

Bernie's "interview" – February 19, 2016

VRCM: Tell me a little about your background, how you got into amateur radio and your involvement with the radio museum.

BM: Well, I guess I was born with a radio gene. I grew up in Rochester, New York. My dad had worked for the Stromberg-Carlson company before I was born. They started out making telephones but expanded to radios, and later into TV and sound equipment – hi fi amplifiers, school intercom systems and military audio stuff. He had boxes of radio parts in the basement and as a kid, I used to play with them... didn't know what they did, but they were interesting!

When World War Two ended, I got hooked on building one-tube pocket radios. Military electronic parts were flooding the market for pennies, and I built several of these things to listen to local AM radio. The radio might fit into your pocket, but then there were the batteries, headphones, antenna, and on and on (laughs). Then one of my dad's Popular Science magazines had an article on building a one tube receiver for 10 meters. It appealed to me and it opened a whole new world – shortwave, and in particular, ham radio... I heard guys talking to one another on the radio! Well, this *really* got my interest and I bought a copy of the 1948 Radio Amateur's Handbook and began studying for my novice ham radio exam. I also built a 4-tube receiver from the handbook, and spent two years trying to get it to work. Then one day a friend of my dad's came over and suggested I switch two connections on the oscillator coil. That did the trick – a simple mistake like that! Even had the "experts" baffled.

In 1950 I met a young lady and we began seeing each other. She got interested in ham radio too, and the next year we met at 5 in the morning and took a train from Rochester to Buffalo, where the FCC exams were held. Debbie got the call WN2LFT and I got WN2LFV. I made my first contact on the air one day after school – I was finishing up high school. I sent out a CQ in code and heard a station call me back – a VE3 in Toronto, Canada. DX on my first contact: Wow! I was so nervous I couldn't complete the contact (laughs).

Well, I wanted to be an electronics engineer and began attending R.I.T. – Rochester Institute of Technology. It was rough because my math skills were very weak and I had very little confidence in myself at the time. I stuck it out for the full three years – they only gave an Associate's Degree at the time – but dropped out before getting the degree. Debbie and I were married – that was 1954 – and I went into the army for two years. I didn't do much ham radio, but after going to the signal school at Fort Monmouth, I became a guided missile electronics instructor... worked on the Nike and Corporal systems... got assigned to Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama.

Our son was born in Alabama while we were down there and although I wasn't an active ham, Redstone had a MARS station – Military Amateur Radio Station. So I went over there and had them send a message to one of Debbie's relatives. As the story goes, the ham operator relayed the message to a ham in California and he called the relative and said something like "This is MARS. I have a message for..." She hung up, thinking it was a crank call! (Laughs) I did have some interest in ham radio and would spend time at the base dump where there were tons of electronic stuff from the German missile program; you know, V-1 buzz bombs and V-2 rockets. In fact I built a heater for our son's bedroom out of parts from a V-2 hydrogen generator!

I got out of the army in 1956 and went to work for the Glenn L. Martin Company in Baltimore – they're Martin Marietta these days – as an instructor and technical writer. They transferred us to Orlando, Florida. Our daughter was born down there. But after two years putting up with heat, humidity and bugs, we decided to move back to Rochester. I went to work for General Dynamics – they had bought Stromberg-Carlson – and I worked on manuals for a military single sideband radio system. When General Dynamics began scrounging for more military contracts, I didn't care for the insecurity and moved to a small company that seemed to be growing – the Haloid Company, which later became Xerox. I spent over 15 years with Xerox, first as writer then manager and ended up producing and directing training films. Along the way I met two hams that got me back into radio: Bob Wille, K2RQU and Clyde Foley – I don't remember his call; it was a five call as Clyde was from Texas.

I was having so much fun making movies, I left Xerox and started my own firm, first in Rochester than in Dallas, Texas. We spent seven years in Texas, Debbie as a nurse clinical specialist and college professor, me running a little film and video production company. We did work for Texas Instruments, all the major banks and corporations... My ham call was WD5JLJ down there – had a little 50 watt station and made lots of good contacts on the air.

We came back east, as they say down there, in 1984 and I set up shop as a freelance video scriptwriter and director; wrote training and informational videos and then got into doing documentaries. I even got to work with Maureen O'Hara, the movie actress on a project for the New England Air Museum.

Since I was now living in New England, I got a new ham call: KB100, and became fairly active on the air. One day – I think it was in 2001 – a friend called to tell me he heard an announcement on one of the radio stations that the vintage radio museum was looking for volunteers. That sounded interesting; Debbie and I had visited the museum at one time and found it quite interesting. So I contacted John Ellsworth, the director, who invited me down. I fell in love with the place – at the

time it was in an old factory building and was full of all the radios I wanted when I was younger but couldn't afford! (Laughs). The building needed a lot of work to make it into a museum and a lot of the guys were skilled at carpentry and other building craft – I was a klutz doing that type of work and ended up helping the museum's librarian with setting up the library. The librarian was Charles Griffen. Charles and I hit it off – we were both hams, loved classical music, and seemed to have the same outlook on many things. In time the museum moved to its present location and I saw the opportunity to educate visitors rather than just have collections of radios, telephones TV's and other stuff. I created the time line we have in the display area and wrote most of the signs you see on the walls describing the displays. I also got elected to the board of directors as secretary. Debbie joined the board as treasurer later, when the treasurer retired. We both spent a lot of Saturdays at the museum, she covered the front desk and managed the gift shop and I gave tours and continued helping Charles with the library.

One of our ham volunteers, Gordon Horn, thought we should have a ham club and he set up a club station. I helped him get a call sign for the club station: W1VCM, which stands for Vintage Communications Museum. I wanted VRM for Vintage Radio Museum, but that was already assigned (laughs). Our club is up to 28 members now. Every June the club takes part in an event called "Field Day" where we set up temporary stations and operate off alternate power. I bring in a little low-power radio and portable antenna and set up on the lawn in front of the museum. We never rack up high points but we give the museum a presence on the air. Besides, it's a lot of fun! Oh yea, I recently got my old original call back: W2LVF; have it on my car license plate too, as a matter of fact!

VRCM: So you're still involved with the museum.

BM: Yes, I'm secretary of the ham club, but I've scaled back my participation in the museum itself, partly due to my age. I only come in on Thursdays to give tours and spend time chatting with the guys, especially Charles; he and I have developed a close friendship. The other guys at the museum are all top notch too! I suspect a lot of us would be lost without the camaraderie and challenges the museum offers. Debbie is currently the museum's webmaster and I get involved every now and then answering technical questions she might have and offering my advice on this and that... I think I would spend more time here, but I get frustrated because I see the potential for education here, but the overall attitude is geared more towards collections, and I suspect in time they'll blot out the timeline we worked so hard to create. I hope I'm wrong.

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