



Episode 388, Corey Ruth, KD3CR Transcript

Transcript funded by: Corey Ruth, KD3CR

Eric, 4Z1UG:

QSO Today Episode 388: Corey Ruth, KD3CR.

My thanks to Icom America for sponsoring the QSO Today Podcast. Welcome to the QSO Today Podcast. I'm Eric Guth, amateur call sign 4Z1UG, where I demonstrate the diversity and relevance of the amateur radio hobby and its impact on society by interviewing ham radio operators, many of whom played vital roles in shaping our technology through the amateur radio hobby.

While many people might say, "Ham radio. Do people still do that?" this podcast demonstrates through in-depth interviews just how amazing, diverse, and dynamic the amateur radio hobby continues to be.

Tickets are on sale now for the QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo returning on March 12th, 2022. We have a very nice lineup of presentations and speakers. FlexRadio is our platinum sponsor and Elecraft is our gold sponsor. You can get to ticketing by clicking on the expo banner in this week's show notes page.

I'll be sending out a request for volunteers and moderators for the expo days proper. If you'd like to be a volunteer or moderator, please use the button under the expo banner on the show notes page.

Corey Ruth, KD3CR, was a speaker in last August's QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo, with a presentation titled HF in an HOA: The BBTB Attic Antenna. This presentation captured my attention because Corey is a relatively new ham living in an HOA, an immigrant to the United States, and using an antenna that, for all intents and purposes, was too good to be true. You'll hear in this interview that my conversion from being a skeptic to a believer is complete. I know that you'll find this interview with KD3CR very interesting, allowing you to draw your own conclusions.

KD3CR, this is Eric, 4Z1UG. Are you there, Corey?

Corey, KD3CR:

Hi, Eric. Yes, I am. Thanks so much for having me.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Corey, thanks for joining me on the QSO Today Podcast. I realized that you're a relatively new ham, but we're going to start at the beginning of your story. When and how did that story start for you?

Corey, KD3CR:

Sure. Yeah. So I actually grew up in Canada, a small town, about three hours northwest of Toronto. My father, at the time when I was growing up, had a business installing and servicing TV antennas and, as a result of that, often had ham radio clients who wanted the towers for their ham antennas. I would often go along with them, and thought it was really neat at the time that these people could talk to folks around the world with just an antenna sitting in their backyard. I guess that planted the seed for me, but I didn't get into ham radio formally until many years later.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

What was the name of the town that you grew up in?

Corey, KD3CR:

I grew up in a town called Wiarton. It's about 3,000 people, famous for having a prognosticating groundhog, Wiarton Willie, our albino rival to Punxsutawney Phil, for anyone who knows about that for Groundhog Day. If you've seen the movie Groundhog Day with Bill Murray from the '90s, he's a weather forecaster that was sent to Punxsutawney to report on the situation and ended up getting caught in a time loop, essentially, where he was reliving that same Groundhog Day, February 2nd, over and over.

Corey, KD3CR:

He's actually a real groundhog there. Punxsutawney has a Groundhog Day festival every year. Wiarton, although we started ours later, we like to think that we're a little different because our groundhog is albino. So it sets us apart a little bit. But anything to draw in a little bit of fame and recognition, I suppose.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Wiarion Willie, when he comes out of his hole, that's the first day of spring.

Corey, KD3CR:

The idea is if he sees his shadow that there will be six more weeks of winter. If he doesn't, that it'll be in early spring. I can't speak to the success rate of those predictions. But that's the concept at least.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

And how does he indicate that he's seen his shadow? Does he like wave a hand or-

Corey, KD3CR:

There'll be a handler, which is normally the mayor of the town. They'll bring him out of his ceremonial hole in the ground, in his den. If it's sunny and you can see shadows quite well,

then it'll be having seen his shadow. If it's overcast, can't see anything, then it'll say, okay, early spring's coming.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Wiarnton probably also had its annual parades as well.

Corey, KD3CR:

Oh, of course, yeah, one of those being the Wiarnton Willie parade every Groundhog Day.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Okay. So your father was in the television antenna business. You just said that he also installed towers. Were you a tower climber or did he make you a tower climber?

Corey, KD3CR:

No, he never had me up on the towers. I would usually observe from the ground kind of thing. I was a bit too young for that. But he certainly did lots of tower climbing until his knees gave out later in life and moved to a different business.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

You're now maybe in your 30s?

Corey, KD3CR:

I am, yeah. 35.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

You just recently, within the last number of years, immigrated to America?

Corey, KD3CR:

I did, yeah. I fell love and married an American. My wife Kelly was living in the US when we first met. She moved to Canada to be near me and to go to graduate school. Then we got married and moved initially to New Mexico where we were for about a year and a half, and then moved from there to Maryland. So I have been in the US going on six years now and have just gotten my citizenship last year. So I've been an American citizen for about a year now.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Did you have an interest in technology that came from this business that your father had, or was that also kindling at the same time?

Corey, KD3CR:

Oh, very much so, yeah. When he moved on from the TV and antenna business, he moved on to computer repair and service. Being a young kid, you're just wanting to find out what's going on. And so, I was always watching and asking questions and that type of thing.

Corey, KD3CR:

So because he had that business, we had a computer much earlier than many of my friends and other family, starting with a Commodore 64 and then moving on to IBM PC compatible computers, pre-Windows. This is when DOS and command line was still everything. So learning about it then on the hardware and software side of things, that stuck with me throughout my life and really originated there.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Where did you go to college and what did you major in?

Corey, KD3CR:

So I'd actually been thinking about something with technology and ended up doing something entirely different. I went to the University of Waterloo where computers and engineering is really what it's known for. But I majored in history with the peripheral courses that were optional. I took some of those in computers and technology programming, in Java and that type of thing. But my major was history.

Corey, KD3CR:

I graduated from that thinking I would get into teaching, only to graduate during a downswing, when there was a huge surplus of teachers. So I tried to get into the military. I applied to the Royal Canadian Navy. Unfortunately, was turned down eventually for medical reasons. Then that was overturned, but I was going to have to wait another year. I thought I just couldn't wait any longer.

Corey, KD3CR:

So I went back to school to a community college, moved from Waterloo to Toronto for that. Went to Centennial College for public relations and corporate communications, which is a one year post-grad certificate program. Got into PR from there, and that's what I've still been doing today.

Corey, KD3CR:

But many of my clients over the years were technology clients, mostly consumer technology, but some corporate B2B as well. So I had clients like Xerox, Linksys, Belkin, Sonos. So having that technical interest, technical background, I was able to use that to help explain the technology and the gadgets and the cool products to reporters and to average people as well.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Wow.

Corey, KD3CR:

Once I moved to Maryland, I got into the corporate side of PR. I'm working for IEEE, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. So still continuing that side of being tech adjacent, I guess I would say, in technology, but on the communication side.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

When you declared your major as a history major at the University of Waterloo to your family and friends, what was their response?

Corey, KD3CR:

I think they were supportive. I think they thought at least that I would probably pursue something in technology, be that computers directly or computer engineering or something like that. At the time, I was pushing back a little bit due to the math requirements. Although I love practical technology, building things, the math courses, in high school at least, put me to sleep. So I was struggling to relate that as aspect of it to my major and decided, well, why not do something else that I enjoy?

Corey, KD3CR:

I really loved history, learning about ancient history and ancient Rome, ancient Greece, and then more modern stuff like European history through the Middle Ages and World War I and World War II, the cold war. I found that stuff fascinating. So I thought let's study something that I am interested in and figure out the job part of it later. But as I realized, the history major didn't open up a lot of doors. So that's how I had to try something else.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Well, the audience of the QSO Today Podcast knows that I reveal this truth every once in a while. I also have a history degree because I couldn't do differential equations to save my life. That's not to say it wasn't a useful degree in terms of writing and communicating. So good for you.

Corey, KD3CR:

Absolutely.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Although when I declared my major, with the exception of my wife, I had everybody saying, "Well, geez, Eric, you're never going to work." You just have to figure out like you did that that you can work in doing something else and that the history degree is a great foundation.

Corey, KD3CR:

Absolutely. Being able to write effectively, which a history degree certainly gives you, being able to research with a critical eye. Just being able to learn how to learn, which any degree will give you, can be tremendously helpful.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

We were talking just a little bit before we pushed the record button. We were talking about the immigrant experience. I was explaining a little bit to you about my immigrant experience. But tell me a little bit, is there an immigrant experience going to the United States from Canada, where you would think that Canada is almost a sister country with almost an identical population? But is that true? What was your immigrant experience like?

Corey, KD3CR:

Mine was perhaps a little different than many immigrants' experience. As you said with Canada being almost a sister country or a cousin country, there are a lot of similarities, which may not be true for everyone immigrating to the United States. There are certainly differences and I think more than many people may realize.

Corey, KD3CR:

But with, I guess, my immigration class, if you could call it that, the people who swore the oath of allegiance with me, I was the only one who came from an English-speaking country. There were a lot of folks from all over the world, and I think no more than two from any one country. So we were a diverse bunch.

Corey, KD3CR:

But many people, if you meet me on the street kind of thing, would have no idea in most cases that I wasn't born and raised here. So it's that I guess almost invisible immigrant experience in a sense. But I've adapted quite well.

Corey, KD3CR:

The one thing that would almost give me away would be the Canadian shift in the accent, talking about house, mouse, about, those types of things. So I've just subconsciously almost hidden that. So I'll more often now say house and about. It'll switch back and forth sometimes sentence-to-sentence, but that helps to hide things a little more.

Corey, KD3CR:

But, interestingly, when I moved here, a lot of folks in Canada, friends and family, were surprised, I guess. They're like, "Oh, really? Why would you move there?" because they have maybe certain thoughts about the US. There's always rivalries with regards to sports and that type of thing.

Corey, KD3CR:

Canada has a very interesting relationship with the US where there's a certain domination in terms of culture and movies and music. So there's a very Canadian push-back to just say, "Hey, we're unique," and to preserve that Canadian identity. With Canada being seen perhaps as more friendly, more welcoming, and a cultural mosaic as opposed to a melting pot, they try to preserve that. But I think been able to seamlessly adapt to both worlds.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Yeah. I think there's a large number of celebrities that most people would identify as American or from the United States who are actually from Canada, unless you scratch a little bit harder. You wouldn't know they were from Canada, unless it was actually part of their bio. But it's not widely known.

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah. Yeah. When I was in high school, I did a student exchange where I spent three months living and going to school in Berlin when I was 16. There would be different people interested in a certain musician. Being the proud Canadian that I was, I said, "Oh yeah, they're from Canada." That was usually met with surprise. They just assumed, oh, this English-speaking person, they were probably American. And so, that was an interesting perspective to bring to things.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Gordon Lightfoot, Celine Dion, if we're thinking singers, I think were Canadian. I think that any of us that grew up in America, I think this is probably still true, in school, we actually had to learn the Constitution and take a national test on the Constitution. In your class for gaining your citizenship in the United States, what did you have to learn?

Corey, KD3CR:

There was a mix of civics and history that was on there. They have a pool, kind of like with the ham radio exams, a pool of many more questions, and then they actually ask a short selection of it. So I think there may have been somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 questions that they could ask. Then you get asked 10. I think you have to get seven or eight out of those 10 correct.

Corey, KD3CR:

So there were things relating to the Founding Fathers and the Constitution and America in the wars, like who was the president during World War I or World War II. Some of the things were easier than others.

Corey, KD3CR:

Being a history major, the history was generally no problem. But I really had to study to make sure that I would get the civics questions correct, like how many people are in Congress, both in the Senate and in the House, what was a given constitutional amendment about, things like that, that I wouldn't have necessarily known or been exposed to prior to moving to the US, that I would have to know to pass the test.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Was there something about that that you discovered, that you thought was interesting, that you hadn't known before about the United States coming from Canada, that you discovered in this learning?

Corey, KD3CR:

I think the attention paid to the Constitution was one. There certainly seems to be a reverence, if you will, towards the Constitution here that is largely absent in Canada. We didn't even really learn about the Canadian constitution that much in Canada, aside from when it was, I guess, liberated, if you will, from Britain.

Corey, KD3CR:

Canada being a British colony for a later period of time than the United States, we didn't have control of our own foreign affairs until after World War I. We're still governed by what was called the British North America Act until much later.

Corey, KD3CR:

There was the government of Brian Mulroney in 1982 that essentially, I guess, went to Britain and said we want our constitution to be in Canada and convened a constitutional convention. There were some controversy that they were supposed to have an agreement with all the provinces akin to the states in the United States, and Quebec was dragging their feet a little bit.

Corey, KD3CR:

So they made a deal at night, supposedly, without the sign off of Quebec. That's still been somewhat controversial to this day. Whereas in the US, everybody knows the Constitution and Bill of Rights and the various amendments. Yeah, there's just not that same attention paid to it in Canada.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

And now this message from Icom America. Now is the time to spice up your ham shack with Icom's new ID-52A handheld portable radio. Now shipping. This radio is perfect for staying in or venturing out and working your favored VHF and UHF bands this winter season.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

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Eric, 4Z1UG:

The Icom ID-52A is the first handheld amateur radio with a full color, 2.3-inch waterfall display, and the ability to send photos over D-STAR with a connected Android device. Other ID-52A features include a wide band receiver with guaranteed range of 144 to 148 megahertz and 440 to 450 megahertz.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

It supports VV, UU, VU, and dual DV mode. It has an integrated GPS/GLONASS receiver, including grid square locations. Other features include microSD card slot, micro USB for data transfer and programming and charging, and of course it is IPX7 waterproof in case you drop it. Be sure to check out the new Icom ID-52A at your nearest ham radio dealer, along with a full line of amazing Icom radios. When you make that Icom purchase, be sure to tell your dealer that you heard about it here on QSO Today.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

One more note, if you are visiting the 2022 Orlando HamCation from February 11th to February 13th, be sure to find Icom's booth to see the ID-52A up close and personal. Now back to our QSO Today.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

There is a special reverence for the Constitution of the United States. Here in Israel, it's a very interesting thing. We refer to other countries ... Canada's Canada. But in Hebrew, we call the United States Arzot Ha'brit, the land of the covenant. It's because the United States has a constitution that we call, in Hebrew from Israel, we call the United States, Arzot Ha'brit, not the United States. We call it the land of the covenant.

Corey, KD3CR:

Interesting.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Yeah, the Constitution is renowned in the world. Historically, it's probably the second greatest document to the Bible. Who knows? But it has that kind of power.

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah. It's interesting how different country names are interpreted in various languages, in various countries around the world. I think the USA brand, if you will, has a certain power to it as well, such that when I was on my student exchange in Germany, the direct translation of United States of America was, I think, Die Vereinigten Staaten. But almost nobody used that name for it. It was just called the die USA, which was just the USA, but the German pronunciation of the letters, because it's just so instantly recognizable.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Okay. So how did you find your way into ham radio then, Corey?

Corey, KD3CR:

So I think the spark for that was when I first moved to the US. We had gone from Toronto, where my wife and I had been living and working, to northern New Mexico. We moved to Los Alamos, which is a relatively small town, really a company town for the Los Alamos National Laboratory up in the mountains, fairly isolated. I knew nobody moving there. The only person I knew was my wife. I thought, "Hey, this would be a good opportunity to try to meet some folks."

Corey, KD3CR:

I remembered having been interested in ham radio, looked up and there was a local club, the Los Alamos Amateur Radio Club. I went out thinking nothing to lose and lots of knowledge and friendships to gain. I'm really so glad that I did because they were very welcoming, really took me under their wing as someone who knew almost nothing about the hobby. I learned a lot, that, really, even though I was only there for a year and a half, helped get me started in the hobby.

Corey, KD3CR:

I was, I think, only there about six months when the elections were coming up and there was an opening for a secretary-treasurer. So I put my name in the ring and was elected to the position. So I was getting involved very quickly in a leadership role there as well, which I think helped to advance my knowledge of things, the inner working of clubs, like how the club structure works and that type of thing. So I was definitely learning a lot very quickly from them.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

The funny thing that comes to mind when you talk about volunteering for secretary-treasurer is a group of candidates standing in a line in front of the room, and everybody says, "Who wants to be secretary-treasurer?" and everybody but you takes a step backwards.

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

But that doesn't sound like that was your experience. Before we go into the radio club, Los Alamos, New Mexico has a very interesting history, the center of the development of the A-bomb. Is your wife, was she the one that was actually brought there to finish her studies?

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah. So my wife is a librarian. She got her Master's Degree in Librarianship at the University of Toronto. Then when she had started applying for jobs, had one opening that had cropped up at the Los Alamos lab there, the Los Alamos National Laboratory, and got the job offer. We thought, "Hey, what a great opportunity to try something a little different," and certainly had a lot of name recognition. A lot of people know of the lab and of Los Alamos. So we thought, "Hey, let's do it. Let's go for it."

Corey, KD3CR:

So she was a librarian then at the lab and I was the tag-along. I was fortunate, early on when we moved, I had tried to resign my position at my job in Toronto. My boss ... I guess kudos to him, he was really supportive and still recognized the value that I brought to the company ... he asked me to stay on just working remotely for him.

Corey, KD3CR:

So time shifted. I was two time zones over to make sure that I was present in my virtual office for the 9:00 to 5:00 hours on Eastern Time. But a lot of our clients, a lot of the reporters we worked with months down the line that they didn't realize I had to even moved. They just assumed I was in Toronto.

Corey, KD3CR:

So I was able to continue my job, which was helpful because Los Alamos, and northern New Mexico more generally, doesn't have quite as many public relations and communications jobs as I was hoping.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

How was the facility? Did you actually have good high speed internet and stuff like that in Los Alamos?

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah, luckily, I mean although there weren't very many options. We didn't have a lot of suppliers to choose from. The one that we did have through Comcast Xfinity was very fast, very reliable. So I had no issues there at all.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

That's a great thing about the era that we live in now, that you can practically live anywhere on the planet and be able to work. I think Los Alamos is a beautiful area. What did you think of New Mexico in general?

Corey, KD3CR:

I really enjoyed it. I think the scenery being up in the mountains was just gorgeous. It looked like a postcard everywhere you looked. I, having grew up in a small town, had that small town appreciation for things.

Corey, KD3CR:

I moved from Warton, as I said, which was like 3,000 people, to Waterloo, which is a fairly small city, I think at the time it was about 150,000 people, and from there to Toronto, which is a couple million people, and found that as you got larger in the city or town size, you tended to know fewer people and everything seemed to get faster.

Corey, KD3CR:

So in the small town where you're separated by such a small amount, even if you don't know the person, you probably know someone that they know. So everyone's always so willing to help and stops to say hi and that type of thing.

Corey, KD3CR:

In the bigger cities, everyone's just in a hurry to get where they're going. I found that I didn't have as much of a sense of community in the larger cities, the megalopolises. So getting back to Los Alamos, in a small town, it was interesting just walking down the sidewalk, people were saying hi. I had missed that, I think, from my times in Warton.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

That's a really great thing, I think. I also live in a small town and know everybody here. The reverse is true. They know all of us as well. So it's like there's no secrets.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Let me just ask, the Manhattan Project was the atom bomb project there during the '40s. That was the product of the Los Alamos labs there. Is there any remnants or any historical artifacts from that period that still exists in Los Alamos?

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah. They actually have a really nice museum in Los Alamos. I believe it's called the Bradbury, where they have a number of artifacts that you can get up close and personal with from the early era and into the middle era of the cold war mostly. Obviously a lot of the newer stuff would be still classified.

Corey, KD3CR:

But it was really neat going through and being able to see that from a history standpoint, but also from the science and technology standpoint, and just what they were able to do in the 1940s, in an area of the country that at that time was even more remote than now.

Corey, KD3CR:

I mean we think of Los Alamos and northern New Mexico as being a somewhat remote place now. But at the time there was basically like a horse farm. It was a ranch for children, like a summer camp type of thing. And so, there were no really good roads up to there. I guess part of that was the point that it was going to be less vulnerable for espionage and that type of thing. But, yeah, just fascinating seeing that.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

At the time, it wasn't the end of the world, but you could see the end of the world from there.

Corey, KD3CR:

That's a good way of putting it, yeah.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

I want to take a minute to tell you about my favorite podcast, the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast with George KJ6VU and now joined by Rod VA3ON, Mike VA3MW, Mark N6MTS, and Vince VE6LK. Every two weeks, George and company offer up a status report on the many amateur radio projects on their workbenches and explore projects on their guest workbenches. This group is project-active and prolific, covering many technical areas of amateur radio.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

So the next time you want a deep dive into ham radio electronic project building, or to learn about technology tools, test equipment, construction techniques, and the rest, listen to the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast, available on every podcast player and channel. Use the link in this week's show notes page to get to the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast directly. Now back to my QSO.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Okay. So let's go back to the Los Alamos Amateur Radio Club. Before we started, we were talking a little bit and I was saying that what I'm interested in when I'm talking to a ham who's young, admittedly you're young, and who's been in amateur radio for a short period of time, but you were probably in your late 20s, early 30s, when you were first licensed, what did the club do right? What did they do to hook you? Because I think we hear sometimes that amateur radio clubs may not be as welcoming. What was the right thing they did that kept you going?

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah, I would say that they welcomed me and treated me as an equal right from the get-go. I think there can be a reputation in the amateur radio community of gate keeping and of treating newbies as maybe somewhat lesser, that like, "Oh, you don't know this. You don't know CW," that there's somehow a bit of an elitism there.

Corey, KD3CR:

Whereas the folks at the Los Alamos club just welcomed me with open arms and were very receptive to questions. They didn't look down on me for asking questions, rather the opposite thought. It was great that I had such an interest. They were very generous with their time and with their equipment, too.

Corey, KD3CR:

I mean when you're fairly young, starting out in your career, don't have a lot of money, and especially when you're looking at HF, it can be a bit daunting, thinking, "Gosh, I'm going to have to come up with all this money for a rig," and then trying to set up for an antenna and all of this. Where do you even start? If you get the "wrong" radio, then what do you do? It was very daunting.

Corey, KD3CR:

So a lot of them had extra gear that they were like, "Here, if you're interested in it. It's just sitting in my shed or in my closet," or whatever, "anyhow." So they were really, from a technology standpoint and from a knowledge standpoint, encouraging me and helping me get deeper into the hobby.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

What was the first thing they did to bring you towards the license?

Corey, KD3CR:

I think I hadn't reached out to the club prior to wanting to take the license test. So I had looked up the fact that they were there and offering testing sessions. I bought the ARRL's Technician Class License book and was studying from there.

Corey, KD3CR:

So the first time I met them was when I showed up for the session. From there, when I took the test and passed it, they told me some information about the club. They said, "Hey, our next meeting is coming up," whichever day. "We'd love to have you come out and meet us and meet the rest of the club, rest of the group if you're interested to join." They certainly weren't pressuring or anything, but I was more than receptive to join the community and to learn more about the hobby through them.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Were there other people also taking the test at the same time?

Corey, KD3CR:

There were, yeah. We just said about a small town, but I think overrepresented in terms of technically leaning people because of the amount of people who were there for the lab. So we had, I want to say, probably eight or 10 people who were writing the test at the same time.

Corey, KD3CR:

I would say in terms of age, I definitely skewed to the younger end of it. We had maybe one or two others about my age and then a number of others who were a bit older. But I think the club membership at large was, generally speaking, probably like late 40s upwards from there to retirement age and beyond.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

How many of those people taking the test at the same time? How many of those also became active in the club?

Corey, KD3CR:

I would say probably about half at least came out to some meetings. Two or three of the others ended up joining the club. Not everybody remained a member. Whether they moved or maybe lost interest, I'm not entirely sure. But there weren't too many who stayed on.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

What was the first rig that you had as a technician? Did you have somebody there in the club also helping you to put that first rig together?

Corey, KD3CR:

The very first one was an HT, a handheld, that I bought. When I got my license, part of the license package that I got in the mail was an advertisement for ... It was a TBX1 radio, which was a BaoFeng variant that, I guess, was taken and debugged and amended by a company in the US. So that was the first one that I had.

Corey, KD3CR:

But the first real radio that I got was a Yaesu-857D, which was one I was really looking at and admiring because it was an all-band, all-mode. I thought if I'm only going to be able to afford one radio, especially to start, this seemed like it would do it all.

Corey, KD3CR:

And so, I was asking the various club members what they thought about it and that I was leaning towards it. Bill Boedeker, NM5BB, one of the club officers at the time, said, "Hey, I've got one of those that I haven't even used or touched in probably 15 years. Would you like it?"

Corey, KD3CR:

So he gave it to me, along with a number of other pieces of equipment. I was floored by his generosity and really appreciative. So that was a real radio that I could use to explore HF.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Now did he or any of the other members help you get that on the air? You have this radio, this gift of this beautiful radio. Did you know what to do? Did you know how to prepare the coax or to hang the antenna, or did you have help?

Corey, KD3CR:

I think he and some of the other club members had explained some of the basics. When I brought it out to field day, our first summer field day, they helped get things going with that, as well as learning from the other rigs that others had brought, some of which were quite a bit more elaborate and more expensive. A couple people had the Elecraft, I think, K3s.

Corey, KD3CR:

The living situation at the time, my wife and I were in an apartment. So we didn't have access to be able to put up much in the way of antennas at home. So I had bought a Buddipole based on some recommendations from some of the others at the club. They had explained some of the aspects for that. Then I could take it to just a local park, set it up there and try to get on the air, or clamp the Buddipole to our balcony and get some limited operations from there.

Corey, KD3CR:

We had a two-meter net every week, as well as a 10-meter net. Even just a set up on the balcony, I was able to get into that. So I was happy being able to at least get started.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

How satisfying was the VHF/UHF portable as a first radio?

Corey, KD3CR:

I think my initial impression was that I wished it could do a little more. At the time I think I was not really understanding as much about the antenna side of the equation from most things in tech. You expect that when you buy it, it's set to go. Take it out of the box and you can use it. But I learned certainly later on just how important the antenna is.

Corey, KD3CR:

Based on, again, some recommendations from talking with the club, I built just a basic quarter wave ground plane antenna for two meters as the first home-built one that I built. Plugging that into the handheld, I was able to reach the repeaters a lot better and really started me down the path of how much you can do with ham radio.

Corey, KD3CR:

Then it's not you buy this and that's it. There's the versatility and the combinations. A lot of radios are almost like Legos. You can take the parts from this and add it to that. It's really like lifelong learning. You're never done.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Oh, that's certainly true. When did you get your license upgrade?

Corey, KD3CR:

So I upgraded from technician to general I think about six or eight months afterwards. So I went for that upgrade very quickly and was then able to start getting into HF. It was probably another six or eight months after that that I tried for the first time for my amateur extra class, the top grade of license in the US, and was not successful on that one.

Corey, KD3CR:

I was trying to cram to be able to write the test at the local hamfest down in Albuquerque. And so, I was on a bit of a time crunch and didn't do as well as I had hoped. I didn't miss it by that much. I think five questions or so out of 50.

Corey, KD3CR:

But it was not long after that that we moved. So with a new job and a new city and adjusting to all of that, the upgrade took a bit of a backseat for a little while. And so, it wasn't until about two years ago, actually just before the pandemic, I think it was March 2020, that I got my amateur extra class, finally.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

What was your first call sign?

Corey, KD3CR:

The first call sign I had was KG5PXQ, which was a bit of a long one and, as I later learned, particularly long for CW. I thought, "Oh, I'll keep that one for now." Then when I get my extra class, I thought that's when I'll go for the vanity call and went for ... KD3CR was my top choice and got it. My wife is Kelly Durkin, or Kelly Durkin Ruth now. So it's combination of our two initials, Kelly Durkin 3 Corey Ruth. So I like the idea of that.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Does Kelly Durkin Ruth, does she have a license yet?

Corey, KD3CR:

She doesn't, no. I've suggested it or hinted at it a few times, and she's not wanting to get into that. She said she's happy that I have this hobby that I enjoy and is supportive of that, and has gifted me some nice amateur radio-related equipment and accessories over the years, but she is not really interested in getting licensed herself.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Did you have some expectations as a person who is now using, or has been using, a smartphone for a number of years, and cellphones before that, that when you pull a radio out of the box, that it would work like that?

Corey, KD3CR:

I think there was a bit of that, yeah. There's a lot in the test for getting your license as to maybe some of the technology behind things, how radio waves work and that type of thing. But there's not really a lot of attention paid, or maybe not enough, to the practical side of things, like how to build antennas, the importance of antennas, not just how they work but why you need certain types of antennas and what situations they're good for, the difference between vertical and horizontal polarization and why you might want one type of antenna for certain types of operations.

Corey, KD3CR:

So being somewhat blind to those aspects of it when I first became licensed, I thought, "Okay, great. I've got this radio. It already comes with an antenna. That's all I'll need. What else could I possibly want?" But, yeah, you quickly learn the limitations and compromises of a rubber duck antenna.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Is that disappointing, or did you anticipate that there was more to learn?

Corey, KD3CR:

I certainly had an idea that there would be a lot to learn about the hobby and that I was just dipping my toe in initially. I wouldn't say I was disappointed. I was glad that I was having my eyes opened, that I could figure out that, "Oh, it wasn't working well because of this," like even something as simple as programming the offset for repeater and the CTCSS codes and that type of thing.

Corey, KD3CR:

Early on, there were some people on the repeater that my light on the radio would light up saying that it was receiving some kind of signal, but I couldn't hear them and couldn't understand why until I realized that it was just an issue with the CTCSS codes that, again, you don't necessarily learn from the tests.

Corey, KD3CR:

It may not be something that people would think to tell you when you're teaching a new ham because they've been doing for so long. But then when you talk about the issue, they're like, "Oh yeah, yeah, that's happening because of this."

Corey, KD3CR:

Then you're building that base of knowledge that when you are teaching or talking to a newer ham down the line ... As you mentioned, I haven't been licensed that long, but still certainly longer than some people who have just gotten their license. So to be able to pass along that knowledge that I've learned and the bit of experience I've had has been rewarding. I've been glad to be able to return the favor that was given to me.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

What's the current rig?

Corey, KD3CR:

My main one is an Icom IC-7300.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Wow.

Corey, KD3CR:

It's been really, really good so far. I've loved the panadapter being able to see the signals. As you're tuning around, especially for contests, it saves a lot of time. The filtering on it has been much better than on the 857. So I'm able to hear more people, pull more people out of the noise, so to speak.

Corey, KD3CR:

I do still use the 857, but have that as my portable rig. So I'll take it out with a battery and a solar panel, and usually like an end-fed half-wave, you'd tossed that up into a tree and be able to work from the park or for field day.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

We will return to our guest in just a moment. A new way to show your support of the QSO Today Podcast is to buy me a coffee. I consume gallons of coffee to create this weekly podcast. Invite me for coffee by pushing the yellow button, buy me a coffee, on the QSO Today show notes page. Now back to our QSO Today.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

You gave a presentation in the last QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo, HF in an HOA: The BBTD Attic Antenna. So could you just explain a little bit what that BBTD attic antenna is and what the situation is that you have where you're living now?

Corey, KD3CR:

Sure, yeah. So I've been in a townhome here since we moved to Maryland. Of course, before that, in Los Alamos, at an apartment. So I've been curious about stealth antennas for a long time. It seemed like, generally, the go-to people say, or half joke, is that what's the best antenna for a situation like that. People say move and put up a full-size dipole or something, which, of course, is tremendously helpful. It gets back to the gatekeeping we had talked about.

Corey, KD3CR:

But I was just thinking there has to be something that's going to work for situations like this. Certainly I'm not the only person who's in an HOA or a similar compromised environment. The Buddipole that I bought for portable operations uses the loading coils. You have to manually tap them. The bandwidth for it is quite low and the efficiency is quite low, which seems to be a recurring theme of these compromised antennas.

Corey, KD3CR:

But I just kept researching, kept looking, kept seeing what's out there. Finally, I stumbled across this one and it's got a few different configurations. The, I guess, maybe initial one that the creator came up with for this was having it set up as almost like a bowtie shape, outdoors. There's the attic configuration.

Corey, KD3CR:

I thought, "Hey, this seems like it could work." The costs were relatively low. All the parts combined, it was maybe a little bit over \$100. I thought, worst case scenario, if it doesn't work, I'm really not out that much. So I gave it a shot and I was able to put up about 125 feet of wire without doing any zigzagging or anything up in the attic.

Corey, KD3CR:

It is a traveling wave antenna, so it's terminated at one end. The resistor at the terminated end absorbs some of the reflected power. So it's actually extremely broadband, although not tremendously efficient.

Corey, KD3CR:

But for that reason, you don't need a tuner, which lowers your costs and barrier to entry even more. Since I installed that, since I built it, in less than a year, I've made something like 750 or 800 contacts. It has gotten me out to other continents. I mean I've made QSOs to Europe, to South America, I think one to Africa so far. And not just FT8 either. I mean I've made some CW and SSB contacts out there.

Corey, KD3CR:

So I'm thrilled given my situation, thrilled that it's worked as well as it has. And so, I was, again, really happy to pass along that knowledge of it, because nobody that I talked to at my current club or on the amateur radio group on Reddit or anywhere else seemed to have heard of this antenna. I thought if it works for me, surely there are a lot of other folks in a similar situation that it might work for them. So why not get the word out?

Eric, 4Z1UG:

I think there's a side of us, especially those of us that have been in ham radio for a long time, that would look at an antenna design like that and say, "Well, that's a radiating dummy load." On the one hand, when I saw your presentation, that's what I thought when I saw the design. On the other hand, you're getting out and you're on the air. Sometimes that's really all it takes is just to get that wire in the air, even if it's in your attic, to be able to have a satisfying amateur radio experience. It sounds to me that you're actually having that.

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah, yeah, very much so. I suspect that that's maybe one of the barriers that prevents new technicians from moving up, that they think once they get to general, they can't put up an HF antenna anyway because they're in an apartment or a condo or a town home. So why bother? Or when they ask about what type of antenna they could use for that, that they get push back and think like, "Oh, it's a hopeless cause. Let's not worry about it."

Corey, KD3CR:

But for me, that entry into actually being able to operate HF any time really spurred, I would say, the next level of interest in the hobby for me. When you're just checking into a local VHF/UHF net every week, there's only so much you can do. I can see how some people might lose interest with that. But getting into HF, being able to actually talk to people around the world with 100 watts in a wire, getting into contesting. Even with, as you put it, the radiating dummy load, I've been active in contests for the first time in my shorthand radio career.

Corey, KD3CR:

And so, it's been really, really fun and really interesting for me. Now I start to think, well, if I can and put this up, could I put up some kind of a shortened wire beam in my attic? Could I put up a fan vertical along the side of the house that maybe the HOA inspectors wouldn't find or wouldn't care about?

Corey, KD3CR:

So it gets you in the door to this next level of the hobby. From there, I mean you're just craving the next big thing. You're looking for what else you can do. I think that door remains closed for a lot of people and it's not necessary because they can't do things.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Well, I think that's very well said. Let me ask you, what's your favorite operating mode?

Corey, KD3CR:

Gosh, I really enjoy sideband just for the ability to actually talk voice-to-voice with another ham. I don't think any of the other modes can quite replace that. But CW I've really enjoyed because it's another new thing. I've started learning on my own, trying to learn with an app on my phone and making marginal progress.

Corey, KD3CR:

So I signed up for a CW academy group actually based on one of the other presentations from the QSO Today hamfest. That's really helped spark a greater learning in that. So I've gotten to the point where I can have some conversations in CW and having the ability then to take part, even in a small way, in those CW contests, which would otherwise be closed off to me has been a lot of fun.

Corey, KD3CR:

I think there's a place for FT8. I like the ability to study propagation with that, to see where my signal is getting out and to make QSOs that I probably wouldn't have been able to otherwise. But I would say the thrill for that dissipates quicker because you're not really having a conversation in any meaningful way. You're just exchanging the bare minimum for the QSO. But there's a place for that as well.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Well, it seems to be one of the interesting things about your antenna situation. I mean it's going to be fixed for a while, and certainly you could do themes and variations on attic antennas. But I think as the sunspot cycle mode 25 starts to rise and propagation starts to improve, it'll be interesting to see, if you're using the digital modes, how the sunspot cycle improves on your base antenna. I think that might be a very interesting activity. You say you're doing some contests. Have you received any certificates for working contests or working DX?

Corey, KD3CR:

Very close to Worked All States. The last two that I need are Utah and Hawaii, which I'm hopeful to be able to get this year. I know the Hawaii State QSO party comes up, I think, late spring. So I'm hopeful to finish that one off. I'm making progress on DXCC. I think I'm up to about 40 different entities there, and the various DX contest and worldwide contests have certainly helped with that in getting new entities.

Corey, KD3CR:

The one that I've got a certificate for was for 13 Colonies Special Event contest, where you're trying to work the special event stations representing the 13 original US colonies. So I did get a certificate for that, which was a lot of fun.

Corey, KD3CR:

But, yeah, I'm looking forward to being able to earn more of those, like once I get the Worked All States mixed, being able to do it on different bands and different modes. So that's definitely a driver for me.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

What excites you the most about what's happening in amateur radio now?

Corey, KD3CR:

I think the biggest thing is just how much you can do with the hobby and how that continues to grow. Certainly a reputation in amateur radio that it's this maybe stodgy hobby and people think, oh, that it's really just the voice in CW. But the digital modes are really neat.

Corey, KD3CR:

A lot of people who aren't hams don't realize that you can do things with computers for that, things like satellite operation, moon mounts, APRS. I mean there are so many things that you can do that there's really at least something that would appeal to just about anyone. I think that's really neat.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

I noticed when you did your presentation last August at the QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo that you had a very special chair sitting behind you in the scene, and anybody that is a fan would have noticed it. Could you tell us what that chair is?

Corey, KD3CR:

Certainly. Yeah. So I got an inflatable Captain Kirk Star Trek chair from a company that no longer exist, unfortunately, but it was ThinkGeek, thinkgeek.com. They had made actually a kid's version of this, and there was so much response from all the adults who wanted one that would fit them that they created a full-sized adult version of it.

Corey, KD3CR:

It's, I mean, comfortable-ish when you're up against a wall. I don't sit in it that often, but having it as a conversation piece. It's certainly instantly recognizable.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

It was instantly recognizable in the background when you made your presentation. I'll have a link to Corey's presentation in the show notes page. It's online, so you can go and you can actually watch it on our Vimeo channel.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

This is always the last question at the QSO Today Podcast. But I'm thinking here that you're an amateur radio success story as a new ham. I think you're doing so many things right. You're exploring the hobby. You're trying new things. You're not letting your HOA put you in a funk. What advice would you give to people who are exploring the hobby for the first time? What can they do to be as successful as you are at this point?

Corey, KD3CR:

I would definitely recommend for folks to get involved with their local ham clubs. I don't know where I would be today in the hobby without having done that myself. Further to that, to don't be discouraged if the first one doesn't work out.

Corey, KD3CR:

When I was in Los Alamos, I left out with a great club there. But when I first moved to Maryland, the first club that I went out to here, I didn't have at all the same experience. It was quite unwelcoming. It was a bit bigger club. But when I was there, I felt like I was just in the background. I was trying to introduce myself and get acquainted with people like I did at the other club.

Corey, KD3CR:

It was telling for me that even four, five months in people that I had met and talked to at each earlier meeting would ask me the same questions and have the same responses, because they had forgotten that they had ever spoken with me at all.

Corey, KD3CR:

So that was definitely discouraging. I can see how if that was someone's first experience with the club, they might just say, "Clubs aren't for me," and leave it.

Corey, KD3CR:

But I went to club in the next county over, the Queen Anne's Amateur Radio Club at the eastern shore of Maryland, and thought if those other guys weren't for me, maybe these ones are. I had a lot more of the welcoming experience like I did in Los Alamos and became a club officer there as well, as secretary, and then, last year actually, elected president of the club. So there's something to be said for clubs.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Good for you.

Corey, KD3CR:

Yeah, thank you. Just the amount of knowledge that those people can give you, and that it's a sharing and learning experience for everyone, as we talked about before that it's lifelong learning. So there have been things that I've been able to learn from other areas that I've been able to then take and teach the members of the club there. So it's been a lot of learning both ways. Yeah, I would really recommend that folks give that a try.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

What is Queen Anne Amateur Radio Club doing that the other club didn't do in terms of are they more aggressive about newcomers coming in the door?

Corey, KD3CR:

I wouldn't say they're necessarily aggressive. They're a smaller club again and just more welcoming, that you're opened into their club as soon as you walk in the door. I think at the first club I had tried in Maryland, I felt like I was just a number, an additional checkbox on their membership roster, maybe.

Corey, KD3CR:

Whereas the others, Queen Anne's and Los Alamos and the contesting club that I joined as an additional one, the PVRC Potomac Valley Radio Club, it feels more like a family almost. I mean you've got people who are genuinely interested in you and genuinely interested in your success as a ham.

Corey, KD3CR:

That really cannot be understated. I think the single biggest thing that clubs can do is to be welcoming regardless of a person's situation, their age, living situation, gender, any of that. Welcome them.

Corey, KD3CR:

Don't think that there are stupid questions or anything like that, because being unwelcoming is going to turn people away and I think make people less likely to pursue the hobby. They're not going to tell their friends about the hobby either. If they have others who maybe are thinking about getting into ham radio, they're going to be like, "No, don't bother. Hams are a bunch of jerks," or something. So welcomeness breeds welcomeness. We need all the people in the hobby that we could get.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

Corey, I want to thank you so much for joining me on the QSO Today Podcast. This was really fun and interesting for me. I hope that the listeners who are involved in clubs or are leading clubs, or are trying to figure out how to get new hams like you into ham radio, that they'll listen very closely to this interview and learn a lot. I certainly have. Thank you so much.

Corey, KD3CR:

Thank you, Eric. I really appreciate it.

Eric, 4Z1UG:

That concludes this episode of QSO Today. I hope that you enjoyed this QSO with Corey. Please be sure to check out the show notes that include links and information about the topics that we discussed. Go to www.qsotoday.com and put in KD3CR in the search box at the top of the page. Be sure to click on the Expo menu item at the top of the page and in the show notes pages for the upcoming QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo.

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Eric, 4Z1UG:

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