

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.

JODY NELIS, K3JZD, #7936



I started out as K5SCC in Fort Smith Arkansas, in 1958. Learning to wigwag Morse Code for a Boy Scout Merit Badge, and some articles about ham radio that were in Boys Life magazine, led me into this hobby. I became K3JZD when I moved back to the Pittsburgh PA area in 1960.

I'm now 72, and I have been retired for two years. During my working years, I did electrical installation engineering and startup support for steel mills, tested computerized central traffic control systems for railroad and rail based public transit systems, and tested and prepared new computerized home health care respiratory medical equipment for their FDA certifications.

In addition to ham radio, I enjoy riding my Harley on the lesser traveled back roads, target shooting and trap shooting, programming computers, and homebrewing various items. Lately I have been building some of the small kits that are available from various QRP clubs and vendors. I am an active member of the Skyview Radio Society, currently serving as the newsletter editor.

Not counting the Heathkit Tener that I had in my car, I was strictly a CW operator during my first 10 years. Not QRP, but it was low power with a rock-bound transmitter that had 50 watts of input power (today that would probably be called 30 watts of output power). Then, I finally went and bought a Swan 350 SSB transceiver and a microphone. CW skills sure have a way of deteriorating once you connect a microphone to a radio.

I went through the usual period of scaled back ham activity once I got married and started a family. Priorities change. But, I kept that Swan 350 transceiver connected and on the air throughout those 'busy' years. At some point I upgraded to a used Kenwood TS-520S. However it ended up being a pattern of blowing the dust off of the transceiver once or twice a year and operating for a few hours

during some SSB DX contest to make a lot of quick QSOs to be sure that everything still worked. My CW skills deteriorated to the point where I rarely tried using any CW.

After retiring, I became interested in the small inexpensive Software Defined Radios (SDRs). I decided that using CW with these low powered SDRs would provide me with a great way to rehabilitate my CW skills while I was learning to use SDRs. I ended up with a Softrock RXTX SDR built for use on 40-30-20 meters and another one built for use on 15-17-10 meters. They are QRPp radios, each producing about 750mw of output. Since that QRPp power was not always getting it done, I added a MX-P50M amplifier to take it up to five watts output whenever necessary. I modified each of these Softrock RXTX units so that they do real-time CW keying by adding a home-brewed Arduino-based K3NG Keyer interface. My K3NG Keyer interface circuit supports using iambic paddles or a straight key. It handles all of the T-R switching for the HDSDR software, the RXTX unit, and also the amplifier whenever it is being used. I can use either type of key with it. But, I have not yet successfully mastered using iambic paddles, and do not use them on the air. I have always used a surplus J-38 straight key, but I am now becoming attached to a SKCC straight key that I purchased last year.

In addition to the regular usage of my Softrock RXTX SDRs, I have also built and periodically use an extremely simple 250mw Chinese 40-meter Pixie transceiver (yes, I put it into an Altoids tin). I have worked down into Atlanta Georgia from here (Pittsburgh PA) using that simple 250mw transceiver and my 40m dipole. I think that is pretty darn good for an \$8.00 transceiver with full QSK (and I overpaid - they are \$5.00 someplace else on eBay). I love the reaction I get whenever I report what my 'rig' is. I plan on trying some of the other economical, small and simple QRP transceiver kits that are available. I would like to find one that has a receiver that has a little more selectivity - the Pixie receiver is just a bit too wide.

I have recently taken an interest in doing battery-powered QRP CW operation out in the parks. There, I use a Yaesu FT-817 and a SOTABeams 40-20m link dipole. I did one NPOTA activation from the North Country National Scenic Trail, but the rest of the time it has just been from some local park. However, I'm finding that it is a bit challenging to get someone interested in your QRP operation with the band conditions being very so-so. I may try some SOTA Activations. They seem attractive due to the fact that the SOTA Chasers that are looking for you will work real hard to hear your QRP signal so that they can get their SOTA Chaser points. Plus, climbing up to those summits is probably darn good exercise. I have not had much luck with working QRP DX. But I attribute that to not focusing on looking for DX and the poor band conditions that we now have. I did have a couple of 'almost' European contacts on 20m while running QRP CW from out in a local park. But while they heard me, and we started into a QSO, they quickly lost me in the QSB and their noise level.

With my renewed interest in operating CW, I soon discovered the SKCC and the FISTS organizations. I joined each of them. Then, John-K3WWP and Mike-KC2EGL came to the Skyview Radio Society in August 2015 and gave a presentation on the Joys of QRP and provided information about the NAQCC, I joined the NAQCC. So, I'm still a 'new guy'.

I have found that, even though I'm still rusty with my CW skills, I am able to participate in the NAQCC Sprint events. I am usually only using 40-meters as I do not have any simple wire antennas up for any other bands. I particularly like doing the NAQCC Milliwatt Sprints. I enjoy seeing how far I can get with my barefoot RXTX SDR unit with its 750 mw output. In my case, I have a rather complex switching system in place that allows me to quickly connect any of my radios to any antenna. So, that 750mw signal ends up going through two SWR/Watt meters, four coax switches, a low pass filter, and about 100 feet of 40 year old coax to get to my 40m dipole. And, amazingly enough, there is still some RF left to radiate once it gets to the antenna. And I do make some contacts. For the rest of the NAQCC Sprints I use the amplifier to crank my power up to just under 5 watts.

While it is not my focus, I have collected a little bit of NAQCC and FISTS wallpaper, and some SKCC 'bragging rights' from running QRP or QRPP power during the various Sprints. My CW copy is still not quite good enough for doing any serious rag chewing, but I will get there. It is just taking a little longer to do now than it took to do back in 1958.

So, that's the 'condensed version' of my story. I'll be listening for you during the NAQCC events.

