

David Michaels interview, 10-3-2016

VRCM: Tell me a little about your background and how you became involved with the radio museum.

DM: I got involved in the radio museum through my husband, Bernie. He and I had a close friend who basically let us know one day that there was a radio museum in Connecticut which was in East Hartford at that time. And so we went out one day and found what was in an old I-Hop. There was a restaurant next to it and we decided we would go there for lunch but we wanted to go into the museum. We walked in and it was just a sea... an absolute sea of old radios and one after the other in the old I-Hop, which wasn't that big. My husband, who is an amateur radio operator and has been interested in radio and communications for a long time... by the way, before we got married, I also had my amateur radio license. So I had some knowledge, but not a lot I'm not a radio tech person at all. But I found it fascinating and there was a gentleman there. I'd say an older gentleman but both my husband and I are older so, I'd guess I'd say someone our own age. And he and my husband started talking and I just started looking around, and I found it fascinating. At that point, I'm not sure how much my husband Bernie got involved then, but I know I enjoyed that whole adventure.

Eventually the museum moved and Bernie got more involved when it moved into Windsor Connecticut. on Mechanic street, into this huge... from the little I-Hop it moved into this huge, huge building... without much heat (laughs). It did have electricity but it was enormous. And they had taken the front of that building and took the contents of the museum and made a very nice little display area. But in the back it was just one huge room. I can remember clearly going there and visiting it when our Finnish "son", Jarmo [an exchange student who lived with us] and his daughter, Isa, came for a visit. We took them and my husband is also a photographer and he took some pictures and we still use one of the pictures in our

brochure. We took our family; our son and our daughter over to the museum. That was fun to do. Bernie got more involved and eventually I started to go to some of the [volunteer] meetings that were being held and I can remember clearly freezing to death! But I can also remember wandering through this whole sea of... in the back, and basically looking at it and thinking, "I don't know how they're going to heat this place?" What kind of heat did they have at that time?

VRCM: I think it was steam heat. There was an old boiler in the basement.

DM: Is that what it was? It was long past its prime! At that point I did go to a couple of the meetings and I kind of liked meeting the people there – they were very nice. And I liked meeting with John Ellsworth. They were just interesting, nice people.

Now, let me go back and say what my background is. I am a Registered Nurse and at that point it was during the time when I was not working full time any more. I had retired but went back to school and got a degree in computers and programming and so that kind of got me into the same kind of mind-set of the museum. The museum has always attracted people who like to collect. And so, again, what I remember most is collections: collections of records, collections of manuals and books – but not the kind of books I enjoy reading! What I enjoyed most was the camaraderie and the enthusiasm of all the volunteers. Just about that time, the museum moved again because the old building that they were in was going to be turned into apartments. And so they found another building over on Pierson Lane, which is the present home of the museum. And it was sort of in a mess at that point and I had other things that I wanted to do, so my involvement was through my husband. When the museum did move over to Pierson Lane, there came a point, and I don't remember the date, but I remember coming in and basically working on the front desk. And at that point the former treasurer decided he could no longer do the treasury. So I got involved in the treasurer's job, which

was way out of where I was comfortable. But at that point, I had the knowledge of doing computerized... setting up a system, because when I was taking my courses at Springfield Technical Community College, I had to have an accounting course. Now, accounting is *not* my major background, but I got into the treasury and that was an interesting time. I was covering Sundays and one of the days during the week at the front desk, do the treasury, and as I did that I looked at what the former treasurer had done. He had somewhat of a software program, but I put everything into Peachtree. And he came over with shoe boxes full of receipts, including receipts for things his wife sent him to the store for, and he had a little note on that and on the other side there was some other information. And I don't remember how much time it took, but I finally got the finances all arranged and I realized that, as a non-profit they had not declared what they needed to do, so I met with the museum's accountant and presented him with my Peachtree and he asked about the original receipts and I told him where they were. So we got the finances settled out and as I was doing that I realized the museum was going to go broke if we didn't do something. As our executive director keeps saying, it's now 25 years that we've been in business and something always comes up. But we looked at what we needed to do and I got somewhat involved. And they had an old business plan and we got involved in looking at that business plan. At that point, the finances got squared away.

About that time I decided that, now that I've done that, I didn't want to do the treasury anymore and resigned that position; finances are not my big thing. But as I was doing that I got more involved in the museum itself and found that I really enjoyed the people. It's a museum of collectors and I think it's just wonderful. Now, there came a point where I was taking and doing more of my own... what was interesting to me, which is nursing and nursing history. And I started my own website for nursing history. Several years ago, the museum had a very, very talented marketing person who also knew computers and was also heavily invested in the museum himself. Unfortunately there came a point where this person no

longer could handle the website and he kept all of the software for the website, it was hosted by a company called GoDaddy, but they were only the host. And there was something... everything worked out; it was a lovely [worksite] website but there was a problem and his computer and he were no longer able to host the website. And the whole application software was on a computer that was no longer functioning. So that's when I got involved because you got a very viable website that they were using because most of the financing for the museum was done through eBay sales and all of the information was on a website for all of the events and the news and there was nobody apparently who could do a website. So I was sort of anxious that the museum go on because it is a great museum and I have a husband who is so invested in it. So I volunteered to try and save the website which meant I had to save the domain name and GoDaddy was very helpful; the people there. And I just mention them because they are the host. But they said they could not get the information from that old website because the software was no longer available. So I had to basically reconstruct the old website, copying every page to my machine... and then we set up a... using their product we were able to develop a website. That was a very frustrating but fun time. It taught me a lot and so I became the webmaster and administrator. And that got me back into working into the museum.

One of my other interests was looking at... the museum goes through communication. To me they stop when computers are starting to become... and the internet is starting to become very much... our communication is moving into a wireless... everybody is using devices. Now the museum doesn't go that far but there are some old computer and one of the things that I'm interested in is history. And since the museum tells that history... basically looking and seeing what are you doing as far as computers and that beginning history of computers? So lately I volunteered to get that set up. We have a new webmaster—I'm the administrator but we have a new webmaster—and she and I basically set up the computer display and we'd like to do some more but the museum itself is jam-packed and there's no room to present things, so hopefully in the future there will be some room where we

can enlarge the computers and talk about the beginnings of the Internet at that point because it would fit in with the basic focus of the museum which is communication. I'm still actively involved, but not as active as before.

End: 17:35 minutes