

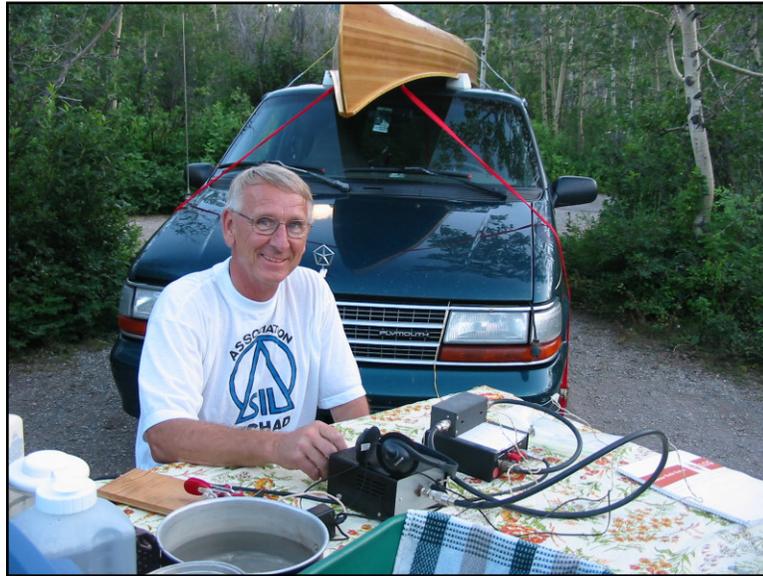
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



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.

DON HEKMAN, VE3DQN, #5846



This is my favorite ham radio photo. Okay, I admit, the photo is of me 15-20 years ago (I'm 71 now). Still, it shows what for me is an ideal ham radio—and camping and canoeing—outing. This one was in Waterton National Park of Alberta, Canada.

In many ways my ham radio profile will sound like that of many (most?) of the readers of the NAQCC newsletter, but with some “twists.” First licensed as a young teen in 1960 in California (WV6NOS), I ate, slept, dreamed, and drooled ham radio activities during those high school years. Activities slowed down a lot during college, marriage, post-grad, and young family years. But moving to Canada (VE2DUN) and living in the coveted CQ Zone 2 from the mid-1970's through the 80's brought on the adrenaline rush of modest DX chasing, this time with a Drake TR-4 and a Mosely TA-33jr at 50ft. Finally, with only occasional on-air activity, I achieved the coveted DXCC. Almost all of it SSB, as my straight key CW just didn't cut it with the DX crowd. Then with a move or two or three, and changes in work responsibilities, many years passed of little ham activity until I retired five years ago. Enter QRP.

First though a word about the “twists.” I wonder sometimes what got me into ham radio. As a youngster I didn't know anyone who was a ham. I was fascinated with electricity, and on our farm blew more than a few fuses with my wiring experiments. I think I found an ARRL publication in the bookmobile that came by once a week, and my best guess is that's what introduced me to ham radio. My most treasured Christmas gift was the crystal radio kit I received at age 11. The next year it was a one-tube radio kit. I never had an Elmer, but my school and church buddies Harold and Dennis were also interested in ham radio, so together we pored over the License Manual and practiced code. We were Elmers for each other.

Ham radio is a great hobby for stimulating the dreams. As I rode into the foothills of central California, I dreamt of operating portable or Field Day out there. But that would require a generator—and much more—and we three ham buddies didn't have the means or know-how for that. I dreamt of homebrew equipment, pored over schematics and how-to articles, and acquired a garage full of discarded electronic gear. But I can't recall ever making something that actually worked. I dreamt of pursuing an engineering career, but life presented its own twists and turns, and my chosen career involved both linguistics and theology. I dreamt of operating from coveted DX entities, but by the time my work gave me opportunity to actually live or be in those countries (Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Cape Verde, Guyana, San Andres Island, St Lucia, Thailand, others) my ham radio skills were too rusty to be easily refreshed.

Enter QRP and retirement in 2012. Frankly, I chose QRP for re-engaging in ham activity because I didn't want my slow CW and poor operating skills blasting out for all to hear. I figured QRP was the way to dip my toes in the water again. Getting on the air again was almost as scary as making that first contact as a novice. This time though I had several Elmers who were a huge help. My engineer brother Ed WB6YTE, is my key advisor, interpreter, fixer, and purchaser in all things technical. And my key encourager. The other Elmers are guys in the Ottawa Valley QRP group (OV-QRP). This informal group meets once a month in an Ottawa restaurant; among them “never is heard a discouraging word.” They've shared generously their experience with computer logging, antennas, equipment, components, special operating events, contesting, and Field Day. For those of you wanting to get back into ham radio, find or create a group like the OV-QRP. I want to nominate them all for QRP ham(s) of the year.

Bob VA3RKM introduced me to contesting and the NAQCC. I remember that in the early months of my ham radio return, Bob mentioned that a DX contest was on that weekend. I said that my CW was still so rusty that I didn't think I could ever keep up with the CW whiz-kids. He told me there's no better way to start than to try. Listen to a call long enough to finally catch it. The exchange is simple. Then jump in and try. So I tried it that weekend. It completely blew me away, that they could actually hear me—I got 30-some countries/entities that weekend—and that I could copy the call and exchange. I'm still a S&P guy, and limit myself to 4-6 hours in the bigger contests, but at least this began to fill my log. I also learned what big contest stations are like: 150 ft towers, stacked beams, and I picture guys huddled over their receivers with stethoscopes to pick out weak signals. Kudos to the big DXers for QSOs with little guys like me!

In the past five years I've enjoyed other ham radio activities that keep me motivated. Including NAQCC sprints and challenges and awards—thanks for the certificates!; Field Day with the OV-QRP group—my first FD in 55 years of hamming!; learning to send CW with a keyer and breaking the 15wpm plateau—thanks to the CWOP course and regular skeds with CW buddy Chuck AB1VL; and building a few (very) small projects that actually work—thanks to the suppliers of kits and to brother Ed WB6YTE for troubleshooting from across the continent.

Since I reactivated, I've used a 35-year-old Icom IC-730 and more recently a Yaesu FT-450D turned down to 5 watts. (Oh, yes, I admit to turning up the power for some DX contacts.) I select one of four antennas, a Cushcraft R-7 vertical, a 40M Delta loop, or 80M and 160M dipoles. For portable I've used an NW40 or an ATS-3a. As I write this I'm in limbo, just having moved to an antenna-challenged subdivision and about to buy an FT-817 for more versatile portable activity. I might rebuild my wire-antenna farm at our daughter and son-in-law's property five minutes away. We live in the small town of Kemptville, Ontario, 45 minutes south of Ottawa.

My forever-YL wife is a big encourager. I have other priorities in life (family, community, church) and other hobbies/interests (kayak, canoe, snowshoe, cycling, volunteering, reading), and try to keep ham radio from “owning” me. However, Jim my psychologist friend tells me that when I talk about ham radio, my eyes light up. I want to stay active as long as I can into my elder years, so that when it's my time to move into an assisted living residence, I can still bring with me a mag loop and a QRP rig. It activates the dreams, keeps me young at heart, and massages the brain cells.

