

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.

CHRIS DEL PLATO, KQ2RP, #5427



The Apollo moon landings were a big deal when I was a kid growing up in Whippany, NJ, and while everyone was amazed with the fact we could actually land on the moon, I think I was really intrigued with how they could communicate and send images back to earth. That may have planted the seed that got me interested in radio communication. I think my first exposure to DIY/homebrewing as a kid was with a Radio Shack Science Fair 160-in-1 Electronics kit, which had some radio projects, and some Radio Shack walkie-talkies. I remember some neighborhood kids and I were always playing with wire, trying to enhance the range of those walkie talkies from our bedrooms. We had no real antenna knowledge at the time.

At some point I became interested in listening to the local police/fire and aircraft. The landing pattern for nearby Morristown Airport went almost over my house. I received a 9-Band Midland Radio for Christmas one year, which received the AM/FM bands as well as Shortwave/HF and VHF. As I explored that radio beyond my initial police, fire and aircraft interest, I was amazed at the distant stations I could hear. I began doing some light SWL and sending out reception reports, occasionally receiving back some interesting letters, info and QSL cards. The famed Bell Laboratories was in my town, and I recall listening to some of the Bell engineers chat on their repeater. I began dabbling more and more with

electronics at the same time, subscribing to Popular Electronics, saving money to buy mail-order parts, and getting excited any time Mom was going to a store anywhere near Lafayette Electronics or Radio Shack.

Soon, the CB craze was in full swing during the mid-70's, and I got a 23-channel Midland CB. A couple of local hams noticed my vertical on the roof and suggested to my father that I might be interested in taking my interests to the next level. They gave me rides to the Morris Radio Club meetings in Morris Plains, NJ and I purchased the Radio Shack study guide "From 5 Watts to 1000 Watts" and ARRL's "Tune In The World With Ham Radio", which came with a Morse code study cassette with an intro by Jean Shepherd K2ORS. I got my Novice license in 1978 as WB2VEN while in high school. At about the same time, my parents got me a Heathkit HW-8 for Christmas. I couldn't build it fast enough. I still own it. The thrill/fear/sweating/pain of that first CW contact is still vivid as are the memories of hours spent surfing the Novice CW segments looking for more.

I have a shoebox full of QSL cards from contacts using the HW8, many times pushing only a watt forced into an old CB vertical on the roof or a very low G5RV. At some point I moved from straight key to a Heathkit 1410 electronic keyer/paddle (still have that as well) and made leaps in my speed using a combination of DXing, ragchewing, high speed CW net and W1AW code practice broadcasts. I quickly upgraded through General class while still in high school. I later added a non-working Swan 350 which I got back into shape. I recall having a voucher for passing the 20wpm code test, but I was shortly off to college and never went back to take the written test. At some point in the late 1980's, after college, I drifted away from the hobby as I began my professional career, got married and moved into an antenna-unfriendly townhouse. Everything went into boxes, save the police scanner and 2m rig, which I monitored occasionally.

In January of 2011, I was moving some boxes around in the basement of the house we had moved into in 2000. One of them had the Swan 350 in it. For kicks, I plugged it in to see if it still worked. It lit up and the tubes were glowing, so I stuck a long piece of wire in the antenna jack to see if I could hear anything. The combination of warming vintage tube electronics aroma and sound CW signals on 20 meters was all it took to rekindle my interest and end my '25 years of radio silence'. I have been trying to make up for lost time ever since. I am still amazed at how short a time it took me to refamiliarize myself with the code, re-attain and even surpass my lost 30wpm speed.

I operate almost exclusively QRP and probably 95% CW. My operating activities include light contesting, chasing DX, portable operation - SOTA, NPOTA, working FM satellites and QRPp beacon modes like WSPR and Portable QRP category in the VHF contests. I participate in many of the QRP clubs/events, including QRP Fox Hunts, NAQCC, Flying Pigs, Zombie Shuffle, QRPTTF, as well as SKCC. I enjoy homebrewing and kitbuilding and also really enjoy experimenting with and making antennas. I have made Moxons for several bands, single and multiband dipoles, a handheld portable dual yagi/diplexer for satellite ops, homebrew Buddistick, delta loops, phased verticals, several endfeds with ununs, 10 element UHF Yagi, Slim-Jims, etc. I have a QRP-centric blog <http://kq2rp.tumblr.com/> where I post items of interest.

I enjoy the NAQCC sprints, and the mW sprint in particular. Even if I'm busy, I usually try to sneak in the sprints and hand out a few points.

My current shack lineup consists of a KX3, HW-8, Yaesu FT-817ND, Swan 350, Kenwood TS930s, Ultimate 3S Beacon. I have a growing assortment of base and portable keys/paddles, and my N3ZN ZN-5 SE is the best I've ever laid hands on. I employ only simple wire antennas strung up in the trees behind the house. These include G0FAH multiband dipole, W3EDP end fed, 56' end fed with 9:1 unun, 20m phased verticals and wire 6m Moxon. Currently looking at designs to enhance my 40, 80 and 160m performance. I own some vintage keys and bugs including a Czech Army Key, Jardillier 1955M miniature straight key, and Heathkit 1410 Electronic Keyer.

Since my callsign change to KQ2RP in August 2011, I have worked 100+ countries on 10, 12, 15, 17, 20 and 30m and am just shy of 200 countries total using only QRP and simple wire antennas. I am currently trying get the few more needed to hit the 100 mark on 40m and the 200 total. I'm active in the VHF contests in the QRP Portable category, and have earned quite a few first place certificates for NNJ and have placed in the top ten nationally.

My most memorable QRP CW QSOs were with New Zealand on 2.5W on an indoor dipole, New Zealand while QRP Mobile, and South Cook Island while QRP portable.

My other passions include Fly Tying (published author and demonstrator), Fly Fishing, Fine Wines & Craft Beer, Geocaching, Hiking, Astronomy, listening to music and being an avid New Jersey Devils and NY Jets fan.

I manage a small RF/Microwave component and subassembly division of larger company. I live in northwestern NJ with my RN wife of nearly 30 years and have three daughters - the youngest entering her last year of college, middle daughter graduated two years ago and has begun her career as a Spanish translator and the eldest is a teacher and married.

