

## Beyond the Radio

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Recently, I had an experience that reminded me of a “hidden” benefit of ham radio that goes beyond the radio. I was in Florida with my wife and son (who’s also a ham) to celebrate my mom’s 100<sup>th</sup> (!) birthday. We didn’t have time to do any ham radio stuff but we were able to do some bird- and butterfly-watching at a couple of the state’s many nature preserves. My son, among other things, is an excellent wildlife photographer and has a lens on his camera that extends halfway to the moon. While walking through one of the preserves just before sunset, we encountered another photographer with his camera on a tripod and a lens that extended well beyond the moon!

We made our way over to find out what he was looking for and arrived in time to hear him saying something to another visitor about “the antennas on my truck.” The other gentleman said he had seen them and asked, “Are you an amateur radio operator?” “Yes,” the man with the big lens replied, “I’m (callsign).” “I’m a ham, too,” said the second person, and introduced himself as well. After giving them a couple of minutes to tell each other about their ham radio interests, Dan and I decided to join the QSO. “We couldn’t help overhearing you talking about amateur radio. We’re both hams, too,” and introduced ourselves. We all spent the next half hour (as it got progressively darker) talking about ham radio, nature photography, and why the man with the big lens had driven an hour and a half to this particular spot (he was looking for a bobcat mom and her cubs who had been sighted there recently). It turns out that when he isn’t looking for bobcats, he’s a professor at Florida International University and the faculty sponsor for the National Hurricane Center Amateur Radio Club, WX4HNC (The National Hurricane Center and its ham station are located on the FIU campus, and all clubs need a faculty sponsor). You never know who you’re going to meet through ham radio.

Oh, and at my mom’s birthday party, while most of the guests were her friends or neighbors, the list also included a ham friend of mine who I first met at age 15 in our high school radio club. We’ve stayed in touch ever since and make a point of getting together whenever I’m down there visiting my mom.

My main point here is that not all memorable ham radio contacts depend on the ionosphere or repeaters, or even radios. Ham radio brings together people of diverse backgrounds and interests, and even overlapping interests (such as birding and wildlife photography) who might not otherwise meet or get to know each other. And some of the friendships that originate in a ham club or on the air can last a lifetime. It is one of the lesser-appreciated benefits to our hobby. We talk a lot about ham radio’s value in emergency communications, in promoting and supporting STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) careers, and in providing a “sandbox” for experimenting in electronics and RF engineering. But we don’t talk as much about the person-to-person aspect of amateur radio and the bridges it creates that can take people from being strangers to immediate friends.

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To me, one of the most interesting parts about the QSO described above is that such contacts are not at all uncommon among hams. As we were leaving the nature preserve (in the dark), my son said to me, “What are the chances of two hams randomly encountering two other hams in a place that has no connection to ham radio?” My response was, “Excellent. It’s happened too many times to count.” Over the years, I have gotten involved with many, many, interesting people and activities simply by virtue of being a ham, even if there was no radio in sight! These contacts can help with off-air networking as well. I know lots of people (myself included) who have advanced their careers through the contacts they’ve made in ham radio, both on and off the air.

So yes, let’s promote amateur radio’s value for advancing technology, providing emergency communications, and promoting international goodwill through the contacts we make on the air, but let’s not forget the value of the contacts we make off the air as well. (And Happy Birthday again, Mom! I know you’re reading this!)

### In This Issue

This month’s CQ offers an eclectic mix of articles that showcase the breadth of our hobby while, at the same time, sticking close to our core interests of DX, contests, Morse code, and antennas. We start off with a DXpedition to Kiska Island in Alaska’s Aleutians, halfway across the Pacific Ocean and part of the dividing line between the Pacific and the Bering Sea. As you’ll read in the article, Kiska was one of two Aleutian islands occupied by Japan in World War II.

We’ve also got the results of the 2022 CQ World Wide RTTY DX Contest and a guide to ensuring you’ve got the right contest exchange copied; two antenna articles and a look at two antenna tuners; an introduction to Morse code “Instant Character Recognition” (ICR), and much more.

March heralds the arrival of equinoctial propagation on the HF bands, and VHF Editor N4DTF reminds us that it won’t be long before sporadic-E season begins on 6 meters ... and with a quickly rising sunspot cycle, there’s no telling what magic the Magic Band may have in store for us this year. Enjoy the approach of spring warmth, and don’t forget the CQWW WPX SSB Contest at the end of this month!

– 73, Rich, W2VU