

# 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.

## KEVIN MCKENNA, KE3V, #0855



### My QRP CW Journey

My neighborhood friends and I got our start in radio communications with CB radio while in middle school in the 1970's. Becoming disenchanted with CB due to its limitations, we started investigating ham radio. One of my friends in the neighborhood had a cousin who was a ham. This cousin helped him to get his novice license and set up his first station. Within a year or so, my dad and I had our licenses. My first callsign, assigned to me in December 1977, was WB3KKT, the callsign I had for about 25 years.

That winter we neighbor kids studied as a group and went to the FCC field office in Buffalo, NY during Easter break to take our General class exams. We came back with Advanced class licenses. We had all passed the 20wpm code test but each failed the Extra exam by 2 or 3 questions, which we believe was due to studying from the same outdated material. The FCC didn't give credit for passing the 20 wpm code test back then, but earning the Advanced class made the trip worthwhile.

My first rig was a TS-520S, and I made many contacts with it. In the summer of '78 I picked up an HW-8 at a hamfest. The receiver worked ok, but it wouldn't transmit. I paired it up with a Heathkit DX-60 CW/AM transmitter that my dad got from a friend at work. This setup wasn't really QRP, but I had a really good time making contacts with it, even though I had only a handful of crystals for the transmitter, and had to throw a manual knife switch for TX-RX.

An older local ham offered to help me diagnose the issue with the HW-8. After we still couldn't get it to transmit, he nearly gave me a little MFJ 40-meter QRP transmitter and matching VFO. Now I was cooking on QRP. I was pleasantly surprised that it wasn't any harder to make CW contacts using the QRP transmitter than it was using the DX-60 @ 50 watts. I think that's when I was hooked on QRP.

I upgraded to a Drake 2c receiver, and later picked up an Argonaut 509, which has the hottest receiver I think I've ever heard.

In about 1988 I built an HW-9 with the WARC bands add-on. There was a period in the 90's and early 00's when ham radio was placed on the back burner, and the 520, the Drake and DX-60 moved on.

I traded the HW-8 with my childhood friend, Dave, WB3CEG for a 2m HT in the mid-80's. He stored it in a closet for 3+ decades and gave it back to me about a year ago. I spent a couple of nights trying to find the issue with the transmitter again. I touched up some really ugly solder joints, replaced a transistor, and after performing the alignment procedures, got it to transmit! It'll only transmit reliably on 80m, but that was enough to allow me to make my first contacts with it -40 years after I bought it. Success!

In the early 2000's, a friend told me about Elecraft, and I built a K2 transceiver in 2004. That was a fun project, and it's a great little rig. A few years after that, I read about the Appalachian Trail rigs by Steve Weber. In 2010 or so, I built the ATS3-B in an Altoids tin and have been amazed at what that little rig, a piece of wire and a 9v battery pack can do. An interesting QSO I remember with this rig was with Dennis, K1YPP who was using the same rig while actually hiking the Appalachian Trail. He noted it in his book, **Three Hundred Zeros: Lessons of the Heart on the Appalachian Trail**. By that time, Dennis had carried that little rig on his back for more than 2,000 miles!

I've upgraded my "main" HF station several times, with a TS-590SG in the shack today, along with the QRP rigs I've built or bought along the way. The K2 probably gets the most air time, followed by the '590 and ATS3-B. I like to set up outside on the back porch or at a park during the warmer months for some weekend QRP CW contacts. I tend to use the HW-9 in the colder months, for things like SKN and NAQCC activities. I think what keeps me interested in QRP CW is that making contacts is really not that much more challenging than QRO CW, and that experimenting and building equipment and antennas is simpler and less costly at QRP scale. Then there's the portability of QRP operating. I can setup my fishing pole vertical in just a few minutes, connect a small battery and start operating. Tear down is also quick.

If there is a downside to low power operation, it's when an operator is having a hard time copying my signal. I'll usually thank him and tell him we can try again later, rather than making him continue to struggle. This can happen at QRO levels also, but it can seem rude knowing I'm withholding power while someone is struggling to hear me. It doesn't happen often, but I try to keep the other operator's QSO experience in mind.

If you're reading this, I suspect you're already familiar with QRP CW operating, but if you're not, give it a try. It may become your favorite mode, too.

72/73,

Kevin, KE3V

