

A “Stedi” Road to Relicensing

The unusual story of a younger mentor and his older, Oscar-winning mentee unfolds over the course of 25 years.

Chris Brady, N3CB

On a late weekday afternoon in the summer of 1989, a call was forwarded to my office at Philadelphia’s KYW-TV, where I’m the News Operations Supervisor, supervising our complement of television news photographers and all the associated equipment they use on the street.

On the other end of the call was an unfamiliar voice. However, when the caller identified himself, I recognized his name — as would most people in my business. Garrett Brown, the famed inventor of the Steadicam, had called me!

For those of you who might not be familiar with Mr. Brown, Garrett is both an award-winning cinematographer and an inventor with 50 patents to his credit.

The Steadicam, a merge of Garrett’s two passions — engineering and cinematography — is an industry-changing, Academy Award-winning device that dampens the vibrations and movement of a film or television camera. Some of Garrett’s most famous work includes boxing underdog Rocky Balboa’s iconic, triumphant run to the top of the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in *Rocky*; the revolutionary background footage used in the speeder-bike chase through the woods in *Return of the Jedi*; and the chilling footage of a crazed Jack Nicholson chasing his child co-star through the snow-covered hedge maze at the end of *The Shining*. Add about 100 more movies, and you’ve just scratched the surface of his professional work.

Back to that phone call! Garrett was looking for input on one of his new projects — a lightweight camera support system, including lights, for TV news photographers. I was invited to his home, where he interviewed me about how I used the television camera to cover news.

Our conversation lasted for a few hours. I was intrigued by his engineering skills and,



Garrett Brown (at left) with Sylvester Stallone on the set of *Rocky*. Garrett and his groundbreaking invention, the Steadicam, gave us the iconic movie moment of Rocky running up the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum. [Photo courtesy of Garrett Brown]

of course, our common bond as cameramen.

Having recently passed my Novice and Technician exams, I mentioned ham radio to Garrett and was surprised to learn that he had been a licensed ham. Unfortunately, a missed opportunity to renew his ticket — blamed on an address change — sent his call, W3AFF, into limbo.

Brown’s Ham Radio Beginnings

Brown had first been exposed to Amateur Radio as a Cub Scout when Jay Gaul, W3IM (SK), brought his “location” setup to a scout meeting. Gaul and Gardiner Pearson (formerly N3BF) became Garrett’s Elmers.

Garrett recalls constructing an early Heathkit CW transmitter — a complicated kit that needed Pearson’s more skillful prowess with a soldering iron to bring

it to life. A World War I “side-swiper” key rounded out his station. Garrett quickly improved his CW speed, reaching 40 WPM after just a few months. At the age of 12, he participated in military traffic nets!

Another Chance Meeting

After Garrett and I parted ways that day in 1989, we lost contact with one another for quite some time. Our paths crossed for a moment in 2004. This time it was while we were both attending the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) Convention in Las Vegas.

Garrett, standing at nearly 6’ 7”, was an easy and familiar figure to spot from across the convention floor. He was holding court at the booth of Tiffen, the photographic equipment company that represents and distributes his line of Steadicam products. Surrounded by a ring of cinematographers,



A professional meeting between Chris Brady, N3CB (at left), and Garrett Brown, W3AFF, led to a friendship that has lasted 25 years — and got Garrett relicensed. [Lisa Brady, KA3VIL, photo]



On July 24, 2014 — after 25 years of encouragement from his friendly “nemesis,” Chris Brady — Garrett took and passed his license exam. He applied for, and received, his boyhood call, W3AFF. [Chris Brady, N3CB, photo]

Garrett was demonstrating his camera support system, when I slowly approached the assembled group.

I approached Garrett’s right side from slightly behind him, and whispered, “Did you get that license yet?”

Garrett slowly turned and looked at me. I asked if he remembered who I was. After all, it had been nearly 15 years since we had been in each other’s company.

Garrett not only remembered me, he afforded me enough time to get reacquainted. He recalled our discussion about ham radio

and his expired license and admitted that though he was full of great intentions, there just wasn’t enough time in his busy schedule, which included a lot of travel, to study and retest. He seemed interested in getting back on the air, but wasn’t confident about exactly how he was going to do it.

Perseverance Pays Off

Over the next 7 years, Garrett and I did a pretty good job of exchanging occasional e-mails, text messages, and phone calls. We even crossed paths at subsequent NAB Conventions. After years of prodding, coaxing, and maybe even a little harassment (I think the term Garrett used to describe me was “nemesis”), I felt the time had come for my perseverance to pay off. In the summer of 2011, just prior to Field Day, our e-mail exchange about PSK31 — a mode that didn’t even exist the last time Garrett was on the air — seemed to pique his interest.

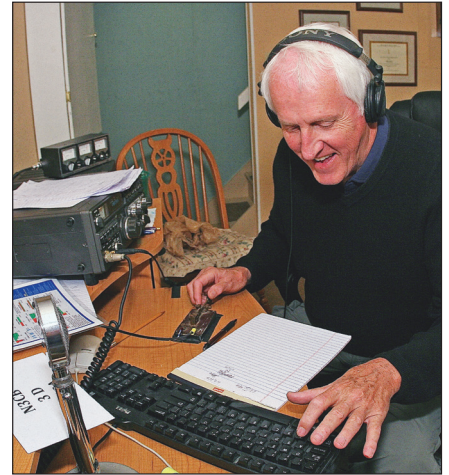
Garrett agreed to make a cameo appearance at my club’s Field Day operation. I set up my PSK station and waited. About an hour into Field Day, Garrett arrived. He watched in amazement as the computer decoded calls. After about half an hour, Garrett reached into a satchel slung over his shoulder and pulled out the side-swiper from his childhood station. He asked if he might be able to get on the air, so we made our way over to the CW station, which was operating on 40 meters.

The guys operating the CW station had a pretty good run going, but eventually there was a break in the action. After some adjustments to the wires attached to it, Garrett started knocking out some CW on his old swiper key, after a long hiatus.

I think Field Day really lit a fuse for Garrett, because after the event, messages from him became more frequent, with a greater sense of interest and excitement. Our many conversations changed from me telling Garrett about all the fun he was missing with Amateur Radio, to Garrett asking questions that implied, “What do I need to do to get back on the air?”

At Last, a License

In the early summer of 2014, an incredible opportunity was about to become available — grandfathering of expired licenses! I sent Garrett copies of articles about this process, believing that, after 25 years of keeping after him, this might be the way to



Garrett takes to the bands on Field Day 2015 with the World War I side-swiper key that he’s had since he was a boy. [Chris Brady, N3CB, photo]

get him licensed again.

I started doing the necessary homework to support Garrett’s application. A quick phone call to my good friend Dick Moll, W3RM, immediately produced a 1987 ARRL call book. On those yellowed, closely printed pages, was the information I needed to prove that Garrett’s previously held license existed. Bingo!

So, on July 24, 2014, after a day or two of cramming for the Technician test, Garrett agreed to meet me at the Phil-Mont Mobile Radio Club’s VE session in Ambler, Pennsylvania. After about half an hour — and 25 years since our initial conversation about ham radio and an expired license — Garrett had passed the exam. A new ham — actually, a *reinvented* ham — was ready to get on the air!

Garrett’s new call sign was insignificant; his goal was to regain his former ham radio identity. Fortunately, his old call had remained unassigned. Garrett quickly surrendered his FCC-assigned call for the call he had held as a boy: W3AFF.

Garrett purchased an Elecraft KX-1 QRP rig. After some initial frustration, he brought it to my house, where we connected his new radio to a 40-meter dipole, and he made his first CW contact!

Back On the Air Again

Fast-forward to Field Day 2015. I had invited four other buddies for a 3D run from my basement in suburban Philadelphia, and it couldn’t have been more fun. Garrett,

along with his side-swiper from days long ago, put many miles on an old Kenwood of mine. He operated 40-meter CW for about 7 hours, only breaking briefly for lunch. He was like a machine!

It's amazing to think that our chance meeting some 25 years ago, and a benign mention of Amateur Radio, started us on a path to getting Garrett relicensed. This shows that persistence does pay off, and that the ham radio fraternity reaches deep into the soul. Garrett, a ham that had been temporarily derailed, is now back on track,

so listen for W3AFF on the bands!

Chris Brady, N3CB, was first licensed in 1989 as KA3VHL. He previously held N3IEI as well. Chris is proud of the fact that his entire family — wife Lisa, KA3VIL; daughters Caitlin, W3CJB, and Heather, W3HEB — is licensed!

Chris's 35-year career in broadcast television began at WNEP-TV in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and for ESPN reporters covering Philadelphia sports teams. For the past 33 years, he has worked at KYW-TV in Philadelphia, which has been owned and operated by CBS since 1995.

Chris has won five regional Emmy Awards

and was inducted into the NATAS (National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences) Silver Circle Society in 2014. Chris was responsible for all the technical aspects of KYW-TV's remote broadcast coverage for Pope Francis's visit to Philadelphia in fall 2015, and the summer 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.

He credits Amateur Radio with providing the strong technical background his career requires. The formula for $\frac{1}{4}$ -wave antennas comes in very handy on production remotes! Chris can be reached at n3cb@arrrl.net.

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