

Tea with Tom: Coffee Shop Best Practices & Fundraising with Gianna & Elizabeth of The Meek House

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[music]

00:05 Tom: This is Tea with Tom, or T as my assistant calls me.

[music]

00:19 Tom: Well, good morning. This is Tom, the tea guy, and I'm at one of our favorite coffee shops here in Redlands called The Meek House. And with me are Gianna and Elizabeth, and they're owners of The Meek House and partners. And we love our women entrepreneurs. My sister started Summit Tea Company and we took it over later, but it was her vision that really got it going. So, go women entrepreneurs. [chuckle] Yeah, so anyway, what I wanna do is just pick up our conversation before we got started. So what are these and what's the challenge here at The Meek House?

01:00 Gianna: So these are our house pastry called the cornuletes. It's actually a Romanian pastry that... And it's my mother's recipe, but it can be found within Romania as well. It's filled with plum butter and there's powdered sugar all over it. So the challenge is that you have to eat the cornuletes without actually licking your lips the entire time. It's quite a challenge.

01:27 Tom: How neat can you be?

01:27 Gianna: Oh, it's... No.

01:28 Tom: And the answer is you just can't do it.

[laughter]

01:28 Elizabeth: We definitely encourage everybody who tries it to just enjoy the experience.
[laughter]

01:35 Tom: Yeah. Well, that's so cool that it's your mom's recipe and it's a Romanian recipe. So you guys are Romanian.

01:41 Elizabeth: Yes.

01:42 Tom: Yes, so what does that mean?

01:47 Gianna: So we are...

01:48 Elizabeth: Lots of culture.

01:49 Gianna: Lots of culture. So, we were born here but our parents had immigrated in the late 80s...

01:56 Tom: Okay.

01:56 Gianna: From Romania. And so we're the first generation here. So we speak full Romanian, it's actually our first language. So, that's pretty neat. [chuckle]

02:08 Tom: So you're bilingual at least.

02:10 Elizabeth: Yes.

02:10 Tom: So, is Romanian like... Is it a Slavic language or is it a Latin...

02:14 Elizabeth: It's Latin.

02:14 Tom: It's a Latin language?

02:15 Elizabeth: Yes.

02:15 Tom: So you can pick up Spanish or French probably pretty easy.

02:19 Elizabeth: Yeah, for sure.

02:21 Tom: You guys, man. I'm always learning something cool about you. Well, that's great. So your mom and dad immigrated to the US. That must have been a really big deal.

02:29 Elizabeth: Especially at that time, it was right... Well, our mom got here right before the fall of communism and my dad actually left during...

02:42 Tom: So you guys escaped.

02:43 Elizabeth: They basically did, yeah. My dad's story is kind of interesting. He waited eight years to get approval from the government to come here and then my mom won a lottery to come back in...

02:58 Tom: Your mom won a lottery?

03:01 Elizabeth: It was a visa lottery at the time, yeah. So they only had certain amounts of people that could leave the country and she was one that was able to obtain that. So that's where their story kind of restarted.

03:18 Tom: Well, cool. So your dad teaches at Yucaipa, a neighboring town, high school, right?

03:25 Gianna: Mm-hmm.

03:26 Tom: And so, did he come with the vision of his daughters yet to be born, starting a coffee shop?

[laughter]

03:36 Elizabeth: I don't think so. I think he still wakes up daily like, "What were they thinking?" But he was always one to back us up and definitely support us in any crazy decision we ever came up with because... I think because of his background, because of where they came from and because

of the opportunities that he foresaw early on, before he ever even met my mom.

04:07 Tom: Wow. So it's been a long time coming.

04:10 Elizabeth: Yeah, it's kind of interesting how it unfolded. I mean, our mom is a business owner, herself.

04:18 Tom: She is?

04:19 Elizabeth: 18 years and so...

04:23 Tom: So pretty much all of your lives.

04:25 Elizabeth: Our lives, exactly. So growing up watching her put forth all that effort and kind of be anchored to something else other than us but at the same time, being able to balance everything out was quite the inspiration. I don't know how she does it. [chuckle]

04:47 Gianna: Don't know how. [chuckle]

04:47 Tom: Well, as life catches up with you, right? So, Gianna, you're still single, right? And a student so you're the younger of the two, but Elizabeth, you're married now. How long have you been married?

05:02 Elizabeth: Two years in November.

05:03 Tom: Okay, and you're expecting your first one?

05:05 Elizabeth: Yep.

05:06 Tom: So life is catching up to you and you're quickly finding yourself kind of in that position your mom was in, 18 years ago.

05:12 Elizabeth: Right.

05:14 Tom: It's so wonderful to have that example to grow up with, because there's a lot of ladies who have a hard time figuring that one out. And so, they end up leaving their career or leaving their pursuit because it's hard, it is hard, there's no question about it, but it can be done. That's the good news, I think.

05:37 Elizabeth: Right, right. And I think, for us, having this space and having a very well-intentioned employed staff, pretty much, I wouldn't say crafted to our liking but having people that have stood behind us and said, "Okay, we want to carry this through with you," and not just work for us, has definitely been an eye-opener to where it's like, "Okay you know what..." and kind of an encouraging thing as well to say, "We can do other things alongside this." So I think that having this space, it does give us the opportunity to not only expand our business goals but also our personal goals.

06:35 Tom: Gee, well said.

[laughter]

06:37 Tom: I'll hire you.

06:39 Elizabeth: Thanks.

[laughter]

06:41 Tom: Okay. Well, speaking of those goals, what is the vision of The Meek House?

06:47 Elizabeth: You can start. I'll expand my long...

06:49 Tom: Yeah, you guys can talk over each other. It doesn't matter.

06:54 Gianna: At this point, we're just so grateful that we are here and we were able to open up this place. I think our vision to keep this place and to be able to have it running really well, where we're able to open up another spot. And I think alongside with just starting a roast right now, well at the beginning of the year, I think that can also take us to another level where we can start distributing to other places as well, just basically spreading what we're able to do and just like our motto, "Spreading kindness with every cup of coffee." I think that's a really important thing and that's what we're kind of hoping for later on and if we're able to expand, that would be great.

07:40 Elizabeth: Yeah, along the lines of spreading kindness, we have this little mantra that we say, "Stay humble. Be kind. Drink coffee." But it's not very much just limited to that. It's a matter of, we are a family-owned business, but we do have charity in mind. So, the original vision was for sure to keep it small, but we have now learned that we have to kind of expand not only our horizons as far as networking and meeting other people, but at the same time, trying to find different organizations that are willing to work with us in order to give more, whether it's serving them personally or serving the community wide. And so, that was our vision initially, to use companies whether it's product that we buy or down to literally the bean from coffee to... From farm, to our tables, making an impact not only locally but overseas. So our hope is to continue to take that, not small mindedness, but intimate feel across other areas.

09:14 Tom: There we go.

09:15 Elizabeth: Yeah.

09:16 Tom: By the way, on behalf of Summit Tea, I'd like to say thank you for being our customer.

09:23 Elizabeth: Well, yeah.

09:23 Gianna: Yeah.

09:24 Tom: Yeah, we love serving you guys and thanks that we're also, maybe then, as I hear it, a small part of your business.

09:30 Elizabeth: Right. Absolutely.

09:31 Tom: Yeah, so we love to share that with you. Yay. So speaking of tea, we're all drinking coffee here.

09:40 Elizabeth: I know.

[laughter]

09:41 Elizabeth: Today is a coffee day.

09:42 Tom: What teas are working for you guys?

09:44 Elizabeth: We have quite the selection.

09:49 Gianna: We really do.

09:49 Elizabeth: We were just talking about it the other day how pretty much a quarter of our customers that come in, order tea.

09:57 Tom: No kidding, a quarter?

09:58 Elizabeth: Yeah, yeah.

09:58 Tom: I would've not expected that.

10:01 Elizabeth: Exactly. So, it's really important for us to continue to definitely promote the different options that we have because we have numerous types of groups and cultures even that come through, and some are like, "No, no, no, we don't do coffee but do you have tea?" And to be able to present that to them and to be able to present more than one...

[laughter]

10:27 Tom: It's something that's not in a staple tea bag.

10:32 Elizabeth: Exactly, exactly. It's really neat to kind of expand to other peoples palates too. And some people are like, "Oh, can you make these iced?" It's like, "Yeah." "Can you make a latte?" Sure. So we're very versatile with our tea selection.

10:50 Tom: Yay.

10:50 Elizabeth: We've created quite a bit with your tea, Tom.

[laughter]

10:54 Tom: Well, that's the idea. We don't make rules.

10:58 Elizabeth: Yeah.

10:58 Tom: We really wanna provide principles to get started. And then the raw materials, you guys take it, and make it personal and make it work for you. That's the whole fiendish plan. So I'm glad it's really working. A quarter, that's really good.

11:11 Gianna: Yeah.

11:11 Tom: 'Cause really about one out of seven people drink tea or something like that so you guys are doubled up. I think people have learned there's something good here. Tea works well for you financially too, right?

11:24 Elizabeth: Right.

11:24 Tom: Tea has great margins.

11:25 Elizabeth: Definitely.

11:26 Tom: And it helps support you and your vision and that's all part of it. So, you alluded to it but you guys have decided to start roasting. So what was that decision about?

[background conversation]

12:01 Elizabeth: Yeah, no, the decision to roast really... Actually, it stemmed from curiosity to just being empowered like, "No, you can do this." It allows us to be, again, intentional with where our money goes, which farms to choose from and then essentially which families are we able to help. So I think that...

12:32 Tom: Things like the family that grows coffee in Central America, right?

12:32 Elizabeth: Yes. Right, right. And so for us to roast, we no longer have to go through a middle man or ask somebody like, "Hey can you check out this area," or "check out this area," or "I heard about this family that does this really neat overseas." So that was kind of a key component for us to not only be limited to a certain importer or a certain area of the world, but definitely for us to just be able to expand, not only our knowledge in the coffee farm industry, but to also be able to help more.

13:25 Tom: Yeah. You guys didn't just go out and spend 50 grand on a giant coffee roaster and all of that, so what... But you kinda have an in-between step as I understand it, so what... How did that come about and how would you describe it?

13:39 Elizabeth: Yeah, so actually one of our employees was... Is the owner of Hearthwood Roasters.

13:46 Tom: Kevin?

13:48 Elizabeth: Yeah, Kevin, up in Yucaipa. Early on and so, he was one that actually sparked our

curiosity and was like, "You know you guys can like, do this." And we're like, "No we can't. We never thought about this like, no we have way too much to do." [chuckle] And...

14:03 Tom: Well that's probably true too.

14:05 Elizabeth: Yeah. And he's like, "Well you know, maybe, you guys can do this."

14:09 Tom: Really? So he was encouraging you?

14:11 Elizabeth: Yeah. So she was the one to instigate first, and then it was just like, "Okay, can we do this?" And we tried to slowly introduce it into our customer base.

14:27 Tom: Right.

14:29 Elizabeth: And we got great feedback. And so then at the first of the year, this year we were like, "Let's just do it. It's gonna be all ours."

14:39 Tom: Right.

14:41 Elizabeth: And then, of course we could offer them variety, and we played off of the feedback of customers. Do they like it? Do they not? Can I tweak something?

14:49 Tom: Oh no, yeah. If they don't like it then...

14:50 Elizabeth: Yeah. So that's kind of nice that I'm able to be behind bar, but also...

14:54 Tom: To have direct contact with your customers, yeah. I think one of the things where a shop like yours can go wrong is when a person is so entrenched in a particular paradigm or philosophy of doing business or coffee or whatever that might be, that they don't listen to their customers. It seems like such a fundamental thing, but it is not.

15:18 Gianna: Yeah.

15:18 Tom: And it's hard to sometimes let go of things that you really love, but you might be the only one, you know.

15:27 Elizabeth: Yeah.

15:27 Tom: Yeah. Well, so let's look back a little bit though. I wanna know where The Meek House name came from. There's gotta be a story there.

15:36 Gianna: Yeah.

15:37 Elizabeth: And how does that fit with you guys? I know it does, but how does it fit?

[laughter]

15:47 Gianna: When we were coming up with different names, I know that my sister had always thought of Matthew 5:5, "The meek will inherit the earth." So when we had created The Meek House, we had wanted a place to feel like a home. And so, creating The Meek House we wanted to be able to serve people and to have them feel like they are coming home every single time. A place where they feel comfortable with everybody around. And then just being faith-based as well, just "The Meek House." And it's funny 'cause a lot of people come in and they're like, "What does meek mean?" And so we have it actually written on our back wall, Matthew 5:5, that those who are meek shall inherit the earth, and so a lot of people actually are very appreciative that we are open about our faith within the name in itself and just the way that we are able to serve people.

16:47 Elizabeth: Right. And so to kind of add on to that, the coffee industry can be very snobby and we kind of encountered that early on, like throughout my college career.

17:03 Tom: Snobby?

17:03 Elizabeth: Yeah. You walk into a shop and they're like...

17:06 Tom: Oh, it's kind of an elitist kind of thing.

[laughter]

17:08 Elizabeth: Mm-hmm. Yes.

[laughter]

17:09 Tom: Well that's a little disturbing, isn't it?

17:13 Elizabeth: Yes. So I'm like, "Why? I'm your customer. I'm about to buy something from you, at least say hello."

17:21 Tom: I'm your friend. Hello?

[laughter]

17:24 Elizabeth: So we definitely wanted to be different. And so not only is the word meek different, but I hope the way we serve people is different and they see that and that we don't lose craft and quality over of our service and vice versa. So we're very intentional with how we greet people initially and then how we actually serve them and how we kindly educate our customers on something that we call a craft.

18:02 Tom: Give me an example of that. When I think of... I think of the very plastic typical Starbucks intro, "What can I get started for you?" It's like, "pshh."

[laughter]

18:16 Tom: My name's Tom.

18:16 Elizabeth: Exactly, yeah. So for us it's, "Hello, welcome." We're kind of playing with a new greeting of maybe saying something like "Welcome home," to play off of the house name.

18:34 Tom: Yeah.

18:35 Elizabeth: But the difference between specialty coffee shops and then franchise coffee shops is, it comes down to the size of the coffee, and then how it's created. So, I mean we're very manual-based behind bar.

18:40 Tom: Well that's the whole third wave, right? It's handcrafted.

18:40 Elizabeth: Right, and our sizes are based off of European sizes. The original macchiato is not gonna be 12 ounces. It is a three ounce drink, okay. So when customers come in and they're like, "Can I get a grand macchiato?" We just kind of look at them and we're like, "Sure, actually did you try ours yet? It's actually three ounces. We don't want to disappoint you as... Was this what you were looking for or is this size what you were looking for?" And in that matter, we're not shaming them for not knowing what a macchiato is and secondly they've learnt something.

18:40 Tom: They're corrupted.

18:40 Elizabeth: Yeah.

[laughter]

19:42 Elizabeth: Sometimes we throw that in there too, like "Starbucks ruined the Macchiato. Next."

[laughter]

19:47 Tom: Exactly. You want sugar and water. Whip it up. We can do that. Maybe not... No. Okay, well cool. So I really like that you guys are pretty clear on what you are and what you're about. So, getting off the dime, going from concept to reality, is a big deal, right? Three frogs sitting on a log, two decide to jump, how many are left? The answer is three 'cause deciding to jump and actually jumping are two different things. So what got you guys to jump? What was the tipping point in saying, "we've got to do this"?

20:34 Elizabeth: I think we all have a different take on that one.

20:36 Gianna: I think so.

20:37 Elizabeth: But at the end of the day, it was a matter of... This is a dream and our parents had a dream and they followed through with it, and I think that was instilled in us too. We don't just dream, we actually run after them. So it came down to, this is an open door, are we gonna walk through it or are we just gonna say, "it's not for me" or "it's gonna be too hard"?

21:10 Tom: Too risky, yeah.

21:13 Elizabeth: Yeah. So obviously it had a lot to do with our parents being willing to trust us with such a big commitment and really just to follow through.

21:28 Tom: So do you mind if I ask how old you were, when you guys first made that decision?

21:34 Elizabeth: The dream or decision to start?

21:37 Tom: The decision to start and chase after the dream.

21:38 Elizabeth: Okay.

21:42 Gianna: I was 21. And so it's been two years, almost three years now.

21:46 Tom: Okay.

21:46 Elizabeth: I was 25, already in my career.

21:50 Tom: Yeah. Already in your career?

21:51 Elizabeth: Mm-hmm.

21:52 Tom: So what was your career?

21:54 Elizabeth: I'm actually still a physical therapist assistant. I worked at a local hospital for six years before I stepped back to just being on call.

22:08 Tom: Oh, wow. So you started working at the hospital when you were 13?

22:10 Elizabeth: 21.

[laughter]

22:12 Elizabeth: 21.

22:16 Tom: Yeah, very cool. Yeah, so that's important. I think there's a direct connection between a person's back-story and how that tipping point is overcome. So for you guys, you described it as like your mom and dad were chasing a dream, that is immigrating to the US, overcoming or escaping communism and its riot of bad things.

22:47 Elizabeth: And control. I think that's the biggest thing.

22:49 Tom: And control, yeah, to a place where you could make this kind of decision. So obviously your mom and your dad have really supported you in this. So, I mean, I look around your shop and it's beautiful.

23:01 Elizabeth: Thank you.

23:02 Tom: I mean the design of this is fabulous. So you bring more than just desire to the table. So, what's the story behind the vibe, and why is it the way that it is? I love plank flooring, but there's more to it.

23:24 Gianna: Yeah, well, being European, my parents had a lot, especially my mom, how this place would look as well alongside of me and my sister. And it's funny 'cause you see my dad behind bar trying to help out customers. Everybody comes in and they're like, "wow, this place is amazing." And he'll say, "it's all my daughters and my wife's job." He was like, "I was able to just put everything down and they have basically built this place up." So behind it, we wanted to make it a nice cozy place where people feel welcomed. With some of the things that we have hung up, we try to give it that European vibe to try to bring a little bit of home.

24:05 Elizabeth: Yeah, our culture.

24:05 Gianna: Here.

24:07 Tom: Yeah, that's important, that your roots really matter.

24:11 Gianna: Yeah, yeah. So that was it. Other than that, we definitely looked at Pinterest.

[laughter]

24:17 Tom: Pinterest, yeah.

24:18 Elizabeth: Pinterest board inspirations have come to life.

24:21 Tom: When you talk about home, I think about the comfortable chairs here and the table and the fact that the back of the bench along over there is pleated, looks kind of like a couch. Yeah, I got that, but it's still European. It's so clean in the lines. Mission accomplished. So the big question and, by the way, you don't have to answer this in-depth, but for that person who's thinking about it going, "Well, good luck to me. I don't have a bottomless checkbook to go do something like that." So how did you guys make it work financially to get started?

25:04 Elizabeth: Well, initially it was very much an investment from our parents' point of view. Definitely entrusting us with a lot, especially their checkbook. Because it's not like they have a lot of money and it's not like we have a lot of money to have contributed. So again things were very intentionally placed and budgeted, and where we could cut corners and work on things ourselves, we definitely did. And so there are ways to make it happen, but it all kind of works out when you have a little bit of faith.

[laughter]

25:41 Tom: You know, there's a lot of truth to that. Well in any endeavour that involves money that you don't have, the first place, the first tier of funding is always family and friends. So that's a good place to start. Well, obviously they feel like they got their money's worth. Now, your dad also though, he ran the interference with the city, right? He's one who handled permits, met with inspectors, dealt with all of that. So he kind of took a certain part of that job on himself.

25:41 Elizabeth: Yeah. I think they would have looked one time at us and been like, "excuse me?"

26:34 Tom: Well, how helpful and strategic, right? So there has to have been some hard lessons learned getting started. So what were some of those hard lessons?

[laughter]

26:50 Elizabeth: Oh, some of the hard lessons.

26:51 Tom: Can you think of any of them? No. Just smooth all the way?

26:56 Elizabeth: It was so smooth.

[laughter]

26:56 Gianna: I think for us, it was just sacrificing a lot of our personal time to be here 24/7.

27:09 Elizabeth: I think that was something that we underestimated initially.

27:12 Gianna: Definitely. Definitely.

27:13 Tom: How much time it was gonna take?

27:15 Elizabeth: Yeah, not only with build out, but at the same time, the second we opened doors, we thought that our staff would just take over but we ended up wanting to work alongside them not only to show them that, "hey, we want it done this way," but to show them that this is how we all will do it and we'll be right there next to you to work with you, to kind of give them that reassurance, too, and not so much about personal responsibility.

27:49 Tom: So nearly three years later you guys are still doing that, right?

27:52 Elizabeth: Yeah.

27:53 Tom: No, I think that's great. I think basically culture flows down from the people that own the company. And the alarming thing is, that you can see your own dysfunction sometimes in your business because of that, you see the good and the strengths, and you see the dysfunction too. I've had the unsavoury process, experience of doing that myself. So anyway, you kind of learn. Alright, so you had to overcome some early obstacles. So if you were to go back and... What would you say to a younger you who was just starting out with this whole thing, looking at plans, figuring out how much it's gonna cost, what the price tags gonna be with your lifetime commitment and all that, what would you say to that younger version of you guys?

28:45 Elizabeth: Don't do it.

[laughter]

28:50 Elizabeth: You literally go through that roller coaster daily though, because you're just like...

28:56 Tom: Why did I do this versus I'm so glad I did it?

29:01 Elizabeth: "Where did this come from?" Yes exactly you have to be... I realized, I thought I was a flexible person initially, and then I was like, "Oh, I am not a flexible person". So I guess to tell my younger me, is to hold on to the ride literally just hang on for the ride, because it is a journey and my Enneagram one wants to just say, "I'm gonna get to that destination in 2.5 seconds, watch me." Instead of just being like, "Okay, this is a process and to trust in the process." I think that's key because for me, Meek is not only a place for us or it's not just the gentle strength, is what I like to call it, but it's definitely a lifestyle and it's something that I hashtagged early on "journey to being meek" or "journey to meek" because it's definitely a personal journey as well.

30:19 Tom: Yeah, so, it's like you set the direction with your vision, but it seems like the vision has come back around and shaped you too.

30:28 Elizabeth: Yeah, definitely.

30:29 Tom: That's a good thing.

30:31 Elizabeth: Yeah. I feel like our characters have definitely been shaped over time.

30:36 Tom: Yeah. So what about you Gianna? What would you say to the younger Gianna?

30:42 Gianna: Oh boy. It was a little difficult for me when I was first starting it out just because at that point...

30:49 Tom: Just a little?

30:50 Gianna: Just a little. 'Cause at that point, I was actually trying to figure out what I had wanted to do in my college career so just going into college, I wanted to do something else and then as soon as we opened up this place I was actually... I actually had a slight mental breakdown 'cause I was going to CBU and at that point, I just sat there, I was like, "What am I doing? Is this something that I want to do with school and a coffee shop?"

31:19 Gianna: So then, trying to figure out what I had actually wanted to do at school, I took a break from that and I put everything into this place. And I think just telling my younger self, is just take it easy. Everything, being Christian it's all in God's plan. So if I wanna say, "I'm gonna do this," it's like, "no, there's something else that's gonna come, something that's gonna be better." So then, just have faith for that. Honestly, because I really wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Him.

31:51 Tom: Yeah, well you've gone back to school now haven't you?

31:53 Gianna: Mm-hmm, yeah.

31:54 Tom: Okay, so you obviously felt like you could create enough margin. Did you change your major, or?

32:01 Gianna: I did, I did. So at CBU, I was actually majoring in Kinesiology and then minoring in Mathematics. And then when I...

[laughter]

32:08 Gianna: Complete opposite sides...

32:10 Tom: Your dad is a math teacher, isn't he? Science?

32:13 Gianna: He was a math teacher, but yeah, he's a science teacher actually.

32:16 Elizabeth: Physics.

32:17 Tom: And he has the robotics club?

32:19 Gianna: He has the engineering club.

32:20 Tom: Yeah, right, right. So it kinda runs in the family, a little bit. Whoops excuse me.

[laughter]

32:26 Gianna: So at that point, I had changed and I had wanted to be a teacher, kind of something that I wanted to do my entire life, but I kinda just put it off to the side.

32:30 Tom: Okay.

32:30 Gianna: And so I started going back to school, and I'm a Math major with a Physics minor. So going back into that after being here for so long, it was a little rough but I was able to balance it out with going to school and being here too.

32:30 Elizabeth: Having family that's in management who gives you your schedule.

[laughter]

33:04 Tom: I bet that helps actually, right?

33:08 Elizabeth: What is your schedule like this semester? Oh, okay.

33:11 Tom: That's good. Okay, how'd you guys figure out who does what? So Gianna, you had to set aside school, right?

33:21 Gianna: Yeah.

33:21 Tom: And had to emotionally get your arms around what all that was about and being here 24/7 as Elizabeth said.

33:27 Gianna: Yeah.

33:28 Tom: Right, so what about that?

33:32 Gianna: It was rough but once it's like your own place...

33:37 Elizabeth: You just kind of do it.

33:40 Tom: You kind of bond with it, don't you?

33:41 Gianna: Yeah, you really do.

33:41 Tom: Yeah, it's not just, you own a job.

33:44 Gianna: Mm-hmm.

33:45 Tom: It's more like a lifestyle.

33:48 Elizabeth: It's like we're driving home and it's like, "Oh, let me just go by the shop really quick." Whether it's like to get a cup of coffee or you just have this feeling that there's a rush and you might need to be helping out behind bar.

34:03 Tom: Yeah.

34:04 Elizabeth: It's become a part of who we are.

34:08 Tom: Yeah.

34:08 Elizabeth: My husband refers to me as the Coffee Lady.

[laughter]

34:11 Tom: Well, we'll forgive him.

34:15 Elizabeth: Yeah, he works in healthcare and everybody's like "Your wife's the coffee lady." Were just like, "Yeah." [chuckle]

34:24 Tom: That's right and roasting now too, by the way.

34:26 Elizabeth: Yeah. So it's become who we are.

34:31 Tom: Okay, well, an interesting thing that's come out of this, we have yet to actually do it, but we have talked about Summit Tea and The Meek House teaming up to do local fundraisers.

34:44 Gianna: Mm-hmm.

34:44 Tom: Particularly for high school, junior high, college clubs and organizations or for that

matter a church or youth group or whatever that might be, to get their projects, to give them something better than selling cheesy candy bars or something like that. Particularly something local in that way. So, tell me a little bit about that. We've yet to do it but how would you describe your guy's thought process on that? You mentioned the community and all that.

35:15 Elizabeth: Right. So when we initially heard about it, we thought of, "Oh, this goes right along our vision and our heart for community and our heart for service." So to add a little bit of extra work to my work schedule, it didn't seem like it would be work because it's just... I'm roasting anyway, it'd be awesome to roast with the intention of being able to help another cause.

35:45 Tom: Yeah, exactly. This came to a head for me when one of the local high school's band had all their instruments stolen. And most schools don't have the money to just write a check for instruments, and we were thinking, "we could give a donation," but as far as Summit Tea and our ability to write big checks, they probably wouldn't get a tuba's worth out of it.

36:10 Gianna: Yeah.

36:11 Tom: And there's a lot more to the band than that. And so, how do we help them be successful? And frankly, I believe that there's a million dollars in our community that would be given for projects just like that if people had the opportunity or knew or could... There could be enough of a transaction there that they feel that it's kind of a win-win.

36:35 Elizabeth: Yeah.

36:36 Tom: Okay, well let's project into the future here a little bit. Let's step five years, you guys have mentioned goals and Gianna, you've got a business face that comes on and then off and I love that. I love that. Let's look five years down the road. So what about on the personal side, family side, raising a family side, so what's five years from now look like?

37:16 Gianna: I think you know more. [chuckle]

37:16 Elizabeth: Like five years from now...

37:20 Tom: Yes, Mr. Right, if he's watching.

37:20 Elizabeth: There's gonna be...

[laughter]

37:24 Tom: Better be smart though.

[laughter]

37:26 Elizabeth: Be a matron of honour, throwing the best bachelorette party with coffee. Yeah, with family-wise, to think that I'm gonna have a little girl running around here is kinda crazy.

37:42 Tom: Is that what's on its way?

37:48 Elizabeth: Yeah.

[laughter]

37:49 Elizabeth: Yes, and that's terrifying. But to have this space that feels like home will definitely be something that... I'm getting emotional about that. [chuckle] It's the hormones. Anyway, I think if you bring your kid to work everyday, that'd be so cool. So for five years from now, to just have a space where we can continue to be a family, but at the same time, continue to serve our community and to show her that things are possible.

38:31 Tom: Like what your mom did.

38:34 Elizabeth: Yeah, exactly, to carry that on.

38:35 Tom: That's something worth passing on.

38:37 Elizabeth: Yeah. And to show her that... Yeah, things can get hard and, yeah, this place feels like a ball and chain sometimes, but at the same time, it's not only helping us out, but it's helping so many more people out. And I think that that's what we're called to do, to ultimately be able to present to others the kindness that was extended to us. Definitely not to that extent, but at least to show 'em a little bit of that love.

39:11 Tom: No, absolutely. Yeah.

39:14 Elizabeth: But from a business standpoint, we started doing a mobile cart, teamed up with an event trailer, Dalton and Company Event Trailers, to throw their name out there. Who's also a family-run business, who's created this awesome trailer for people to work out of, and that gives us the opportunity to be like, "Hey, this is something we thought we couldn't do, but now we can because you guys basically created the model we were looking for." So the mobile side, and the catering side of Meek, hopefully, would have expanded by then to where we can be at events, at charity events, and be able to take our coffee on the road.

40:08 Tom: Bachelorette. Got it.

[laughter]

40:12 Tom: Yeah, got that.

40:13 Gianna: Yeah.

40:14 Tom: Okay. Well so what would you guys say to the older version of you, five years from now?

40:20 Elizabeth: You thought that was hard.

[laughter]

40:31 Gianna: Okay, I mean...

40:31 Elizabeth: Look at you now.

40:32 Gianna: Yeah. I don't know. Right now I think because I'm still in school, it's like... Again, just have faith that everything is gonna be okay.

40:47 Tom: It's hard to get your head up out of the tall grass and look around.

40:51 Gianna: Yeah, it is. Yeah.

40:55 Tom: Yeah, until you get through the other side.

40:55 Gianna: Exactly.

40:55 Elizabeth: Five years, Tom, that's a lot to think about.

40:56 Gianna: I know.

41:02 Elizabeth: I'm like, "Give me two years."

[laughter]

41:02 Gianna: Yeah. Gosh, I don't know, 'cause I'm thinking, honestly, just two years. I'm thinking up until two years, where I know that I'll be having my teaching credentials, and then finishing my master's, but alongside this, as well, that... Gosh, I actually... I don't know how to answer that.

41:26 Elizabeth: What we would say to our five-year-older selves?

41:31 Tom: Yeah. People get busy, things get more complicated, and you do have a second location, you've got the expanded catering business and all of that. What do you not wanna lose, maybe that's a way to say it? In all of the business, or complexity that the future may hold, what's really important to hang on to?

41:54 Elizabeth: For me, it would be the small, intimate feeling. Sometimes, I think of expansion as losing quality, so I would...

42:07 Tom: Can be.

42:08 Elizabeth: Yeah. I would much rather keep quality over quantity any day. But I also know that in order to grow, we have to stretch one way or another. So yeah, I think for me would be to not lose sight of what our original vision was, and is, and to continue to just be able to give. If we do expand, then hey, that's awesome, because that gives us more opportunity to help more organizations over time, so we look at it that way.

42:47 Tom: Sure, leave your footprint. Yeah.

42:49 Elizabeth: Right.

42:52 Gianna: I would go along the same mindset, of just using that quality, because I feel like as soon as you start expanding... Like she said, that instead of looking at quantity, I'd rather just keep the quality the same. So not where if we were to expand to another location, where it's like that location is better than this location. Or...

43:10 Elizabeth: Yeah, consistency, I feel like.

43:15 Gianna: Exactly. Yeah. And just being humble throughout the entire process, because there have been people that I've seen, where it's like as soon as something gets better, they... Things start going along really well, and as soon as that one little iceberg, or tip of the iceberg... So I just... Just keeping the same throughout the entire process, of looking backwards like, "This is where we've started," and just keeping that the same.

43:44 Tom: Yeah. Not losing track of that.

43:45 Elizabeth: And, "Don't forget where you came from and what your vision was." Yeah.

43:50 Tom: Makes sense to me. Okay, well let's say that we're sitting across the table from a young woman who has got coffee in her eyes, so to speak. She's thinking about it, she's at that point where the teeter-totter could tip. What do you have to say to her, what would you tell her to do or not to do? How would you encourage her?

44:23 Gianna: All of us, we all started with a dream, so I would say just stick with it. There are gonna be... Like she said, it's a roller coaster. There are gonna be ups, there can be downs, but as long as you stay with it anything can be made possible. So for us, it was just a dream three years ago. We started off with...

44:47 Elizabeth: It was a dream decades ago. [chuckle]

44:49 Gianna: It really was a dream decades ago. But just staying with it, and I think for us, it was kind of always something just that we had thought about. And then as soon as an opportunity arose, we were like, "You know what? I think it is time. I think let's actually make this dream a reality." And so if it's possible for us, especially as women, in this world, to being entrepreneurs, that it is possible for her as well, that if she just... And again, it's within the community, too. So if... I don't know.

45:27 Elizabeth: I would definitely tell her, because as women we pay attention to detail. And we tend to get lost in the complexities of things, and want to have variety, have this and that, but keep it simple, because when you start to add things that don't really matter, [chuckle] that you kind of get lost in the details and lose sight of what you're actually really trying to do. So I think the key thing for us was to make sure that we keep it simple. Not only will it help the checkbook, but also people will appreciate the memories that they make in your space, not so much the cloth on the... The upholstery.

46:30 Tom: Okay. What would you tell her not to do? You've offered encouragement. What would you tell her not to do? It seemed like there was a point where you guys had an opportunity that presented itself. Did I interpret that correctly?

46:46 Elizabeth: Yeah.

46:47 Tom: Maybe back up a little bit and tell us a little bit about that opportunity. How does that tip for you guys?

46:55 Elizabeth: Yeah. To be honest, it wasn't in the ideal time frame, whatsoever. I was planning my wedding, so to also build out a coffee shop.

[laughter]

47:01 Tom: It's usually a busy time, right?

47:08 Elizabeth: Also, build out a coffee shop, and working a lot. So I would say that the opportunity didn't really just fall into our laps. But we saw the need for a coffee shop in this area...

47:32 Gianna: In the mall area.

47:34 Elizabeth: In the mall area. Yeah. It's not some place that specialty coffee shops are found these days. It's not an independent building. It's in the center of what they call the food court of this area. It's in the middle of three cities. The donut Hole of Redlands is what they call it.

[laughter]

47:58 Elizabeth: So it was an interesting location but we saw the need for it, to where it's not just people who know coffee, it's people who actually just really want a space to hang out and just maybe like sit for a couple of hours, while there's Wi-Fi...

48:21 Gianna: Traffic dies down.

48:21 Elizabeth: Yeah, or traffic dies down.

48:21 Tom: Or the kids were at the movies or something.

48:23 Elizabeth: Yeah. We're so close to so many different areas, that we were like, "Yeah, let's look into this place, let's see if there is a spot open in this area." And there was. And it was interesting because all the other shops in this center are all franchise. So for us to be like, "Hey, we have this vision. We have this idea." To present it to head honchos in LA, who own this shopping center, and pretty much this whole area, was nerve-racking. I don't think it just fell into our laps, because we really had to prove ourselves, like, "Hey, yeah, we don't have the business background in this, but Mom has it in this, and it's been successful. We've been consistent in what we personally do." And I think that they saw the opportunity as well to just open doors to something that's different. And I think we've definitely shown them that over the years.

49:39 Tom: Yeah, I'll bet they're really happy with you guys. Yeah. Well, it makes a lot sense, I think, because you have a great location. I mean, foot traffic is incredible here, right? So bravo. Maybe, on the what not to do question again. So that gal sitting across the table and she's got stars in her eyes. But you're gonna tell her you're gonna save her some pain. How are you gonna do that?

50:10 Elizabeth: What not to do.

50:12 Tom: Don't do this. Keeping it simple, by the way. And I hope... I think that's really important. I think particularly as a Christian, you can have a sense that God is leading you to do something. People will tend to embellish that. Taking it off in a little different direction and wonder why there are only the sum of their efforts, and not that sense of God being with them, 'cause they took things off the tracks.

50:42 Elizabeth: What not to do? Would be to not be discouraged early on by customers that don't understand you or to not be discouraged by...

50:55 Tom: And she nods her head.

50:56 Elizabeth: Not only just customers. But, people that don't understand your vision, your dream, your plan. I think that we're easily influenced by people in general, society in general. We put limitations on ourselves and are shamed for having dreams outside of the norm. You didn't finish college, and you run this? What do you mean? You don't have a business degree and you run this? What do you mean? Things like that... That's mean to say, but thank you for the compliment somewhere.

51:41 Tom: Yeah. Yeah.

51:42 Elizabeth: And it's like, "Yeah, I run this place and I don't have a business degree. My advice is to really just keep their head down and not let others define your dreams, not let others define what you can and cannot do; and to not let others place limitations on you. Because, at the end of the day, this is your work and nobody's gonna believe in your dream as much as you do.

52:16 Tom: That's for sure.

52:17 Elizabeth: So it really comes down to advice like that. Not like, "Oh, don't pick that color." Or...

52:29 Tom: Yeah. Oh yeah.

52:31 Elizabeth: 'Cause we were very intentional with the colors we chose, because we wanted things to look a certain way, and for our boys to clean a certain way. If something's white and it's dirty, you can see it, so maybe let's clean it.

52:43 Tom: Yeah, yeah.

52:44 Gianna: Yeah. I mean, just to go based off of hers, again, at the beginning, you are gonna have people who aren't gonna understand your vision.

52:53 Tom: Yeah.

52:54 Gianna: Again.

52:55 Tom: Some people just like to, excuse the word, poop on things.

53:00 Gianna: Yeah. Yeah, so do not be discouraged by that because they don't know and they don't see the behind the scenes. They only see what you put out there. They don't see how hard it was to actually get this place started. They don't know.

53:16 Tom: Yeah, the heart and emotion and...

53:17 Gianna: Exactly.

53:18 Tom: Passion.

53:18 Gianna: Yeah, so all that hard work, they only see a little bit of you and then they decide to stomp on it, and that's where you have to say, "No, this is what I believe, and this is how I believe that things are gonna be," and, yeah, just don't let anybody discourage you because this is your dream.

53:40 Elizabeth: Yeah.

53:40 Tom: Yeah.

53:40 Gianna: This is yours. You can't have somebody, say, "No, that dream isn't good enough," or anything like that.

53:47 Tom: Yeah, or not. Yeah.

53:48 Gianna: Yeah.

53:48 Tom: I totally get that. That's really important. Well, ladies, it's been a pleasure talking to you. Is there anything that you wanted to say about The Meek House that we missed in our conversation? Or did we nail it?

54:04 Elizabeth: Did we miss anything?

54:04 Gianna: I don't...

54:07 Elizabeth: Other than actually taking part in the Cornulețes challenge, no. I don't think you've had one, Tom.

54:14 Tom: I think we gotta do this. We can't just talk about it. But I can't do it by myself.

54:19 Gianna: Okay.

54:19 Tom: So I need a lesson. So here, I'm gonna...

54:24 Elizabeth: Yeah, you can't lick your lips.

54:25 Tom: Oh, you're unfolding your napkin like you know what's coming. Okay, let's do it. So...

54:30 Gianna: I was just gonna let it fall.

54:31 Tom: First of all, here, Cheers.

54:34 Gianna: Alright. Oh my goodness. Okay, here. Cheers.

54:35 Tom: And no licking the lips, right?

54:37 Gianna: No.

54:37 Elizabeth: No licking the lips.

54:37 Gianna: No.

54:38 Elizabeth: Okay.

54:44 Tom: Go, Mom.

54:51 Elizabeth: Oh, this is rough.

54:51 Tom: Blow on the inside. Now, how do you spell this?

54:55 Gianna: You lost.

55:00 Tom: I'm gonna finish eating.

55:05 Elizabeth: 20. Cool.

55:07 Tom: So how do you spell the name of this pastry?

55:12 Gianna: Cornulețe.

55:19 Tom: Oh.

55:19 Elizabeth: But the T has an accent mark under the T.

55:22 Gianna: So it gives it a "tse."

55:26 Elizabeth: Yeah.

55:26 Gianna: So Cornulețe.

55:27 Tom: There we go. And a little lesson in Romania, while we're at it.

55:38 Gianna: Yeah, there's no way.

55:43 Tom: I gave up, too. Elizabeth cracked and I...

55:44 Elizabeth: Yep.

55:45 Gianna: Yep.

55:46 Tom: If the pros have trouble with it...

55:50 Elizabeth: That's why it's a challenge, yeah.

55:54 Tom: God help the poor amateurs.

55:54 Gianna: Cool. Thanks Nicole.

55:57 Tom: Yeah. So just out of curiosity, what is your best selling Summit Tea?

56:01 Elizabeth: Tropical Breeze and Tropical Black, lately that's all I've been selling.

56:09 Tom: Yeah.

56:10 Gianna: From the herbals, though, I'd say the Summit Blueberry. Especially as a London Fog as well, if they don't want that extra caffeine in anything. And then Summit Sunset.

56:24 Elizabeth: Vanilla Wood.

56:26 Tom: Vanilla Rooibos? Well, that's about... Yeah. You know what my wife does with the Vanilla Rooibos? She drinks it every morning. What she does is she takes just a little drop of maple syrup, and she says that sweetness, just wow.

56:42 Elizabeth: Nice.

56:47 Gianna: I'll have to try that.

56:50 Tom: There we go. Okay. Well, you guys, thanks. It's been great and you guys have to open up here pretty soon, right? Duty calls. But I really appreciate it. I love being part, a small part of your vision, supporting that. So let's just keep doing those things.

57:08 Gianna: Yeah.

57:10 Elizabeth: Sounds good. You'll have to take the last one to Patty.

Tea with Tom: Coffee Shop Best Practices & Fundraising with Gianna & Elizabeth of The Meek House

57:12 Tom: It might not make it to her, so you don't ask her how it tasted. Okay.