

Transcript – Mariah Calagione, Class of 1993

Narrator: Mariah Calagione

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

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Amanda Knox: Good morning. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the Assistant Archivist at the Pembroke Center at Brown University. It is Thursday, May 21, 2020, and it's 11am, and I am here today to interview another Brown alum who can interview, who can – don't interview yourself. I'll interview you – Who can introduce yourself to our listeners now.

Mariah Calagione: Good morning. My name is Mariah Draper Calagione, class of 1993 from Brown and I'm coming to you live, not live, maybe not live, maybe live. But from coastal Delaware, from our home in coastal Delaware where we've been hanging out for quite some time during this COVID pandemic.

AK: Yes. So, we are absolutely, as you said, in the middle of a pandemic right now, which is one of the reasons that has brought us together. But you're also one of the co-founders of Dogfish Head Brewing, which is another reason why I wanted to dedicate a little bit more time to your story, [1:00] because I think that's going to be really interesting to get into our collection. But I want to start kind of from the beginning of your time at Brown, if you don't mind. Or even before that. Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up, the kinds of education your parents had, maybe a little bit about what they did if you're comfortable sharing that kind of background information?

MC: Sure. So, I grew up in Delaware, here, about 20 miles from where I am right now. Small town. My mom, at the time was a stay-at-home mom. I have a sister and two brothers so there's four of us. And then my dad was in radio and then TV broadcasting, and also sort of farmland management. We're pretty rural area here so our family had some farms as well as the TV businesses he was in.

My mom went to [2:00] school, grew up in Delaware, went to University of Delaware,

and then later in life ended up going to Delaware State University and getting her degree in social work. And after she got her master's in social work, she worked with doing some counseling in sort of a organization for a while, but then went into the public school system. They have wellness centers and so she was the licensed social worker that would work with high school students in the school-based wellness centers, and then got into administering those. So, she's retired from that now and still lives right down the street from me, which is great.

And then my dad, like I said, he also, he was born in Chicago, I think, or Media, Pennsylvania, but then lived in Chicago. And he actually left Delaware and went to school in western Massachusetts for high school to a school called Northfield Mount Hermon School. And then from there went to Brown. So, he was at Brown, [3:00] he graduated from Brown in 1964 and then moved back to this area fairly soon after he graduated from Brown and got into the radio, and then TV business and was in that for, gosh, I don't know, 30 some, for almost 40 years. He was killed in 1990, no. It'll be four years ago this September. Three years, four years? Anyway, while riding a bike. Unfortunately, he was riding a bike like he did every single day on a back road near here and got hit by a truck. So, he is no longer with us. But he was very proud of his time at Brown and really excited that I went to Brown and then my, now my son is at Brown. So that was a cool thing.

So that's my sort of history. I, like I said, grew up in the small town of Milford, Delaware, and went to [4:00] school there, local public school through ninth grade. There's a squeaky door in my house. After ninth grade I also went away to Northfield Mount Hermon School in Worcester, Massachusetts, repeated my ninth-grade year so I was there for four years. You know, way sort of, just below the Vermont/New Hampshire line in Massachusetts. Loved my time there and then after my time there, went to Brown and loved living in Providence and love my time at Brown. I ended up staying in Providence for about a year after I graduated from Brown working at WPRI TV in East Providence. And then, you know, I said I'd never move back to Delaware because I had to get out of there and never come back. You know, such a small area. Within a year of graduating and working up in Providence we ended up moving back here to start our business. [5:00]

AK: Fabulous. So, if you don't mind if I backtrack a little –

MC: No, no, go right ahead.

AK: Was it obvious to you when you were in high school that you were going to go to Brown? Or had you considered other universities?

MC: Oh, yeah, no, I actually applied to some, I want to say, like 12 schools or 10 schools or something like that. And I, well, I didn't think I would get into Brown. And so, you know, obviously was covering all my bases. So I ended up depositing at a couple schools because I had gotten waitlisted at Brown and all the other schools that I ended up sort of at the top of my list were small liberal arts and more rural schools, which was very much like where I went to high school, and I loved my experience in high school and I wouldn't have traded it, but I just realized, at the very end of the school year, I was like, I want something different like Brown although was always on my list like now, like, [6:00] I really want to go there. So, I did my letter writing campaign saying, if you let me in off the waitlist, I promise I'll be there and I'll promise I'll, you know, do a great job and contribute to the community. So, at some point, I don't know, in maybe April, late April or May, I ended up getting off of the waiting list. And so it was sort of a, you know, everything came together in the way it did and that's fantastic, but that wasn't, it wasn't sort of like my mission in life to follow that same path.

AK: What was it about Brown that really appealed to you?

MC: Well, I love the idea, I love the size, the size, it wasn't like overwhelmingly massive, it was very manageable, but it was bigger than sort of the kind of other schools that I had been looking at. I loved that it was, you know, in a city but also its own campus. I loved you know, the open curriculum and the flexibility there. So all of those, you know, things [7:00] were really appealing. And it's just, you know, it was also a school that culturally, I think it was a good fit because it aligned really well with my high school and the culture of my high school. It was very similar in you know, there was a lot of kids from my high school that looked at Brown as sort of a natural sort of, the personalities of the school were very similar. So that was, that was also appealing.

AK: Do you, and do you have any like Polaroid memories of your time at Brown like really good fun memories, maybe memories that are not so good, that kind of have stuck with you?

MC: Well, I don't have any that are not so good. You know, and at this point, you know, there's so many years out like, my Polaroid memories are mostly centered around the people. You know, the people that I knew, the people that I got to know, friendships. You know, those kinds of things [8:00] are really what has stood the test of time. I've done, I don't know, in the last month or two, I've done like three or four Zoom, you know, get-togethers with my Brown roommates. And last summer we all got together up in Maine for a long weekend. So, to me at this point, you know, it's really about the relationships you make in that, you know, sort of period of time where you're, you're growing up, together. So for me, most of my times are, revolve, like, my memory times revolve around that. You know, obviously, there's educational stuff, which is no small part of your Brown experience. But, you know, over the period of time, that's what really stands out.

AK: And did, you may have already mentioned this, but can you tell me again, what you concentrated in?

MC: Sure. I concentrated in public policy and I didn't even really know what public policy was when I started at Brown and I [9:00] hadn't really heard a lot about it. But I, what I found is I was just taking these different classes because they sounded interesting, which is the beautiful thing of what you can do at Brown, and you don't have to worry about like, you know, all these requirements or fulfilling things that aren't that relevant to you. And I realized that they all sort of had this, this theme where they were touching, like classes, that would be a public policy concentration. To me, like, like, I'd heard about political science and to me, that was not as interesting, much more theoretical. Like, whereas public policy had the more practical sort of policy analysis side of it, which I'm not a huge data person, but I liked that it was grounded in that, you know, sort of the lessons and the learnings were grounded in sort of how impactful and effective policy actions or desires can be. And then my senior year, I did a project, [10:00] well I had an internship at WPRI, which is where I ended up working after graduation, based on the concept of how the media can impact public policy and how, you know, the, the sort of interplay between policy and media. So, I had mentioned earlier my dad's business was in TV, so I had

some exposure to local TV news, but and had worked, you know, for one summer in the station down here, but really started as an intern there in my senior, I guess it was my senior fall because I graduated in the winter. And on the morning news, actually, when I was interning I was, it was during the day but then I got a job offer right as I was coming up to graduation, and I so I had, I started on the morning and noon news so I had to be at work at like 3:30 in the morning [11:00] every day, which was a little bit different than my normal schedule.

AK: What kind of work were you doing?

MC: Well, at that point, like I was working mostly on, I started on the assignment desk like sort of helping out with sort of researching potential stories, finding, you know, helping the assignment team help find contacts to talk about different subjects. And then when I got hired, I was doing, I was assistant producing for the morning news and the noon news. So writing up scripts for the anchors to read. You know, usually I was like, working on sort of the fill-in stuff. The reporters would go out and do the local stories, but then like this little fun story at the end of the newscast, like, you know, I'd get to write and, you know, cut the video. I learned a little bit of editing, which is very different than now because it was all, you know, [12:00] on tapes. So, yeah, so I just started doing that. And then when I moved back here, I actually did end up going to work for my family's company when, while, to have a paycheck while we were starting the business.

AK: So, what was the impetus for you to leave Providence and go back to Delaware?

MC: Well, we were living, I was living in Providence with my roommate who was finishing up her senior thesis project. And this was after graduation. Yeah, we were living up on Savoy Street near the stadium. And my at the time, now husband, but then boyfriend, moved back to Providence because we had this idea of opening a brew pub, and he had been living in Manhattan and doing some writing classes, but then started working in a beer bar, like one of the early craft beer bars on the east coast, [13:00] a place called Nacho Mama Burritos up near Columbia, and got really into the, you know, got the craft beer bug, and started home brewing. And he's like, "I'm going to open a brewery." So the idea was, we'll open it as a restaurant because then you

have like, immediate cash flow and you know, you have more direct interaction with your drinkers. So the plan was he was coming to Providence. We were, you know, going to open this restaurant that had a brewery in it. And so he started interning at an advertising company up there, I forget the name of it, but because he wanted some help with the, with the logo and sort of, you know, access to people who thought about marketing and branding and stuff like that. And then was looking at real estate and we were, had been, started looking at some properties and trying to figure out how it is in Rhode Island. You go about all the legal, legal side, there was already at least one brewpub in Providence so we knew that it was legally possible. [14:00] At some point during those early days of like looking for space and creating like, sort of doing test runs with homebrew and recipes for the menu. We got a call from my dad who was like, “Hey, do you guys remember that group that was going to open a brewpub in downtown Rehoboth, or in Rehoboth Beach down here?” And we’re like, “Yeah. We had heard about that.” He’s like, “Well, their plans aren’t coming to fruition. You guys might come to Delaware if, you know, you can’t find what you’re looking for in Providence.” And so we thought about it. We were like, hm, we could be, you know, the, the first brewpub in Delaware since prohibition, and we would have been the third in just Providence alone. So that idea of being the first brewpub in the first date, which is Delaware’s sort of moniker, we thought was really cool. We knew Delaware obviously, because I’m from here, but Sam had spent two different summers living at the beach and working in restaurants in Rehoboth Beach. [15:00] Which a lot of college kids did in summertime. So he’s familiar with the area, we knew that Delaware was a very business friendly state, like in terms of supporting small businesses. And you know, it’s easy to get things done in a small state because you generally know all the players if you need to, if you need to get stuff done. So that was helpful. So, we were like, okay, well, we’ll just move this to Delaware. And I was like, timeout, I was like, you know, I swore in my mind that I would never move back to Delaware, but I’m all for it if this is the plan, I said, “but you have to decide,” I said to him, “because I don’t want to be dragged, I don’t want to be blamed later for dragging you to Delaware.” You know, you know, Monday morning quarterbacking it we could easily say yes, this was part of the plan and the strategy. And so it all just sort of like evolved sort of as we went along, and I don’t think we envisioned this year, actually next month, [16:00] celebrating our 25th anniversary as a business, it’s kind of cool. But yeah, I wouldn’t have even like sort of been able to fathom that at that point. But, yeah, that’s why we ended up in Delaware.

AK: Well, congratulations on 25 years.

MC: Thank you.

AK: Can I ask you a really trivial question? How did you come up with the name?

MC: Oh, okay. Sounds very strange, I know, to people who don't know and I'm like, "Dogfish Head. Dogfish Head" all day long. So, but so Dogfish Head, like Hilton Head, is a place. It's a head of land in Maine. And my husband spent summers up there growing up as a teenager. So when he kind of went to his dad and said, "Hey, Dad, I know I'm in New York and I'm taking these graduate writing courses and I want to become an English teacher, professor or something, but I've had a change of mind and I want to go open a brewery." A conversation which he was somewhat dreading. They were out for a run at the time [17:00] and they were running by the entrance to this road that's called Dogfish Head Road and his dad basically said, "Yeah," he goes, "Well, you know what a good name for a brewery would be is Dogfish Head." So his dad like not only gave him like, sort of his blessing, you know, not that he really needed to, but it was important to get the support of your family, but, and the name of the company. So, Sam, we liked the name because it, it was tied to a place but it wasn't a known place. So it wouldn't be like, oh, forever, the Delaware Brewing Company and then like, because if you did want to sell beer outside of Delaware, you don't necessarily, people in say, middle Pennsylvania might not be like, "Oh, I'm going to go buy beer from the Delaware Brewing Company." So, we wanted to we like the idea of it being sort of tied nautically because a dogfish is a kind of fish. We liked the idea – and it's coastal, but it's not necessarily overtly tied to a place. [18:00] Unless you're from Dogfish Head, Maine, which isn't a town, it's just a point of land.

AK: Is it really popular in that part of Maine?

MC: Well, it's funny. There's, yes, our beer sells well up in Maine. Maine has a lot of amazing breweries. But there's, at the top of Dogfish Head Road there's a general store and they say that the sign that says Dogfish Head Road goes missing quite, quite often. And for a very small general store on an, on an island, it's the island of South Port, and it's off of Boothbay Harbor,

and they do sell quite a lot of Dogfish Head beer.

AK: That's wonderful. I love that. Thank you for entertaining me with my weird question there.

MC: Of course. No, that's normal.

AK: So can you tell me a little bit under normal circumstances, what your role is in the company and kind of what your day to day looks like?

MC: Yeah, sure. So, under normal circumstances, I'm able to go work in the brewery [19:00] in my office, like we you know, in our office with all my coworkers, which I really, really miss, you know, interacting with people besides my immediate family here. But yes, I go work at the brewery. I work with our leadership team there in Delaware. And my main focus for me on a regular daily basis is either you know, our leadership team is my sort of group, but also our marketing team. I'm pretty involved in the digital and social media front, still on a day to day basis. When I came on board, Dogfish full time, I was going to be in charge of all marketing, you know, because of my vast television background which at the time, you know, is kind of comical. But, you know, for them, I came on board full time, did everything but marketing for a while because we just had to get stuff done and then came back to marketing a number of years in. [20:00] And then as our marketing team grew, we got a lot of great people. So now we have a team of great people that I get to work with. And I get to go dive down deep on the social side.

AK: So now, fast forward a little bit and news about COVID-19 and Coronavirus starts popping up. Can you tell me a little bit, maybe like how you first heard about the virus and what you were thinking as this news was coming out?

MC: Yeah. I actually first heard about it in either early this year like, I don't think it was December but definitely January. So I'm on the board of an independent, of Northfield Mount Hermon School, the boarding school, and we have students much like a college does. We have about 25 students, percent of our students are international. So everybody went home for Christmas break. And, you know, college campuses, independent school campuses, started

hearing about this virus in Asia [21:00] that might impact some of our student's ability to get home, or to get back to school after, after break. And sort of how we were going to sort of navigate that and if that was an issue that we were going to have to worry about here. So that's sort of how I first started hearing about it. It's just through some of that volunteer work that I do. And then obviously, it started ramping up, you know, here domestically. In early March, my daughter who had her spring vacation, so I was taking her to visit one of my high school classmates who lives in Costa Rica. So we left the country on March 5 –

AK: Oh boy.

MC: And came back on the 15th I think, something like that. We came back on the March 15th, I remember that, and it was like, a whole different world. Like we had our, you know, sort of our like, what are these little buff things like over our face in the airport and we're afraid to touch anything and you know [22:00] in retrospect, like at that point, it was probably nowhere to be found really. But you know, people were, you could visibly see people beginning to take precautions. And while I was in Costa Rica, our company made the choice to close all of our hospitality, consumer facing locations. So we closed ahead of state mandate. We closed on March 12, I believe. So, at that point, it was obviously very real. It was weird to be far away and on vacation. And all we talked about, of course, that whole week was this and how, and I was worried about getting back and whether we'd be able to get back. So yeah, and then once I got back here, it was, it was already mandated that we were all, any non-production workers were going to be working from home. So yeah, I had, I didn't go back to the brewery for many, many weeks. Even to sort of get some stuff I left on my desk and see if my plant was still alive [23:00], which it was. Someone had been watering it. But that's sort of how, you know, I got to start hearing, hearing about, you know, this as it ramped up, at least in our area.

AK: So in those initial weeks, how if at all, is the brewery operating with workers being from home?

MC: Yeah. So our product, we have kept up production the whole time. We took early steps in terms of separating shifts, so our shifts didn't overlap. We, you know, in terms of sanitation, we

very early on shifted our distillery production. So we have a brewery and a distillery within our campus in Milton, Delaware. We shifted our distillery production to hand sanitizer and we worked with the state of Delaware to get you know, all the official approvals we needed [24:00] to do that. And we, so we got into the hand sanitizer business. One of our brewers in our company actually had sent Sam an article, like in those early weeks saying, hey, Europe – which was a couple weeks ahead of us with the virus awareness and everything – showed one distillery over there making hand sanitizer. Sam was like, “Oh, duh. We can do that. We can, we can pivot and do that.” So we quickly did that. So we had obviously sanitizer to keep our all of our spaces clean, we upped our cleaning protocol. We had a lot of coworkers from the hospitality side of the business since that was closed, to help with sanitation, help with distilling, help with packaging. I actually have some on my desk right here. This is our hand sanitizer.

AK: Oh, cool. I love it.

MC: It's liquid. It's not gel, because you know, that's just simply the distilled 80% alcohol [25:00] solution but so they switched a lot of our hospitality coworkers to production of distilled spirits, packaging, and logistics of getting it out our main focus. We're not selling to consumers, mostly selling directly to the state for supplying all the state agencies, our two local hospitals, and first responders. And then, you know, over the weeks of that, we've also been supplying some local businesses, but mostly the state, hospitals, and first responders. So that, that distillery side we did that there and then on the brewing side, we split the shifts everyone immediately, like we went to temperature checks, you have to get your temperatures – two, two to three, depending on the day of the week; entry times when you can enter our campus and you'd have to be, you know, you have to be working in production, get your temperature checked, get your mask. We have a [26:00] nurse on duty at every shift change to check everyone in make sure that they were, they were safe. And then just, you know, kind of just tracked everyone and made sure everyone is feeling good and feeling okay about being there. Yeah, so it was learning on the fly, but I'm proud to say that we've been you know, when one folk, one coworker go out for a week or two did test positive but there was no transmission at that point. You know, so far so good. That person's already back at work. So we've been lucky. And yeah, production's been able to keep going, which means the rest of us can still work from home because all of our production

team is in there. They're still making beer, still shipping it to our wholesalers across the country.

AK: Have you noticed an increase in sales now that [27:00] everybody's home with their immediate families?

MC: So yes and no. So immediately, so what, you know, immediately draft beer, every restaurant in America closed so draft beer, that entire business went away overnight. There was a lot of beer in the sort of supply chain across the country for all the breweries from, you know, the biggest breweries down to the smallest breweries. So much beer was frozen in the supply chain and needing now at this point to be dumped. Anything that was kegged at that point was pretty much, ended up, you know, going down the drain. Not the literal drain, like we're actually taking kegs back company wide and decanting them and distilling that liquid because, you know, there's not much else you can do with it, you can either dump it or distill it. So we are doing that which is, you know, better than the alternative. But so, we, we switched immediately from kegging, [28:00] canning, and bottling only to canning and bottling because there just wasn't a market for any draft beer. And, you know, definitely, I think overall beer consumption, there's been a boom, in that, you know, for the smaller independent breweries, some of them, you know, have been, seen a big boom from that. I mean, we're very lucky and we're doing, doing well. Some of the bigger brands, you know, people go back, they want a, you know, familiar name. So, some of the bigger brands have had more of an impact from that, but we're very pleased that we're still in business, we're still making beer, we're still selling beer. And, you know, as restaurants start to reopen, which is starting to happen now, in certain, some states, we'll see that keg beer maybe start to pick up although I would imagine some places are going to go deeper when they open with kegs and bottles so that they, you know, they don't know what the traffic [29:00] flow is going to be like, they don't know how many guests are going to come and enjoy a beer in the restaurant. We know it's definitely going to be less than, you know, February.

AK: Right. What kinds of, what are you expecting personally or professionally going forward? Are there certain changes that you think are going to hold firm for quite some time? Or are you predicting maybe an almost, quote unquote "back to normal" at, soon, at some point, ever?

MC: I think back to normal will be a long time. I don't know what a long time means, but particularly in the hospitality world and sort of, I mean, we, you know, we, our own hospitality locations weren't like, you know, pack-them-in bar situations. It was more like sit down dining. We had a bar of course, but it wasn't like a big bar scene, if you will. But so many of our customers were more reliant on that, [30:00] on that kind of volume. So for us, I think, you know, hospitality will be slow to come back, I think, you know, we do have outdoor seating and picnic tables, everything at our brewery and we have some outdoor seating on our pub, I think that'll be popular this summer as we can reopen. And we do have, we do, our space in our restaurant, we have two restaurants in downtown Rehoboth Beach. One is the traditional brewpub and one is a seafood restaurant and they're connected by a patio and courtyard. So there's definitely space opportunities to spread out in all of our spaces there and then the tasting room but you know, it'll be, it'll be interesting to see how that goes. I don't know. I you know, I'm more worried like, just about all the, you know, friends that we have that own the independent restaurants and they, you know, they're saying, and small breweries, they're saying anywhere from 30 to 40% of these independent restaurants [31:00] and breweries, you know, mom and pops, are not going to be reopened after this, they just couldn't, you know, keep the, their coworkers employed, they couldn't necessarily pay their rent. So we'll see, as we roll in to this, you know, reopening phase. And if there's some kind of COVID echo, and people have to close down again, yeah, there's only so much small businesses can do to, to last through that.

AK: So as we kind of wind down a little bit, I'd like to ask you, if somebody listens to this interview tomorrow, what is one thing you would want them to know? And if they're listening to this interview 50 years from now, what is something you would like that person to know?

MC: If they listen to tomorrow, I would say you know, what, things are looking, there's light at the end of the tunnel. We're seeing reopening, we're seeing like, yes, it's not going to be normal. It's not going to be businesses as normal and maybe not this summer and maybe [32:00] not next summer, you know, but like, you know, it, we're going to, we've, there's obviously been a sort of catastrophic impact on, you know, the world, but we're going to, I mean, we're going to make it through like, that's what I see is like, there's, there's light at the end of the tunnel.

50 years from now I would say 50 years from now, if you're watching this, especially if

you didn't live through this, like if you're born next year, like I would imagine there will still be some imprint of just societal changes. What they are, I don't know, but like, it's kind of, going through this was so surreal and you can't even imagine what it was like to have like everything come to a grinding halt, you know, pretty much overnight. And, you know, around the world, people have reacted to this differently but you know, individually and as groups [33:00] and as regions and the states and as countries, it's just kind of been fascinating to see how it has so far played out and what kind of decisions every entity, whether it's an individual person, a family, a campus like Brown or a business. Everybody's had to make these decisions on the fly to try to navigate this. And we're going to look back in 50 years and some will have navigated it very well and some will not have, and it'll be interesting to see what lessons we've learned.

AK: So finally, I'd like to leave some open space. Is there anything that you were hoping to talk about today that I didn't get to ask you about that you would like to get into the historical record?

MC: In terms of, I mean, like I said, I think it's been fascinating. I'm super [34:00] jazzed, I think, by the way, I think Brown has responded right now, in this time. Obviously, we don't know what's going to happen next year for the campus in the fall. But I'm really inspired by the leadership that I've seen, you know, from President Paxson, not only in my communications that I get from her as a parent, but, and as an alum, but as, you know, I've seen her *New York Times* op ed and, you know, I just, I think it's cool. You know, someone asked, one of our coworkers, we have these sort of weekly leadership sessions online with all of our leaders here in Delaware and someone asked about sort of how, how, what is leadership, like, how can we be a leader in Dogfish like in this time and like, you know, there's a lot of negativity and they were basically saying like, is, does the company have any responsibility to speak out about what this coworker saw as a void in leadership [35:00] in our country right now? Like, should the company take a stance on that? And I was like, well, first of all, I probably don't think companies generally do. Not, not a lot of good comes out of taking a political stance for a company, just because there's always people you make happy, and there's always people you make mad no matter what it is. But I kind of flipped the script a little bit. And I said, you know, what I do see is, in this time is the leadership that that comes out of, like, you know, people doing things that you never would have imagined that you could do. And so, I don't know, I don't even know why I'm talking about

this at this point. I took your question and, and turn it around. But I just think, you know, it's been cool to see the way that leadership has evolved in different institutions and Brown has been a great example of that. And I really, you know, it makes me proud to be a Brown alum.

AK: Well, I thank you so much for your time today and for the work you're doing to help first responders and your state right now and for keeping people at home sane with your beer.

MC: Doing our part.

AK: Thank you so much.

MC: Thank you

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