

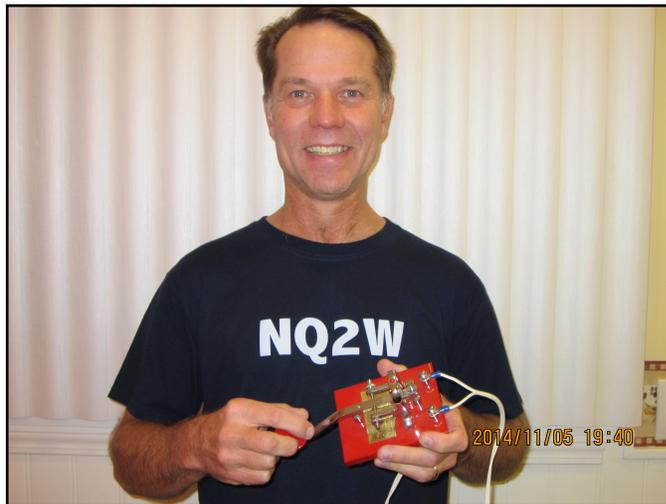
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



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.

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Looking back, it seems like I have always had an interest in radio. As a youngster, I listened to my AM transistor radio, the family Magnavox hi-fi, or a Panasonic portable multi-band SW receiver. We had a set of channel 14 walkie talkies with a Morse code button - printed letters with dots and dashes so we could send audio code - but mostly, we just used them to talk.

In high school, I acquired a Midland 23-channel CB and bottom-loaded whip antenna. There was no power supply, so I hooked it up to our garden tractor's battery until I could afford to buy a power supply. Eventually, I bought a base antenna and spent hours talking on the CB.

New York's North Country winters took their toll on that base antenna and I had to take it down. After college, a brilliant idea came to me, build an antenna for that CB. That would be something to tinker with. A trip to the local library ended with me bringing home an edition of the ARRL Antenna Handbook. The world of amateur radio was there before my eyes!

Now, I always knew about ham radio, my uncle in California was a ham, and there was a ham radio club at college plus the local club set up a station at the Lewis County Fair. But it never dawned on me that I could actually be a ham, or that I wanted to be a ham.

There was a paragraph in the handbook that mentioned contacting local chambers of commerce to inquire about amateur radio classes. I did and there was. I was about two or three weeks behind. I had to learn Morse code, and quick. Where were those walkie talkies?

I remember the instructor, Don, WA2OEP(SK) shaking his head when I exclaimed walking into the class

"I learned all the letters of the alphabet. An "A" is dot-dash, a "B" is dash-dot-dot-dot..." I wish I knew then what I know now.

It seemed that it wasn't too difficult to unlearn that recognition system and I passed the Novice test with flying colors. The FCC sent me my call, KA2VAJ, and I was on my way. I soon upgraded to General, and then, Advanced class. Guess what? I tried for my Amateur Extra but failed the code exam. Actually, unlearning the visual letter recognition system wasn't that easy after all. More code practice and I did it - 20 wpm passed and I had my Extra. The FCC sent me NQ2W.

During this period, from the mid-80's to mid to late 90's, I was active on HF SSB and CW and 2-meter FM. Usually, I was running 100 watts on HF and whatever the 2-meter rig would deliver. I experimented with all kinds of antennas, from verticals to wires to beams on all kinds of supports. For HF, I eventually settled on a free-standing 60-foot tower with a 3-element tri-bander on top, a 40-meter quad loop, and an 80-meter dipole. My property had a great window to Africa and Europe, it was pretty much ham heaven.

I dabbled in chasing DX (never really chasing the paper) and contesting. Somewhere along the line, I picked up an HW-8 and I was hooked. I made sure the low power setting of my IC-745 was at four watts and I never looked back. Well, maybe a little, but the majority of my time was on HF CW QRP. A move from the "house on the hill" to one in town and other commitments necessitated a hiatus to HF activities.

A new job brought us to Albany in early 2004. For some reason (maybe a QST article on an attic antenna - I'm an ARRL Life Member so I have been reading QST for a long time), I made a New Year's resolution for 2006 - to make a CW QRP QSO. I practiced CW. A 40-meter dipole went up in the attic of our single-story ranch. I practiced CW. I fired up the IC-745 at four watts on March 15, 2006 and answered a CQ from P40D. A few minutes later, I worked EI9JF. I was hooked again. I practiced more CW.

A lot has happened since 2006. I practiced lots of CW. Radios and accessories have been built, bought, used, sold, kept, modified, tossed, and stored. Right now I'm firing up a Jupiter or a K1 with either a Bencher paddle, a homebrewed light-weight (mostly plastic) paddle, or the Vibroplex Know Code straight key that I won in an NAQCC drawing. I hope to someday soon connect the computer to the radio - someday.

The 40-meter dipole in the attic was replaced with a homebrewed ground mounted, near-bottom loaded vertical for 80-meters, a homebrewed 40-meter inverted vee up at 40 feet, and a 2-element mini-beam at 25 feet. The mini-beam is supported by a homebrewed 8-foot four-legged tower. It took a while to get this antenna garden together. And I continued to practice CW. It's nothing like the "house on the hill" but I'm pretty happy given the urban setting. The weakest link is the vertical - cramped for space and not enough room for a sufficient radial field.

Most of my radio time is spent listening. I enjoy chasing DX and getting QSLs via LoTW. I'm still not fond of chasing paper QSLs but I respond to those that I get. At the time of this writing, I have 153 DXCC confirmed on LoTW - all CW, all QRP. 10, 15, 20, and 40 meters are all over 100 confirmed. 80 only has 34, my weak link. I haven't applied for the DXCC certificate, yet. I'm not sure why. I have the WAS certificate for CW - all QRP - and I am working, although not seriously, for 5-band WAS, CW QRP. I'm pretty close on all bands with 15-meters lagging behind the other bands. The close by states are tough. I also worked and confirmed all the W1AW portable state operations - all CW, all QRP - during the centennial celebration. That was fun.

Even during contests and sprints, which I enjoy immensely, I'm listening. I'm calling when I think I can be heard but I'm mostly listening. I try to participate in as many contests and sprints as I can - all CW, all QRP. Sometimes I do okay. Sometimes, not so much, but it's always a fun challenge. I'm amazed when

some stations hear me. They must have fantastic receivers and receive antennas. In any case, I'm glad they can.

I'm pretty sure that the bulk of my ham radio contacts, especially the most recent ones, are from contest/sprint QSOs. I've won some plaques and certificates for my efforts but they're not the goal of my participation. Don't get me wrong, they're nice and I'm proud when I see them in the mail, but I enjoy contesting because of the QSOs and the folks behind those QSOs - camaraderie. Making lots of QSOs from all over the world in a relatively short period of time is thrilling.

If I may opine, CW learners and users should practice and listen. The listening is the best practice. You don't need tapes or mp3 files, just listen on the air. Listen to a DX station running QSOs and copy the calls of those answered. Listen to a ragchewer. Listen to W1AW. I was first licensed in '84 and I'm still practicing and listening - learning and using. The visual recognition system I first learned has been a hurdle that I'm slowly, but surely, getting over. Don't give up, move at your own pace, and have fun.

When I'm not hamming, I'm doing something else. (Did Yogi Berra say that?) My XYL and I have been married for 21 years. I have two married step-children and three very young grandchildren. The something else often includes them, maybe one or more of the 2nd harmonics will get licensed, or other family. I enjoy puttering around the house doing minor fixer-uppers or major remodels; trying to play the guitar, fishing, and the great outdoors. Oh yeah, there's also work - the kind that you do for money - so I can do all the other stuff. Luckily, I have had and continue to have a wonderful career with no regrets.

I am looking forward to continuing my CW practice. We never know what the future can bring but if it includes family and friends, non-hams and hams, then it will be fine. I hope to listen to and be heard in many contests and sprints for years to come. I'm grateful for organizations like the ARRL, NAQCC, and FPqrp and hope I can someday reimburse them for their contributions to my enjoyment of this wonderful hobby. If we've met on the air, thank you for the QSO. If not, I hope we do soon. I don't always play radio, but when I do, it's CW QRP. Thank you for the privilege of being an NAQCCer.

