**How craft beer, home brewing and I crossed paths.**

I like beer so it was inevitable that craft beer and I would meet, but how it happened is an interesting story.

My introduction to beer in the late 70s was limited to mass produce commercial beer, it was all I knew and the rebirth of craft beer following prohibition was in its infancy. My friends and I would talk about which beers were better, Budweiser, Coors, Schlitz and others on the market at the time. I was in the Marine Corps at the time and exposed to other commercial breweries on the east coast but most of the beer at that time looked and tasted basically the same.

My first exposure to craft beer, or beer unlike what I had experienced in America, came when the Marines sent me overseas to several locations in England and Scotland. At each location when time permitted my fellow Marines and I would go to the local pub to have a few beers. The beer was very different, it was flavorful, colorful, malty, heavy and basically very good. We began to take notes on our favorite ones so we would know which to order at the next location. What we discovered was the beer was different at each location, and locally brewed. I thought this was wonderful, and wished we had local pubs in the U.S. with different beers. I did not give it another thought, came back to the states, commercial beer, and went on with my life. President Carter had legalized homebrewing at the time, but I was unaware of the home brewing industry or home brew, nor were any of my friends or colleagues.

Fast forward to 2006; I was watching a document on how the ancient Egyptians brewed beer. I figured if the Egyptians could brew beer, why couldn’t I? I went online to look for information about brewing beer and found a large amount of information not only about brewing beer, but information about home brewing. I discovered a large industry around home brewing, and local supply stores I could visit. I took a trip to a local homebrew store and bought a beginners kit. It was simple and inexpensive and the store offered a brewing class the next Saturday that I attended. I purchased the book Home brewing for dummies, read it, and brewed my first batch of beer. I also discovered in my research that several pioneers of the craft brewing revolution were located in my backyard of northern California. I visited a couple brewpubs and toured a few breweries and was soon introduced to craft beer. It immediately reminded me of the beers I had enjoyed in England.

I am thankful that my first batch came out drinkable, or I likely would have abandoned the endeavor. I began to brew often, some batches were ok, some very good and some I threw away. At this point I began to study the hobby and subscribed to Zymurgy and other periodicals and joined the American Homebrewers Association. I also attended a couple of beer festivals and I came to the realization that homebrewing is about creativity, exploring and creating and began to experiment and make my own recipes. Soon, commercial beer was unappealing to me. By this time I had brewed hundreds of batches and transitioned to all grain brewing. Soon I had moved the brewing operation out of the kitchen and into the garage on a gravitational sculpture I built out of wood, Ice chests and my wife’s large cooking pots. Now I have a 10 gallon stainless steel sculpture I use, and my own favorite seasonal recipes I brew.

I frequently travel and make it a point to visit local breweries and brew pubs in the area. There are now thousands of breweries in the country and the number continues to grow annually. Just as in England, we now have thousands of different beers available to us in America. The variety of beers reminds me of the wine industry today given all the varieties to choose from.

The hobby of making beer was so enjoyable to me that I started a website and formed a nonprofit education company to promote the craft. I teach people how to brew beer at home, and host tours to local brewpubs so others can experience the variety of beers on the market. It has been a wonderful journey for me and I have only taken a few steps. If you haven’t already, get out there and discover the world on craft beer – and even dabble in a little home brewing if you are curious.

Chuck