

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Each month one of our members is randomly selected and asked to share their ham radio biography with all of us. Questions or comments should go to Paul, KD2MX.

**DISCLAIMER:** Any views expressed in this section are those of the submitting member and may or may not be those of the NAQCC or its officers.

## MIKE SMITH ADOYM #9247

My first experience with ham radio was with Boy Scouts where I obtained the Radio merit badge and a Novice License [WN0MBN]. That license expired in 1976. Then life happened.

Fortunately, I am still married to my first wife, my college sweetheart. We have two children, a son and daughter. My first adult employment was in secondary education. That lasted for six years. Then I got an opportunity to change vocations and work for the Missouri Department of Conservation; first as a resource assistant, then as a fisheries biologist and finally as a mid-level administrator. I retired in July 2015. Family activi-

ties have included fishing, day hiking and primitive camping. In addition, I have enjoyed many years working with our church youth using outdoor skills as the hook. My wife and I also enjoy first person interpretation of fort or campaign military life, War of 1812 era. So, to be honest with all of the things already in place, ham radio was not on my bucket list of retiree activities.

### INTEREST REKINDLED

However, that interest was renewed when my wife and I encountered wolf watchers in Yellowstone using handheld radios to tip off one another where the wolves were to be seen. They were not using amateur bands, but when I looked into it, I

saw I could use HTs designed for amateur use to listen in.

One thing led to another. I was able to prep for the Technician and General licenses using on-line tools before successfully testing. Soon thereafter, I purchased an Extra license study book during a cross country trip to Utah for some day hiking and camping. The study book was my late night reading. Upon returning home, I took that exam. So as of June 2017, I was book smart, but had no practical experience other than teen age memories nor any equipment. This was not a particularly comfortable place to be.



## RE-LEARNING CODE

I am fortunate to live in a relatively large community which has a very active ham radio club, Mid-MO Amateur Radio Club (MMARC). My initial interest was CW operation which was nurtured by the club's Saturday morning CW class led by two fine Elmers (K9ZTV and W4RK). At first I focused on relearning code by breaking old habits ... the worst being the mental look-up table. (Some of you may remember TMO, EISH, etc.) That approach may have been fine for a 5-wpm Novice ticket, but it was holding me back.

Farnsworth and minimum speed of 20-wpm characters were new concepts to a 1970s Novice, but very helpful. The class tailored practice exercises based on those in attendance. Sometimes it was paragraphs, other times calls, random characters or contest exchanges. You would never know, except it would always be challenging. Even more important, each class always came with insights and lessons on our amateur radio heritage, history and customs. Still, once a week is not enough time to improve, so for months I spent about an hour every day with some kind of code practice. My favorite online tools are still CW Morse Runner for contest tune-up, RufzXP for call signs, and of late, Morse Camp to work on head copy.

## BUILDING RAGCHEW SKILLS

Am I where I want to be? Of course not. There are times when I really need a pep talk along with some serious counseling. I am comfortable at 15-wpm for a rag chew, but more opportunity awaits with greater proficiency. One of my more recent revelations is that there are still some characters I really do not know. At greater speeds in long strings I get tripped up. I am working on identifying those characters and of course really learning them. I also try to get on the air almost every day. On the air is where it all comes together; the customs, the abbreviations, and simply the experience with all the variations found in even a basic

QSO. My Saturday morning CW cohorts are also very good at finding CW events for us to play. Most are QRP. All are fun to plan what equipment to use, our approach to the bands and other strategies. Though my likelihood of winning is low, at least we can compete amongst ourselves and learn how to improve over the previous attempts. Such makes it fun!

## THE RIGS

I have a modest home station including a Yaesu FT 450 D, a homebrew OCF dipole antenna at 30 feet in my small and heavily wooded backyard and a MFJ Deluxe Versa Tuner II for tuning 30 and 80 meters. One of the few surviving relics of my Novice days is a Radio Shack J-38 style key, though it has once again been retired by a Navy Flame Proof key. I also have a borrowed Vibroplex Code Warrior paddle I use with a K3NG keyer that I built from scratch.

My go-to portable rig is a LNR Mountain Topper 5B. I feed it to a Spiderbeam OCF antenna mounted to a 40-foot fiberglass pool for contesting. (Height is might!) I also have a five-band linked dipole combined with a 20-foot fiberglass pole for casual portable operation while traveling. I can use either a Palm Mini Paddle or a miniature 3-D printed straight key. I like "resonate" antennas for portable use but do have a 4 State QRP tuner and recently acquired a LDG Z11 Autotuner. I have cut a random length antenna, but have yet to deploy it.

## NAQCC ACTIVITIES

I am usually able to participate in the NAQCC monthly sprints, though I occasionally run into scheduling conflicts with other important activities. I do appreciate the evenings alternating between Tuesday and Wednesday evening which helps eliminate the schedule conflict at least half of the time. It is fun to watch the Autologger populate. It is also great that recognition is by division and

class. That provides many more opportunities to be near the top of the leader board. I have been able to work many of the NAQCC Anniversary Special Event stations during the last couple of years. Each time it was from a portable station since I was away from home during part of the events. Trying to catch stations from the different call areas is a great study in propagation, though sometimes it is just dumb luck to get them into the log.

### QRP HUNTING SUMMITS ON THE AIR

My current favorite daily radio activity is chasing Summits on the Air (SOTA) activators. SOTA is particularly near and dear as I used chasing as the means to overcome my key fright. I still get fumble fingered every once in a while, but I no longer experience hesitation with a pounding heart prior to engaging in a chase.

My goal is to work SOTA activators on equal footing. Most are also QRP operators. Ninety-nine plus percent of my SOTA contacts are QRP. I like the idea of spinning the dial, but have to admit spotting networks help with success on both sides of the QSO, though I do feel like the smallest robin in the nest during pile-ups. Still, I am able to complete the exchange with at least 70% of the stations I hear. I am also coming up on Super Shack Sloth in the SOTA program. I have a few QRO QSOs to make up for, but should complete 10,000 points, all QRP, in the very near future. I have tried one SOTA activation so far. It was not successful, but I certainly learned a lot from the attempt. I hope to try again during some future travel that includes periodic camping and day hiking trips. I also chase Parks on the Air (POTA) activators, a similar activity though there are usually fewer CW

operators on a given day to work.

### A RELAXED APPROACH TO CONTESTING

I dabble in contesting, but generally am not very competitive. I am happy to provide others points for their totals. I must confess I am most comfortable operating search and pounce. That probably makes me a control freak. I can listen to the exchanges multiple times to get it right. I know I need to make the jump to running, but that is yet to be a standard approach for me. I have also found it a bit more challenging to live in the middle of the country. It may be a mistaken notion, but I think the folks on the coasts have more band choices or at least can communicate with each other while I often find the bands a bit on the long side. Still, it is fun to plan strategy and operate with specific geographies in mind. There are states in the U.S. I know I can easily reach while others that generate a celebration when conditions come together.

### MELTING SOLDER

MMARC has a monthly Tech/Builders night. We have built a number of commercial kits, a lot of them QRP oriented, as well as designed our own



projects as part of a meeting's program. I have attempted projects I would never considered as a result of this group. There is considerable experience to tap in our group. They are also great enablers as someone is always ahead of the others, so of course we need to catch up.

Our current project is the 5 Watter Organic VCXO Transceiver which we are building in stages. Part of the goal of this project is to learn the electronics that make it work so there is some classroom support in addition to the smoke. The current pandemic has not slowed us down. We have been meeting virtually every week and Zoom's screen sharing feature gives everyone a front row seat during the discussion. One additional club activity for me includes serving as the Mid MO Amateur Radio Club's VE Liaison.

### OUT IN THE FIELD

I do enjoy operating in QRP contests, both from home and also remote set-ups. Remote set-ups for QRP contests are probably the most satisfying, at least when all goes well. I also enjoy participating in state QSO parties, generally with modest goals, but sometimes the bands cooperate. I am hoping to complete Worked All States (CW) both in Logbook of the World (LOTW) and also for Straight Key Century Club in the near future. I currently have 58 DX entities confirmed by LOTW, so there is a ways to go to the first one hundred.

My first off-grid QRP QSO was at a picnic table at my campsite in Badlands National Park . I had hoped to catch some of the 4S QRP folks during their second Sunday evening sprint. It was over 100 degrees in the shade, but I wanted to check out equipment before taking it to a summit hike the next day. I could hear three member stations

calling during the evening and was quite pleased to finally work WB0CFF. SD to MN certainly is not a miles per watt record, but you have to start somewhere! It's not always about the destination, but the journey. A long and successful journey I hope.

### PATIENCE AND ATTITUDE

My primary goal had been rather constant: continue to increase my CW comprehension speed. I think attitude has a lot to do with that. As one of my Elmers stated, "You got to get on the air with an attitude (positive), along with some swagger (confidence). Furthermore, mistakes are OK, but you need to recognize when you make one and always correct it." As to the later, I can make some dandies, EEEEEEEEE.

Fortunately, most hams are for the most part patient and understanding, recognizing we are all in the same boat. Again, my main focus has been CW operation, but as you know there are many ways to enjoy that activity. There are entire categories of ham radio operation that perhaps someday will be in my wheel house (shack). In the meantime, it has already been quite interesting, challenging and fun to participate in this hobby whether it is building a radio kit or related test equipment, logging QSOs or exchanging paper or electronic QSL cards, or simply being on the air. There will always be something fun to do whether it be familiar or something new. That reminds me, I have a 4 State QRP Bayou Jumper that needs some exercise. One last thought, I have many radio friends I may never meet in person, but exchanges occur often enough that it is like catching up with a longtime friend. Maybe you will be next? Hope to catch you on the air!

**72 –Mike, AD0YM**

