

VRCM: Tell me a little about your background

BA: Well, I grew up in Glastonbury, Connecticut. I've always been a big fan of radio ever since I was sick with the chicken pox at age five I discovered AM radio and listening to WHYN up in Springfield. It came in real good on this little transistor radio that I had and I was hooked and soon I was listening to WDRC and all the top hits. My brother and sister were older so they had an influence on my musical tastes which were advanced for my age. So yes, I really liked listening to the Beetle's latest hits in the mid-sixties and I sort of evolved with the music... with my musical taste.

I always had an affinity for radio and you can imagine the joy I had one Christmas when I was maybe about 12 years old that I got my first pair of two-way radio CB walkie talkies. Now, to me, two way radio was very, very exciting and my friend Peter Knight – who is also a volunteer at this museum – I'd give him one of my walkie talkies and I would take the other and we'd see how far we could talk to each another with the ultimate goal of spanning an entire mile. Mind you, these were rated for one-quarter mile and well, we soon discovered that we could modify the antennas on the walkie talkies and make them talk farther by attaching wire! And soon we were able to communicate from one house to the other. And Peter was using his dad's barbeque grill – the grill of the cooking surface – hanging on the side of his house as the antenna. And it worked! That was the best antenna he had that worked very nicely until Peter's dad had to do some outside grilling and said "What the ---"(laughs) and saw the grill on the side of the house.

None the less, I ended up getting better walkie talkies and eventually a CB radio in 1973; it was just before CB had the big boom. So I was into CB radio for a bit and that taught me how to communicate and I talked to a wide variety of people. But then that wasn't quite enough, so my mom suggested, "Bobby, why don't you try Amateur Radio?" So I did just that. In the fall of 1973 I enrolled in a class in Glastonbury and in the spring of 1974 I got my two-year novice license. So my novice career was great. I had to not speak but only do Morse code, which I didn't have any problem with – I loved Morse Code – and soon I was communicating with people all over the place: around the country and eventually around the world. So that was a great joy for me.

Amateur radio kept my interest all the way through adult hood. But amateur radio led to a career in electronics and engineering; that's what I pursued after high school and the University of Hartford. So I was a graduate of Ward Technical College and the last year I was going to college I worked full time at Channel 30, the NBC affiliate in West Hartford and that started my career as a broadcast engineer. I stuck with television for 28 years.

But I missed my wife tremendously because I always worked second shift for the most part and she always worked first shift. I was growing older and was approaching age fifty and said to myself I don't want to go through life missing my wife because we were ships passing in the night. I would go home and see her on Saturday morning and we'd have fun together on the weekend but Sunday night I'd have to say, "Bye Kathy. See you next Saturday... I hope." I wasn't going to grow older like this. Life's too short; love is strong. I started volunteering at the American Radio Relay League in 2006. That's two years before I ended up leaving television. I ended up as a volunteer tour guide. It was a brand new program at the ARRL in 2006... in July. The intent was to have lunch with my wife twice a week. I could at least see Kathy at least twice a week as a tour guide. So I did that. But during that year and a half that I was a tour guide, I got to really appreciate the ARRL: what it does for its members and how it preserves amateur radio. I was very impressed with the people that worked in the building. So when a job in the laboratory opened up I said, "I could do that!" So I started at the ARRL as the test engineer for QST Product Review. I still test for QSL Product Review but now I'm also the Assistant Lab Manager, so I have a lot of responsibilities there, but I love my career and it all started with radio.

VRCM: How did you get involved with the radio museum?

BA: Well, interesting, when Channel 30 retired all of their film equipment in the early 1990s, I ended up with one of their 16mm broadcast film projectors. It's not meant for projecting far away across to a screen, it was made for broadcasting into a television camera. And I had preserved all the films at Channel 30 and transferred them over to videotape and I used to operate these 16mm projectors on the air when I was much younger at Channel 30. So they're scrapping all the projectors; ending up in the dumpster. And what I did was save one of them; had it at my folks barn in Glastonbury for quite a while, but then they got tired of looking at it so they said, "Bobby, you've got to get rid of that thing." So someone at work had heard of the Vintage Radio and Communications Museum. I think at that time it was located in East Hartford. I think it was in the I-Hop building. So I ended up donating the projector and I remember Gene Gregory was one of the crew that came by to pick up the projector because he was always cutting up and making a lot of funny jokes. I remember Gene. They took the projector away and they preserved it. And today I was actually running it before this interview. So then I learned about that museum. They said come on down – take a look. And me: I've always loved things old. I love history. I love old technology. I have a large collection of radios and phonographs. I said, "Gosh I've got to see that place".

So I went down there the next weekend, met John Ellsworth and I really, really liked the place. The only problem was, since I was second shift, I wasn't a good candidate myself to actually volunteer as a tour guide, especially the first thing on a

Saturday morning (laughs). So flash forward to 2008. Now I'm at the ARRL. I'm happily at first shift and now I can volunteer once again. What to do? What to do with my volunteer time? Hmm... May be I'll drive trolleys at Warehouse Point. I love trolleys and I really wanted to volunteer. But Charles Griffen volunteered here at the museum and said, "Bob, we really, really could use someone like you at that museum." And Charles twisted my arm something awful... I could feel joints buckling and cracking. I said "uncle". And so I came up here during a swap meet John Ellsworth once again showed me around, but this time the museum was located in Windsor, Connecticut on Pierson Lane. I was quite impressed and the guys there were really terrific, so soon afterwards I started as a tour guide here at the museum. I love having the ability to share my information and knowledge that I have of all things historical; all things communications with the general public that comes here. It's a great pleasure to have that opportunity to share my knowledge and of course *I* learn lots of stuff from people who come here and they tell me a thing or two. So when I leave every day I learn something new and that makes life exciting.

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