingredients.

RB: There's yeast, hops, malt and water. The water would remain constant always. I wasn't going to change the water. I wasn't going to change the water. There are things you can do to water and I did try

to change the water and add chemicals later to try to emulate certain styles of beer but you knew the water was going to be constant that's coming out of the taps, same source, right? Then, what I did was I started with White Labs-001 which is our California ale yeast and I brewed run of beer on that yeast because you can reuse yeast repeatedly. So, I would go from light to dark and there was a Pilsner extract, regular two-row, a wheat, an amber and a dark. I took that yeast and I brewed with eight pounds of extract and the same hops, that same beer five times but with the different extracts; then I got another type of yeast that was a British ale, 004 and I did the same thing with those five extracts. Then I got a different type of yeast, I think the third one I used was the kolsch yeast which is 029 and I did it again. Then I used the heffeweisen yeast and that doesn't even make sense because heffeweisen yeast, you're really supposed to brew wheats with it and only one of those extracts was a wheat extract but I did it again and that is how I learned the differences between the yeasts and also the malts. Then I did that for close to a year, almost every week and when I found five yeasts that I like, I started formulating some recipes. I started reading recipes, formulating recipes, changing up hops and I had a lot of good sources for recipes. Oddly, I will tell you, I've never actually brewed from a recipe other than my own. I have never tried to clone another beer. That's big in the home brewing community. You don't clone Two Hearted or Pliny the Elder or whatever. I never did that. I might've done it had I ever talked to any other home brewers because that's what they do. It never really occurred to me because I did have one friend of mine who used to live in the Soo who is a chemist for DuPont in Delaware and he actually, whenever I would have home brew questions, I would go to him. So, he was basically my source for information. So, after I did that about another year, then I started all-grain brewing. That opened up a whole different world because there are so many different varieties of grain that you can use at that point. So, at that point, I started working on my recipes, perfecting my recipes. I would take my beers out to functions and to gatherings and get input on it, you know, find out what people like, which is why the beer that I eventually came up with was put on tap when I opened up. I knew that it was something that the people around here would be able to tolerate because there wasn't a whole lot of

craft-brew drinking here when we opened in 2011. When I opened, I did not have an idea—I did not have a style and these are basic beers for craft-brew drinkers. I wouldn't think of not having an IPA in my line-up now but the reason I didn't do it was because I was afraid that people would come in here having never had craft beer, try IPA, hate it and then say, “Oh, that craft beer is too bitter” or “He just sells all that dark stuff,” and on and on, then it would be ruined because I needed a lot of positive spin. I needed everyone who came in here, not everybody did, but the vast majority of the people who came in here and tried the beer, left with a positive experience and that's how you're built.

RM: So, you wanted to get them in here, then they could try these other beers.

RB: Well, it wasn't long before we did an IPA and a stout. I think it was like 2 or 3 weeks before we did a stout and a month until we did an IPA but I didn't want to do it right off the bat because I didn't want to be too-hip-for-the-room, so-to-speak. I had been told that this was a Bud Light, Miller Light, Coors Light, Busch Light town and I really think that it was to a degree. You'd have to talk to the Jorgensen's but I think they said something like 3800 cases of craft beer total was sold in Chippewa County in 2009, the year before when I was doing my research. I sell more than that now in this room, let alone the fact that you've got a place next store and one across the street and one over there. They're all selling craft beer, like they've never done it. These places never carried craft beer. They had a little selection of craft beer and added more taps for craft beer. There's been a little bit of a craft beer explosion in the Sault compared to the way it was. I knew coming in that, about 6.7% of beer in America, at that time, consumed was craft beer. I think I needed somewhere just below or right around 2%. If I could sell 2% of the beer in Sault Ste. Marie consumed, then I would be able to make it financially, because that's always a big concern and I did. We're selling about 3% of the beer now. The difference between 2% and 3% is huge in this town. The consumer wanted beer. You're looking at like

6.5 to 7 million dollars' worth of beer a year in this little town. It's a long winter but you live in Marquette, you know how that goes.

RM: Right, right. Now, I wanted to ask you what you said before you became professional, how would you define that? At what point did you consider yourself a professional brewer?

RB: The first time I brewed our first batch of Goldilocks which we sold, then I was a professional brewer on this equipment and not a home-brewed batch of beer. I didn't make it in my kitchen.

Although the guys at HopCat were nice enough to let me sit in with them a couple of times on their brew sessions. They had the exact same equipment. I was going to buy this. I called down there, there were like four other set-ups like this, in the country, at the time from ABT (Allied Beverage Tanks). I asked them if I could look at their equipment before I bought it and they said, "You should come down and brew with us." I said, "Great." So, I went down there and I brewed and then a couple months later I went down there for a couple of days and brewed again and then when we brewed our first batch of beer here which was Goldilocks, they came up here and helped me brew it, so I wouldn't screw it up too bad. They ended up taking that recipe back down to Grand Rapids with them and were brewing it as a beer called "A Beer Named Sue," which is funny because I had that name reserved for my red that I was going to brew and I ended up not using that nor did I ever brew that beer more than once anyway, even though it's a really good red recipe. Reason being, we thought we were going to be open—here's a little story behind our most popular beer: we thought we were going to be open by St. Patrick's day so I brewed, what was a going to be our March seasonal "Maggie's Irish Red." We weren't open on St. Patrick's Day. We were open March 31<sup>st</sup> but we had "Maggie's Irish Red" because you had to dump it all, so we had that to sell and as it turns out, that ended up being a very popular beer but I thought that one of the reasons it was so popular was the scarcity because when we ran out, it seemed people wanted it more. So, at that point, people were kind of demanding it. "When are you going to brew Maggie's again? When are you going to brew Maggie's again?" So, I brewed it again and it sold out

very quickly and then I decided to brew it once a month because I feared, and that's seven kegs and it would go in usually eight days regardless. So, we would have it one for eight days and then off for twenty-two days in a thirty-day month. Then I decided to brew a double batch and that's the bigger tanks. They were the seven-barrel tanks and then that sold out in 2 weeks. So, we don't have it on right now and I'll probably explain that in a little bit but we've had that on tap continuously for a while and it has not lost any steam and it's actually, by far, our most popular, most consumed beer which again was only supposed to be seasonal. I was only supposed to brew that once a year but it's actually a staple now. It's very different from other reds in a couple of ways. Number one, it's quite malty. It's a bomb. It's like 7.2% alcohol by volume. Secondly, most reds contain a lot of caramel and this beer contains no caramel. So, it's quite different from other reds. I like it personally. Although, I'm an IPA drinker, so I don't drink a whole lot of it but I do like it and evidently lot of other people do. It's our most popular beer. The reason it's not on right now though is we just expanded in May. If you would turn around, you can see three new seven-barrel tanks back there. Then we started, when we opened, we had four three and a half-barrel tanks which would've given us the capacity, technically, if we had brewed to capacity, to brew 365 barrels in a year which is why our slogan is "Tomorrow is only a keg away." Its 365 barrels in a year, right? Then, we kept nearly running out of beer. I mean, often we would have one beer or two beers on tap and had we not bought that—we were on the verge of running out of beer and we bought the seven barrel fermenter that you see there named "Bam-Bam" from GW Kent in Ypsilanti. They happened to have one. So, I drove down there and picked it up, drove it back, we plumbed it and we were able to save the day because it was the middle of summer and you don't want to run out of beer in the middle of summer. Then, last year, which was the first year under the new configuration with the seven-barrel fermenter, we were actually down to one beer or two beers for most of the summer. At one point, I had a keg of a beer called "the Gift" which is our Christmas lager and I was saving it for the following Christmas and I was going to bring it out as a surprise but actually, had I not brought it out, we would've been out of beer because we had one tank that was ready to move but

was not going to be carbonated for a day and I needed something to do that stop-gap. So, we called it “Christmas in July” and brought out that one keg of the Christmas lager to carry it. I’m very pleased, the banks have been very good to me. It was rough in the beginning because I was unemployed when I built this place but now that I’m up and running it every day. It’s practically a blank check. They’ll give me as much money as I need. We have very good cash flow. We’ve sustained double digit growth. We’re still experiencing double digit growth which, I would think, will slow down in July and August because we sold so much beer last year in July and August. I mean, we sold more beer than we could possibly brew. That is, we loaded up as much as possible. We brewed as much as we could brew through July and August and we still sold more than we brewed. So therefore, you know you need more tanks, right? In which case, we got three more sitting in the back there and I would have to say, beyond a doubt, we will not have the same issues because this room is only so big. You can only sell so much and, again, that’s the whole thing about the double digit growth. When I say double digit growth, I mean May of 2011 to May of 2012, the May of 2012 to the May of 2013—I view growth, same month, previous year. For instance, huge shocker for me, that we experience more than 20% growth from May of 2013 to May of 2014 because we had slowed down—I want to say our growth last year was something like 17%. So, to be able to grow even further than what the average was for the previous year was amazing to me. Last year, we sold like 40 barrels in July and 40 barrels in August and to sustain that growth rate this year because we’d have to really pack this place during the day because, at night, we’re already packed so the only way that we can really grow is if more people were taking it offsite. The whole other thing, and this is how I think we differ from a lot of other breweries and maybe the other breweries in the U.P is that when I designed the business plan, I designed it so we would sell a lot of growlers. The number in 2010 was, I believe, 12% of your sales and if you owned a microbrewery or a brew pub in Michigan, 12% of your sales were going to be growlers, 40% of the beer we sell is not consumed on the premises. As a matter of fact, just this Saturday, we sold over a hundred growlers in a day for the third time. So, we move a lot of growlers and we do that because our

growler prices are very competitive with what else is going on in the craft beer marketplace locally. The growlers are only three dollars a piece for the bottle and eight dollars for the beer, ten if it's IPA and 12 if it's high-gravity but, generally speaking, you walk out the door with eleven dollars and get a refill for eight and we also buy them back. So, if you got some at home and you're driving by on your way home from work and you think, "Well, I don't want to buy another growler. I've got like six of them already." Once you pass us by and you go home and your kids are meeting you, your dad or Johnny did this and your wife is saying, "Can you take out the trash?" You're never going to make it back, right? So, the whole point is, to make the growlers, in the mind of the general public, generally speaking, expendable. You can accumulate a bunch, don't worry about it, as long as they are clean, pristine actually, bring them back and we're good. We can do that because they're clear. A lot of places don't like clear growlers. I don't like amber growlers. A lot of people bring growlers in but they're fairly disgusting. You can look into a clear growlers and see what's going on in there. There's been plenty of time where I've refused to fill a growler because it had mold, bacteria, oil, all sorts of nasty stuff in there.

RM: And people came in to have it filled?

RB: Oh yeah, it's crazy and I can't even imagine what it's like to have a bunch of amber growlers coming in that people can't see inside because then I put my product in there. They take it out, they drink it. It's not up their expectations and then they say, "Oh the Soo Brewing Company, they've really gone downhill. I'm not going to buy another growler from them," because they never blame themselves, right? So, that's why we do that. I insist on clear growlers. Once, there was a clear growler shortage, a couple of years ago. I bought a pallet of amber growlers and I actually have those in the basement. Actually, that's not fit to print because I don't like people to know that I have those because some people do insist on amber growlers and I hate amber growlers. I'll tell you that right now. I've got



one of our best customers comes in with amber growlers all the time because he stocked up when that's all we had was amber growlers. So, he uses his amber growler and he knows I hate that. I know he keeps his growlers clean. He's good that way.

RM: What were you doing before?

RB: I was a career broadcaster and my last job, I worked for Clear Channel Broadcasting in Broadcast Research which, very briefly, because a lot of people didn't even know this sort of thing existed—I used to listen to and transcribe 800 hours of radio a day. They would send it to me on the computer, I would rifle through it and name every song that was played, the DJ spoke at 10:13, played a commercial at 10:14, Jim \_\_\_\_\_ at 10:18, into Peter Frampton “Do You Feel Like We Do?” at 10:19, Led Zeppelin “Stairway to Heaven” at 10:31. Boom-boom-boom-boom. I'm awesome at “Name that tune” I'll tell you that right now. When it comes to rock, I can name that tune in less than one second usually.

RM: So, what happened then? You wanted to get into something else?

RB: In April of 2009, Clear Channel—I don't know if you're familiar with them but they're the world's largest broadcasting—they laid off one-third of the workforce, practically indiscriminately, I know it wasn't indiscriminately but they were going to lay off a third of the workforce which was over 5,000 people. I did not get laid off at that time. However, I saw that handwriting on the wall because I knew that if I lost my job here with Clear Channel, then I wasn't going to be able to work in broadcasting in this town because I had already worked in broadcasting in this town and that's just the way that goes. You can't go back, right? So, I had to come up with a plan B and that plan B was to open a microbrewery. At that point, I was already brewing a lot of beer. I was very confident in it as a product. I knew I loved brewing and I knew that there was a niche for it here. There was nothing here. The

closest microbrewery is in Tahquamenon Falls, 71 miles away. There was nothing north of Big Buck. I'm looking and seeing that there's a successful brewery in Grand Marais. Grand Marais is way smaller than the Sault, two breweries in Houghton, again, considerably smaller than Sault Ste. Marie. So, I made my plans to start a brewery. Unfortunately for me, when Clear Channel laid off all those people, then the people who were existing, their workloads were increased. So, I was actually working on opening the brewery and working about a 50-60 hour work week every week. So, that was an incredible load. Then, my number did get called May 10<sup>th</sup> of 2010, a year and a month later. Again, this is just background information for you. The research that I did, because there were other companies that did this type of research but they were all automated. We were the only company out there that had human beings. Therefore, when we were putting them out of business one by one, there was a tremendous amount of satisfaction that human beings were in fact, better than automation, right? That is true. You can't beat human beings. Right? What happened was, there was the last company left and they owned Radio and Records which was the industry's newspaper. They called themselves that \_\_\_\_\_ after years so we didn't really think that they would ever go under but in fact, they did which left us as the only research \_\_\_\_\_ left. When that happened, there was this corporate-wide cheering and the somber high-fives because we never met each other and everybody was just so excited that we did it. At that very moment, I knew, I said to myself, "This is not good," because if you don't have competition, then what's going to happen? What happened was, they decided to automate. Let's say human beings make three fewer errors in a day than automation, well if you multiply that by every single person, you're talking about thousands of mistakes that we're catching that automation won't catch and therefore, we're viable but once you're the only game in town, then those three mistakes don't really seem so bad anymore because you're not comparing it to anything. So, we were all let go, every single one of us in broadcast research was let go. But, it was good news for me because they gave me six months of severance pay and therefore I was able to work on the brewery and not have to worry

about where my next meal was coming from and it all worked out. I make more money now than I did then and I'm happier and...it all worked out.

RM: You were making a conversion—

RB: I was already making the conversion. I would've made the conversion quicker—

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START OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

RM: Okay.

RB: Had they never laid us all off, I might still be working on the brewery and never had opened it. So, here's a need-to-know is that we are actually opening another brewery called "Lockside Brewery Limited" which is down the street where you see the construction there. Which is going to be right down the street. That'll be a nano-system so, it'll be smaller than this. But we're also doing wine down there and going to do a little food. Because there is spill over from here. I mean, in the summertime, in particular, around Thursday nights, which are big nights for us, people come in and they look around and there's no seating or whatever and they leave. Well, now, they'll have another brewery to go to. I will be brewing at both.

RM: Since you're brewing there, you can have that, you can sell the brews.

RB: Yes, but we do need to brew beer down there. We will be brewing down there.

RM: Because if you're brewing you can only have one \_\_\_ tap-room.

RB: Right.

RM: Is there an amount that you have to brew?

RB: I don't think so. I think it's just a measurable amount but I do plan on brewing there regularly. The beers down there will be different than the beers here. It'll be a completely different experience. It'll be different in a number of ways. There will be a television. There's no TV in here. There'll be better looking wait-staff than me. There will be food, there will be wine, there's a deck. It'll be a little more upscale. This place is a very family oriented place with the big community tables and the games and kids come in here all the time, right? But, Lockside is going to be a little bit more for grown-ups.

RM: When is that going to open?

RB: The day after the state of Michigan gives me my license for that place. It's not fully constructed yet. I would invite you to take a look and walk down there and see what we're doing. That was a bar called "The Corner Pub" and now it's going to be 1668 Winery and Lockside Brewery Limited. 1668 being the year that Sault St. Marie was founded. As a historian, I guess that you would know that.

RM: Do you feel that you have, I'm asking this because it's come up, do you feel that you've added to the community, the economy?

RB: By all means, for sure we have added to the economy. We do a lot of cooperative works. Almost all of the advertising we do is through the events like the Summer Solstice 5k which was just this past weekend. We were major sponsor of that. Our root beer sales, all of that money is going to Sault

historic sites. That was like \$5,000. We're so involved with, whether it's girls' softball, Sault area Little League, anything. As a matter of fact, because I put together a plan, I wanted to develop, and I still want to develop, there's an old water treatment plant out in Sherman Park and we wanted to develop that into a brewery and the Corner Pub property became available for a really good rate and we decided that that made more sense but the city put out a RFP and asked for proposals for development of that property. So, I put together the RFP and we actually have the rights to develop that right now because we are the only ones who submitted an RFP but as part of that RFP, I outlined what our financial impact has been in the city, how much money we've spent with all these local business. Here's a really good example. Thursday night's we do what's called "Pint and Slice Night" where we sell a pint of beer and a slice of Uppercrust pizza, a little mom-and-pop shop here in town for five bucks. We have purchased over \$20,000 worth of Uppercrust Pizza since we've been doing that. I mean, I wish somebody would do a promotion and purchase \$20,000 worth of Soo Brewing Company product. That'd be wonderful! I'd like to think that that's had a positive impact on their budget and they are the only mom and pop pizza joint in town, everything else is a chain. So, I feel really good about being able to do that with them.

RM: Now, do you feel that you've brought new clientele to downtown Sault St. Marie?

RB: Absolutely, positively, we have. There are a lot of people who come in here. There are a lot of medical professionals, doctors and such that would not be caught dead in a bar but they can come in here. There's a doctor—my own physician, I'm not going to name him, but my own physician who I know would not go to a bar, will come in every week or so, buy a pint of Maggie's Irish Red and a slice of pizza and enjoy his newspaper and read the paper, unwind a little bit and he's on his way. It also gives those folks a little bit of a social—My banker, is a mug club member, okay? And almost every mug club member, not all of them, but the vast majority of mug club members we have, we have about

400 of them now, they are not people who are hanging out in bars previously. And there's a huge social aspect. A lot of people, they buy that mug because it's 25 ounces for the price of 16 and you only need to buy like 30 mugs of beer over the course of a year and it pays for itself. However, there's a huge comradery, in fact, I hope you're in town tonight, are you in town? Ahh, that's too bad because every Monday we do something called the Fraternal Order of Cheese which was started by the mug club but independent. I say "we" do it, it's actually "we" don't because it's independent of the brewery. You understand me? It's not a brewery event, the brewery doesn't really have anything to do with it except for the fact that we provide a table, right? But it started with one of our mug clubbers, Mike Verhag who used to bring in cheese and he's a big cheese fan, and people would sample his aged asiago or aged white cheddar or whatever and then it kind of grew and then there were like seven or eight different types of cheese and some crackers. And now we've got people who bake bread out of our spent grains and the yeast and people who make homemade venison jerky, and pickle their own stuff and they're bringing that in. So it's quite the spread every Monday. And Monday is a huge day for us as far as mug clubbers and a lot of people look forward to it on Mondays. And it's just one of those social things that has been an offshoot of the brewery. Again, it's not a brewery event per say...

RM: Right. It just happens to be in the brewery.

RB: It just happens to be in the brewery and the mug clubbers are the ones that, generally speaking, bring the...can you think of anybody, Jason, in who's not a mug clubber that brings stuff in for that?

Jason: Um, not off the top of my head.

RB: But I mean non mug clubbers are allowed to partake. It's open to the public, anybody can just come in and eat. Though they do ask if you could throw, if you didn't bring anything in, if you could throw a couple of bucks in a jar they have out. Not everybody does, but that's okay. It's easy for me to

say that's okay, I'm not the one who... every once and a while I'll spring for something. Here's something kind of funny is that the Katmai Bay, we have a real good relationship with them. As a matter of fact we have an autographed life ring up there where they gave that to us as a Christmas present our first Christmas that we were opened. And the Captain of the Katmai Bay, Brian Astell, great guy. He was a mug clubber. And we had I think nine guys who were on board that boat who were all in the mug club. And so Brian had been around and was very well travelled and I was coming up from Frankenmuth and brought some German beer kaesa cheese which is extremely pungent, right? And they told me down at Kearn's at Frankenmuth, they warned me, "People are going to think this cheese is bad. It's not cause we get people who return this all the time." I said, "No, it's okay. It's going to be great!" And so I brought it in and it went over kind of like a lead balloon, right? Some of the people that worked here insisted that it be wrapped up tight in foil, you know what I mean? They just didn't want to smell it, right? Well Brian Astell comes in the door, takes...now the cheese is over there, right? And he takes one step in and says, "Who brought German Beer Kaesa cheese?" [Both chuckling] "Give me some!"

RM: So now you get the coast guard then, they come in here?

RB: Um-hm. And not just the Kat, but a lot of guys from Sector that made, they don't have a life-ring, right? So they made that plaque there and all the mug clubbers that have been in Sector have signed that. We got a Buck Thorton ring up there and it's been very cool.

RM: You see now, before you opened there really wasn't much of a place for these young people to go to?

RB: You are correct, that's right, yeah. Especially the ones with families because most of these guys do have families. And that is true, and we also see a lot of tourism through here. There are a lot of people who have come and sat, and it's like I wish the Convention and Visitor's Bureau was just hanging out here when these people would come in and say, "The only reason I came to Sault Ste. Marie was because of the brewery." And now we're hoping to have a second brewery with a completely different atmosphere and completely different beers. You know what I mean? Never mind that the fact that same guy's brewing it. But still I mean we only have nine taps here and look at the wide variety of beers that could be brewed. And I've got a lot of recipes that are dying to come out, like my Original Red, that used to be called A Beer Named Sue, that I really haven't brewed here because of the popularity of Maggie's Irish Red. So that's going to be a beer, say, that we have down there

RM: Okay, now should that be included as the fifteenth brewery in?

RB: It will be, yes.

RM: So I mean, it's going to have a different name and

RB: It's a different name, a different corporate structure...

RM: So I could say there are two microbreweries in Sault Sainte Marie?

RB: Sault Ste. Marie, yes. Yes, that will be true. We will be brewing there.

RM: And when I was at Tahquamenon yesterday there was a fellow who overheard my interview-conversation, and he was doing the brewery tour. I think he had come through \_\_\_ and we told him about Grand Marais and he was going as far as Marquette, so I and Lark gave him a rundown of places to go to. But he was on a brewery-tour, visiting as many as he could.

RB: Well, I know you've been to, are we your last one? Have you been?

RM: No I still have the...

RB: Western? Okay.

RM: Copper, Keweenaw and Copper Country.



RB: When Brickside opened up we went on, my family and I, went on a U.P.-wide brewery tour. We hit every brewery other than Tahquamenon, nothing against them it's just that we had been there many times and that was kind of out of our way. But we hit all of them in 48 hours!

RM: Oh my god! [laughs]

RB: Didn't drink more than one pint in most places, obviously. And we ate most of the time. So...

RM: So you did the whole thing up to Copper Harbor?

RB: The whole thing, so it can be done in 48 hours, minus Tahquamenon. Because that really would have screwed up our timing. Because we started by having lunch in Grand Marais.

RM: And then you could do dinner in Marquette?

RB: Actually no. We did Marquette on the way back. Marquette was day two. Yeah, we stopped in Grand Marais and then shot up and hit the peninsula there and then...

RM: The Keweenaw. Now, did you get down to Escanaba?

RB: Yes we did. We did that the second day, that was the next-to-last place we went to and then we came back and hit here. So that was kind of neat.

RM: We should and put that as a...I might do it as an insert, you know. "This can be done!" To get your itinerary down. So the first day was: left the Sault, Grand Marais...

RB: Grand Marais, then we went up and hit Brickside, not necessarily in this order because I think what happened was we hit the two in Houghton, then we dropped off our stuff because we knew we were going to stay in Calumet. And then we went up and hit Brickside and came back and finished in Calumet.

RM: That was all in one day?

RB: That was one day, yeah. We had an early lunch and...you know. When I say 48 hours, it may have been more like 50. You know what I mean? It may not have been a strict 48 hours. But it was basically two days. That was day one. And then in day two we hit all the ones there in Marquette and

Ishpeming and then went the next day, went to Escanaba for lunch, and then came back here and had a beer.

RM: Interesting. You're the first person that's done that.

RB: I have very little time on my hands! We knew that we...the two things that we wanted to do very much were go to the new Brickside and also we wanted to stay overnight at Michigan House, there.

Have you been there?

RM: Yeah, oh yeah.

RB: In my opinion, best ambiance of any brewery in the U.P. Love that place!

RM: Now there was a....

RB: Tin I think its tin anyway advertisement for Soo Brewing Company from 1910 that I recently purchased, which as far as I know is the only one in existence because all of that was scrapped during World War II. This was found in somebody's crawl space and it's got holes in it where you can see that someone had like screwed it to a wall in somebody's bar or whatever. And I'm having it put under museum glass and properly framed and everything right now or it would be here, because that's a really cool thing to take a look at. And of course, just very briefly the bottling line at Soo Brewing Company, 1906 or 07 that was an advertisement from, there's a date on there. I want to say it's 1946 possibly. That advertisement with the Stroebel front? That looks like some sort of heat exchanger that's being brought in by a horse to the original Soo Brewing Company. There's...that's not before cars thought, because there's a car in the background there. All of our taps by the way are...or not all of them, but most of them; they're all bottles. Most of them are original Soo Brewing Company bottles, pre-1910. We'll just affix different labels depending on what the beer is for the tap. We have some bricks that are from the original Soo Brewing Company that are in that wall there that make up the outline of...

RM: Oh, here?

RB: Yeah.

[Both seemingly wander off]

RM: Okay, could you tell us a little about the history of the original Soo Brewing?

RB: Sure. Soo Brewing Company began as Arnold Brewing in 1901, I believe they ran that way until 1907, it might have been 1906. Then they were purchased by another group, Richard Reinhardt was the name of the CEO and he hired John Leonard Stroebel to be the brewmaster. Stroebel was a German. And they brewed Soo Export, Rhinebrau, eventually they brewed a beer called Soo Brew which we also brew Soo Brew but I'm sure it's nothing line the original Soo Brew, and Stroebel. Those are four of the brand names that I know of that they were brewing. Of course they shut down during Prohibition, they became Soo Beverage Company. And then when Prohibition ended they reopened. Stroebel, I believe, was the owner at that point and that's when I think they started brewing Stroebel beer and again you can see the advertisement for it there. They were shipping it down to Detroit. But there were not long for this world when that add ran, I think that they had like two more years. There is a gentleman who is in Tendercare, I believe in Escanaba. And his name is Ray Paquin who actually worked at the actual Soo Brewing Company. And while I was formulating this place and planning it, he lived in the Sault and he was...well we were both in Knights of Columbus together, and we would make pasties together, et cetera. And he used to talk about the old brewery a little bit. And so I kind of had that little bit of a connection anyway, that human connection, that I actually do know somebody who used to work there. And I wanted him to be our first customer here, I thought that would be really cool, but he was not in good health at that time and he never made it in here. And he was in Tendercare, and like I said I think it's in Escanaba.

RM: Do you think I could interview him? Or...

RB: I don't know. Possibly?

RM: But I'm thinking...mentally he was?

RB: Mentally he was okay. Yeah. It was his eyesight and his physical frailty. As far as I know.,.,,

RM: And his name was Ray?

RB: Ray Paquin, P-A-Q-U-I-N. Another person you may want to talk to regarding the history of Soo Brewing Company, his name Duane Forrest, and I have his number. He is a huge, huge...I don't know what you'd call it. Fan...of the original Soo Brewing Company. I got all my bottles from him, I got all these pictures from him. He would give you the original and I'd get them blown up of course and such. Those two pictures there did not come from him, they came from Chuck McReady who had a hand in building this place. In fact, build the bar himself and his wife was the engineer on this project. So that's where those came from.

RM: I think someplace I have some pictures that I took when it was still standing. I should dig them out and I could send them to you.

RB: That'd be neat.

RM: Just so you have whatever's available.

RB: Yeah cause I like to have as much as possible...brewery.

RM: Do you have any...

RB: And so he's got a lot of stuff. And he knows a lot of the history, the things I was telling you about, like Richard Reinhardt and John Leonard Stroebel and so on, I got from him because he's the one who told me all of this because I wanted to know as much about the history of Soo Brewing Company because invariably people ask questions. I have a picture over there, I don't think you can see it from where you are, but you know when you get up. It's up above there's growlers there on the left, it's a picture of their celebration, their ten year anniversary celebration which was in 1917 with John Leonard Stroebel on the right and \_\_\_\_\_ on the left and they're drinking Soo Export. Which was a stronger, darker, more bitter version of the Su Bru, which they spelled S-U, B-R-U. I don't know why. I spell it S-O-O B-R-E-W. So I don't know if I should spell it S-U-B-R-U or not. It doesn't really matter, it's not the same beer.

RM: Now have you been able or has anyone been able to go back and create the old recipe from?

RB: No. I would not...I mean all those people are dead. John Leonard Stroebel had two daughters and they were both school teachers and never married and Bill Winn who is a former mayor, like a ten year mayor in this town, in his early seventies they taught him. So I mean they're long gone, you know?

Anybody affiliated with that, because a lot of people say, "How did you get the name?" Well they went out of business in 1948 and nobody wanted it, you know what I mean? And all those people are dead.

RM: But then.....the businesses that way, they threw all the papers out, the recipes, whatever they had.

RB: Right, right. Evidently a lot of building statements available, and I have one up on the wall there.

Which is, I love their bill head, it was very ornate. If I did bill head, I would actually, probably incorporate that in there somehow.

RM: Okay, so you do have the labels, or access to them, or copies? Okay

RB: I, yeah, right. For Stroebel and Su Bru.

RM: Because they had....

RB: I think that's something we could probably sell except of the fact there would be huge copyright infringement issues because we've used like pop-culture figures and such on our labels, you know Marilyn Monroe or whatever. So I couldn't sell it, but I'm sure there's not an issue using it in here on a tap handle because I'm not, and you can hardly even see it from the bar, but if I were actually selling a poster and it had the image of Hugh Hefner or Marilyn Monroe or whatever on it, or god knows who.

RM: Part of what you see in there and I'm obviously into history but one of the problems and will be missing like with these labels, the old original labels is that you're doing that, you're selling the beer or the can or whatever, and your labels or if you have them in here, are used and forgotten about. You move onto something else and what you should do is keep a copy of whatever you're advertising.

RB: Well I do. I have a copy of everything we've done \_\_\_\_\_

RM: Okay and then the other part of it is when you get done using it mainly the archivist, is if they're going to have something at the college is to, they would become your archival depository if you don't

want to keep all of that paper work and what not. Especially when you're done with it and it's sort of dead paper.

RB: Well I mean now a days thought, it's nothing to keep it on, you know you got a terabyte hard drive or whatever. So it's not really taking up a whole lot of room on my computer.

RM: But the big thing is to keep it because most businesses when they run out of business, threw everything away.

RB: We've done like, I want to say eighty one different beers done at this point.

RM: With some kind of a label?

RB: Yeah, they've all had labels on, okay.

RM: Now have you thought about doing any canning?

RB: No, never. No. There are many reasons why not. Number one is that that is contrary to what other might tell you, that is a very hard game to play financially. I mean here, you're profit margin is very slim when you're canning beer. I'm selling beer for 3.50 a pint, there are 120 pints in a keg, so you're looking at \$400 for a keg of beer, right? A six pack, take Keweenaw for instance. Keweenaw is going for \$6.59 I think for a six pack at Neville's Superette. Now how much of that is Marcetti charging for distribution, how much of that is Neville's profit, now how much is Keweenaw actually making that six pack. Now to make that six pack they need bigger vats, they need a canning system, they need people to run it, and all that overhead! And again, how much money are they really making off of that, you know what I mean? It's very difficult. Besides that, take Goldilocks. Goldilocks was one of our most popular beers, it was our most popular beer probably would outsell Maggie's Irish Red by now except I didn't feel like brewing it anymore, period. And I don't want to tie myself, you know, you got Black Rocks got their 51K IPA and the other two that they're doing. What happens when I show up for work and I don't feel like brewing 51K IPA? You know what I mean? It's just a life thing. It's just the way I choose to...I view this as a craft and as long as I'm doing it like this, it's still a craft. But once you start canning and once you give yourself that headache and you're forcing yourself to

continue that and “today I must brew this specific beer.” You know, and to a degree I do that, I mean because I do try to keep Laker Golden up and I do try to keep, Laker Gold was the predecessor or actually was a follow-up to Goldilocks, because Laker Gold’s a very well-balanced beer. Goldilocks had almost no hop to it which I brewed because I knew the people that didn’t drink craft beer already would like

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

RM: Now what did you say?

RB: I wear Soo Brewing Company attire.

RM: OH, Soo Brewing Company attire.

RB: Yeah, I do every day just not when I’m brewing because I change my clothes. Usually I’m brewing, then I go take a lunch and then I come back dressed to tend bar in my Soo Brewing Company attire.

TAPE STOPS, BEGINS AGAIN

RM: Tape number two, Soo Brewing. Okay, where did we leave off?

RB: Oh, just the canning. And...even though I tried to keep Laker Gold up and I try to keep Maggie’s Irish Red up, et cetera, I know that if I come in and I don’t want to brew that, I don’t have to brew. If I want to create a whole new beer, I can do it. I have that freedom. But when you start canning and people start...You’re Keweenaw and you’ve got Red Jacket Amber and you’ve got Widow Maker and Pickaxe Blonde, I mean...you know, don’t print this because nothing against the guys at Keweenaw

because Dick Grey's a great guy and he helped me a great deal. But I mean if I had to go into work every day and brew Pickaxe Blonde, I'd kill myself. It just wouldn't be fun anymore.

RM: Yeah. And that was kind of the whole reason why people get into brewing, it's a fun activity.

RB: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, you know, and I know it's a business and evidently, so far, we've been pretty good at making money, but still though. It needs to be fun and I just don't envision the canning end of it and mass production as really being fun. Again, the profit margin's very small that's why it made much more sense to open up a whole other tap room and sell more draft beer than it would to expand into a canning line. You know what I mean? At least it did to me. And that's where, because we're in America and in America bigger is better, and you know, Adolph Coors wanted to be the next Augustus Busch, and the guy who owned Sam Adams wanted to be the next Adolph Coors, and Larry Bell wanted to be the next guy who owned Sam Adams, and you know, Joe Short wanted to be the next Larry Bell! And everybody wants to be the next big thing and you know, but it's not always worth chasing that. You know? This isn't really, this is not for publication if you don't mind, but I have friends. I won't mention by name. There are people that are friends of mine in the brewing industry not in the U.P., down below. And they were telling me about the very exciting things that they were doing there, and they had upgraded their system, they're distributing in Detroit now, they built a new patio, yadda-yadda-yadda. And it was all very exciting and if I were them, I would be excited too. The only thing is, they only have to sell a hundred thousand dollars' worth of beer a month. So then they came back about eight months later or so and I said, "So have you sold the 100,000 a month yet?" And he was very upbeat and he said, "No, but we've cracked eighty, so we're almost there." In my mind, I'm thinking, you mean to tell me that you've lost 20,000, a minimum of \$20,000 a month for the past eight months? I couldn't live like that, my kid's gotta eat! You know what I mean? I need to make money. Now, they're a group, you know what I mean? So that's a little bit different, that's investment. But see, and there's going to be a new brewery coming up in, a group from Grand Rapids is putting together a brewery, I think it's called Bier du Mac or something like that in Mackinaw City. And this is



coming very soon. And I talked to the guy just on Saturday. He's not a brewer, he and his dad got an investment group together, etcetera, et cetera, right? Which is completely different than what I did here. You know what I mean? Like the guys from Black Rocks for example. And I mean, you know, then it's just a business at that point. You know what I mean?

RM: So there's a fine line? Your eyes get very, very large with the possibilities of expanding and then you sort of walk out of, I'm not saying this is a bad thing, I mean, but they walk out of the essence of craft brewing.

RB: Right.

RM: That you can tinker and have fun and get people to enjoy your beer or new style and flavor and so on.

RB: Exactly. And that's what it is to me. And you know, it's not that way to everybody and that's okay. You know what I mean? But I think you're seeing more of that now that it is and you see that in Cheboygan, that occurred. Where guys who really didn't know anything about brewing that had the money and could see that craft beer is up and coming financially for the state of Michigan, Cheboygan doesn't have a brewery, we should build one. You know what I mean? And hire a brewer, then he'll brew whatever the hell we tell him to brew. And then that guy's kind of hemmed into whatever. You know brewers at places like Founders, that's a pretty high burn position because they're going 24/7 and they're brewing the same thing over and over again. And again, it ceases to be a craft at that point.

RM: A job.

RB: Yeah, it's just a job like anything else. This is still pretty much a hobby for me. I mean, not to the point where I have to make it work, I have to, you know. But in the beginning when I had four tanks and I was brewing twice a week, right? And now that we have what would be the liquid equivalent to ten tanks, because I have three that I have to brew twice to fill, which is six, and the original four. So now I'm pretty much brewing Monday through Friday. Every morning I'm coming into brew. Now I have guys doing brew assists, like what you're seeing here, so I couldn't even tell you the last time I

cleaned up after a brew, which is great! I love that! You know what I mean? I don't have to do the hard stuff, I just get to come in and do the fun stuff and let those guys take care of the hard stuff.

RM: Now, just following up on it. Talking about the people who come in here, you mentioned some groups of people. Do you get people from the college, the students, the faculty?

RB: Yes, very much so. Although evidently we don't have as much of a college student following as say they have at Northern, for whatever reason. I don't know. I always thought it was because, and I don't know how they do it at Northern, but I always figured that for us, it's because most of the college students aren't twenty-one years of age yet. You know what I mean? But the faculty is strongly supportive. And we just got a new University President here and he came in. And he said he came in on a recommendation of faculty. We had a chem class in here once. And we've got, yeah, we've got a lot of faculty who are mug clubbers. And we have quite a few students who are mug-clubbers, but again, I would actually kind of rather have faculty because they stay year in and year out, right? Where the students are more transient. Not that it...we're welcoming to students and students were actually a big part of our success the first couple of months we were here. And in fact, graduation day, commencement day is annually our biggest beer sell day of the year. Bigger than St. Patrick's Day, bigger than the day before, bigger than New Year's Eve, bigger than the day before Thanksgiving, yeah it is.

RM: Really?

RB: We have another big one coming up here on Friday on Engineer's Day. Engineer's Day does not touch Commencement Day, but it is a very big day for us.

RM: So you're kind of right in the byway here for people going to the canal and to and from the canal and Engineers Day and so on?

RB: I tend to think though, and my landlord or my former landlord because he's since sold the building, always talked about how great a location this is and everything. And I don't if you know much about Paren's in the Grand Rapids area, but see, they sparked a big debate on what location

means to a brewery. Black Rocks is the same way. I don't think Black Rocks' location is as good as say the Vierling or the Ore Dock would be, do you?

RM: It's, yeah I pass it every day. It's kind of a whole different operation.

RB: Yeah. My point here though is that people don't just walk by and say, "Well normally I drink Budweiser, but today I think I'll try a craft beer!" It doesn't...craft breweries are the destination. You either know you're going there or you're not. You know what I mean? Sure, we've had a few people come in here, a lot of times people are looking for food. Which I have always talked about how when I brew a stout and call it "Food". So then when people say, "Do you serve food?" We can say, "Yes we do!" We already have a beer and I'll be brewing it again before too long called "The Lightest Thing You Have" because so many people have asked for that. They'll say, "I'll take the lightest thing you have." Usually I pour them a glass of water, but, well we have that on tap though. Some people think it's funny and some people won't think it's funny at all.

RM: The, but you talk about Black Rocks, yeah they started in a location that was...I don't know. These places sort of die. Everything that goes into that place, it doesn't matter what the business is, it collapses and they went in there and the thing has just blossomed now. And I asked them "What is your clientele?" And they had Mrs. Sonderegger who is ninety-five, she goes in there with her friends and what not and he said, "You know, we just don't get students, but we get kind of a whole variety of people that are going there because of the." I don't know if it's, it might be the location, it's kind of in the middle of the residential area. So if you just want to go down and drink to your heart's delight and then walk home.\_\_\_\_\_. The Vierling is the restaurant and the Ore Dock, I don't know they have a lot of events that they have upstairs and what not with fund raisers and I don't know. I thought the location was kind of odd, in a part of town that was half-dead. But they've seemed to become a focal point for people. So all of these taprooms and breweries and tap rooms have had, like your own stimulated the local area economy and so on.

RB: Right. For instance the, and I know they're only a consignment shop next door, but they own the building, right? And if we weren't here, that wouldn't have occurred because it was our paying of that rent on a monthly basis that made buying this building viable for them. See, which it could've gone the other way for me like I wanted to buy the building but because I didn't know who I could get as a tenant on the side, therefore it wasn't financially viable, but they had already had me locked in, therefore it was viable for them to buy the building. You know what I'm saying?

RM: But now are they going to, as your lease ends are they going to then jack the price up?

RB: Um, I'm sure they won't. Number one, we get along great. Number two, that was part of the reason why I opened that place down there because if they had me by the balls so to speak because I didn't have any other place to go, that's be different. But if I've already got another thriving brewery down the street and I don't want to do it down here anymore, and I can just say, "I'm picking up my stuff and going." You know, then it's not that big of a deal for me, you know what I mean? Whereas, and that's why I felt a need that I had to do that. So.

RM: Interesting, kind of pushed you to....because I know in Marquette a number of places were doing taverns and what not were doing \_\_\_\_\_business with students and so on \_\_\_\_\_not\_\_\_\_\_brewery places. And then the owner of the building got greedy and they packed up and left and ruined the whole ambiance of charm of the....

RB: Right, because this place was empty for quite a few years before we moved in. If I took these tanks out and took these walls, because they're my walls, right? I build these walls! I didn't lay the brick, John Malport, yeah, John Malport laid the brick. He's dead now, but anyway. Yeah they're my walls. And it's just, what else are you going to put here? We basically ruined this half of the building so I mean if they want to play hard ball....

RM: \_\_\_\_\_

RB: Then again, we get along very well.

RM: No, that's good.

RB: The \_\_\_\_\_ are a wonderful family.

RM: And I went and I stayed at the Ojibway and I asked the girl at the desk, I didn't know exactly where you were. I said, "Where's the Soo Brewing Company?" "Right across the street!" So, okay!

RB: We get a lot of business in the wintertime from the winter testers. They're these engineers, they have three test tracks out here, one for Continental, one for Bosch, and one for T.I.W. And a lot of those guys stay at the Ojibway and end up right here. The funny thing is, again a little bit of history. This wasn't even my first choice for location. I had a purchase agreement on Island Book and Craft which is, they were owned by the Saint Vincent DuPaul Society at that time but they are right across the alley from where my new place is. And that place had a lot going for it and I had offered St. Vincent Du Paul like a \$100,000 for it and they signed the agreement but they said, hey, they would sign the agreement contingent on we would give them the end of the month to get a better deal. And if they didn't get a better deal at the end of the month, it was ours. Well, as it turns out I then realized sometime between that point and the end of the month that there was going to be C.S.O. work going on that block and Portage street, and here is the building and Portage Street from Ashmun down and Ashmun Street to Portage down were going to be dug up all summer. So how are people going to get to the building other than airlift? I mean you really really want beer, you'd really need to want a beer badly to fall through a ten foot trench to get there to get it. So I think I would have died there, and therefore I called it off with St. Vincent DuPaul Society and unfortunately for them they ended up taking less money than \$100,000 for that building. So it would have been kind of nice to have that now though because I would have two places that are like right across the street from each other. I could keep an even better eye on it than I am.

RM: Yeah, yeah, so if one's full you send everybody to the other side.

RB: Yeah, yeah exactly.

RM: Well that's what Terry Doyle did with the Vierling. He would have a big trade in there for dinner and what not and then people didn't want to leave so they walked out. So he had to set up a waiting

area so they could sit and have a beer and drink and then get called, called up. So you're kind of doing the same thing here.

RB: Yeah, a little bit.

RM: Overflow, yeah. Is there anything that I missed or could think of or something I didn't even talk about? Now what I'm going to do while I'm thinking, I'm going to have this transcribed, then I send you a copy of the transcription and then you could go over it and make any revisions, additions, or a note, I don't want this published, but I'll keep it in the document.

RB: Well considering that my degree is in Journalism, and I also don't know if you knew this or not, but I'm a sitting public official. So I've been on the Sault Sainte Marie City Commission since 2005 so I try to be very careful about what I say. I mean, I try to be candid as possible but I choose, I try to choose my words carefully. So

RM: \_\_\_\_\_Journalists \_\_\_\_\_

RB: So I try very hard to \_\_\_\_\_

RM: And so I'll do that and then get it back to you and then you can edit what you want. And then I've talked to people and they'll say and they'll...

RB: If I knew I was going to have to edit it I wouldn't have talked so much. [Laughs]

RM: But I can, I'll get the gist of it. And you mentioned things that you wouldn't want in the book, there were things \_\_\_\_\_.

RB: Right.

RM: I'm not going to send a copy to the Sault Evening News. Okay, well I guess that's it.

RB: Guys is there anything, did I? Have you been paying any attention at all or is there anything that we haven't talked about?

Unidentified Male Voice: Umm, no. Not really. I was thinking about \_\_\_\_\_social\_\_\_\_\_

RB: What he just said was that there are a lot of people, just because we were talking about the social aspect, that there are a lot of people that would never have met or would not be friends if it were not for

Soo Brewing. Yeah, I mean there are people who work in completely incompatible fields their paths would have never crossed. We have a lot of mug clubbers for instance who are prison guards, right? And they, and I think prior to our opening were more of the same clique. You know what I mean, because they work together. But you don't really see the general public that much when you work as a prison guard right? But they come in here and there are college professors, and there are doctors, and there are Coast Guard, and Border Patrol, and you know what I mean? And those are just some of the professions that make up a large portion of the mug club. Mug club...

RM: Could you...Yeah I have that as a note here. Could you give us the background of your mug club? Did you start it or did someone?

RB: Well, I was selling mug club subscriptions before we ever even opened. So, yeah. It was always out there as an idea. I think the hardest thing was trying to determine how big to make the mug because, and I'll show you one before you leave. These mugs are all the same size, they're 28 ounce Scandanavian-style glass mugs and people decorate them here on premises whatever way they want to so it's their own personalized mug. And then they get a twenty-five ounce, actually a twenty-four ounce pour for the price of a sixteen ounce pour. So if you buy thirty beers over the course of a year, it pays for itself. And like I said, it's more of a social thing than anything else. For instance, once a year we have a festival called Circle of Life Festival where all the grain that we go through here ends going to Circle K Ranch to feed the buffalo out in Rudyard, and then at the end of the summer Orv Kabat who owns Circle K Ranch has a big buffalo roast out in the back parking lot and we do an all you can eat for \$5, but mug club eats for free, right? So, that ends up being a big mug club love-fest sort of thing. Now this is just going to show you the direction we've gone and again we're getting a little bit away from the social aspects. But, last year Circle of Life Festival, we sold 100 mug club pours in one day that was the first time we did that, right? And I want to say that in this calendar year, I'd really have to go look, but I know that by the end of March we had already done that six times this year. And we've probably done it a dozen times already. Mug Club for about the first two years of our existence,

they consistently drank one-third of the beer that was served in this room. Now, even at this point, although I suspect that when the tourism gets here it'll bounce back the other way. But even in May, Mug Club consumed more beer than non-Mug Club. And that is just a testimony of how the Mug Club has grown and are here like every day supporting us. You know what I mean? Because we've had growth but it's, you know, a lot of that has been local growth. And you have to have that, you have to have that. So we've had, and there's a lot of loyalty to Soo Brewing Company, from those Mug Clubbers. They do things like built these two coat racks that you see here, were built by a mug clubber and stuff like that.

RM: So they're kind of \_\_\_\_\_.

RB: And they bring games in every once in a while, add to the collection. You know, a bunch of other stuff.

RM: So they're kind of like your associates?

RB: Yeah, they're more like family that I can get rid of easier than my real family. You know? But they feel a stake and as a matter of fact. And as a matter of fact, once a year there's a mug clubber who has a fairly large piece of property at this house in Brimley and he will have a party and a lot of the mug clubbers will go out there and spend the night and etcetera, right? Well, it just so happens that the last time they had a party, I had somebody, and this is going to have to be off the record. [TAPE STOPS AND STARTS AGAIN] But the social aspects of the brewery and I don't think it's unusual or I don't think it's unique to Soo Brewing Company, I think a lot of breweries are that way. Because the people who come to a brewery share a common philosophy. I really believe that, you know what I mean? They're less likely to buy everything that you're going to shove down their throat. They're less likely to be McDonald's kind of people, you know what I mean? And more likely to be Mom and Pop type of restaurant goers. They're...no matter what they do for a living, I think that philosophically speaking they're more open minded to other ideas and that's one of the reasons why this place works. I was told by many people when we opened up, "We'd never make it without a T.V." And I've had so many



people over a period of time say, "I love the fact that you don't have T.V." In fact, one of mug clubbers, one of our biggest mug clubbers lost a \$100 bet that he had with somebody which was unbeknownst to me until the year was over, right? And he bet that within a year that we would have a T.V. and we didn't. But my kids get a lot of neat experience out of the brewery, at first they liked working here now not, they don't really like working here so much. They're young, they're like ten and thirteen, so when I opened they were seven and ten and so they had their fill of, they don't mind bussing tables if they think they'll give you a tip in it for them. But the whole thing of filling peanut bags and toilet paper dispensers has lost it's charm. But, they have other little side businesses in here. My youngest daughter for instance sells these pillows. And she's sold, man, she's like made \$120 in a week selling pillows, and the other one sells friendship bracelets. And they are a part of the brewery inasmuch as my youngest daughter Maggie, of course is Maggie's Irish Red, and she designed the tap handle. And it's one of the only tap handles that we use that is not a Soo Brewing Company bottle, it's an old Grolsch bottle because she wanted it to be green. There were no green Soo Brewing Company bottles and I always wanted to do a shirt with that logo on it but I still haven't been able to get anybody who's capable of reproducing it. And my oldest daughter, Trinity, we brew the Trinity Belgian Triple once a year and we have actually bottled that and that is the only beer that we have bottled, and that's very labor intensive when you don't have a bottling line, you have to bottle them one at a time. And I could show you one before leave, especially if you're interested in labels and stuff, because it's a limited edition 22 ounce cobalt blue painted label, Grolsch-style flip-top. And we got a \_\_\_\_\_new beer gun to put those together so this beer will keep indefinitely, like for years and years and years, and get better over a period of time because it's a Belgian Triple. I don't know how you feel about triples, but man it was all that I wanted it to be. And all the brewers that I've had who have sampled it and everything, they've all given it their stamp of approval so. And we'll do it now every year, and it comes out on her birthday. Her birthday happened to be January 2<sup>nd</sup> and so it's our first release, our best beer, really because it takes the most to produce, it's our most expensive beer to produce, it's the only beer we

bottle, it's our highest in alcohol by volume, any of those superlatives that you want, and it's also our first release of the year. Last year we pre-sold that starting in November and we sold ninety percent of those bottles before it was released. At \$25 a bottle. So and not a single person complained and said that they didn't like it, at \$25. So I mean the family plays a little part. I've got a couple of beers, my wife is a big IPA fan and I've got a couple of beers that I've developed for her. The Super Yooper IPA which was not originally called Super Yooper IPA, but it's an IPA that I developed for her as an anniversary gift and then it ended up being my best IPA so I went with that when I first opened. Then as a professional at that point I said, "How can I take this beer..."

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

RB: ...which she wanted it to be more bitter, hoppier, drier, and stronger. So I created all those things, Slo-Hand IPA which is, it's actually my favorite IPA, the Slow-Hand. But her picture's on the tap handle. It's not just her picture, it's a picture of her drinking a beer on our wedding day in full bridal, it's a Michelobe, but we really didn't have craft beer in 1988, so.

RM: So the family's then involved? Now do...

RB: Yeah, they really embraced it. The kids have gone on these brewery excursions with me, they love root beer and all their friends except for one, notably, is into the root beer. They love our rootbeer so that makes me feel good. And, what was I going to say? Oh! My daughter took first place in the regional science fair this year with an experiment that actually had to do with the brewery, and I did not help her with it really, at all, which was nice from my vantage, she did it on her own. And this doesn't....yeah you're probably not interested in this in the book but just as a...yeah well this is a very

cool experiment. She took our root beer, and had a growler of root beer and then had a Big Chill brand which is like the generic, local supermarket brand of root beer. Dumped out the Big Chill and put our root beer in that bottle. Then had the kids at school taste test it and then asked them which one do you like better? And hands down, they all, almost all of them picked our root beer. Some said that there was no difference but very few of them could detect the fact that there was no difference. So with that, that's a psychological experiment as far as the impact of marketing on your product. So people who don't think that marketing matters, it matters a great deal! The funny thing is, it was the youngest kids like the first and second graders that couldn't tell the difference. And the older kids thought, "Oh you can't tell the difference?" And then it's kind of like the Emperor's New Clothes.

RM: Oh, interesting.

RB: So, because they really had not at that point had been subject to concepts like marketing, and the older kids they largely, not largely but exclusively preferred Soo Brewing Company to the Big Chill. Big Chill may want to take note and relabel their brand, I'm thinking!

RM: Are you going to get your daughters to get involved in brewing or are they interested?

RB: They are, the funny thing is and the one who is the oldest one who is really quite the scholar and she is bent on developing cures for cancer, so it's kind of hard to say to you kid, "Oh no, brew beer!" [Laughs] And she gets that because she has an uncle who works at Boston, he did work for Harvard, and now he's working at Massachusetts General in helping find cures for cancer so she's kind of made that her ambition, and again you can't very well say, "No, don't do that." But the youngest one who actually likes working here most and has the most business acumen between the two of them. She owns the pillow business as she calls it and I can totally see her running this joint in fifteen years. Do you think? Yeah.

Unidentified Male Voice:\_\_\_\_\_

RB: Thanks\_\_\_\_\_ I'll get the hops. But yeah, she's probably and she has made it more well known that she wants to stay in town and she wants to stay in the Sault where you know, there are very limited opportunities to cure cancer in Sault Ste. Marie.

RM: Yeah, yeah.

TAPE ENDS