

Talking Across Time

By Steve Schmitz, W0SJS

From my earliest recollections, I have always been a watcher, a listener, and a student of human nature. Together these have influenced me as a communicator. I have spent the greatest part of my life in two endeavors that both support and require these traits – first as a teacher and, secondly, as an amateur radio operator. Through these two things—one a vocation and the other an avocation—I am reminded of a quote from Bacon, “Books, (and here I include the communications of amateurs), like ships, pass through the sea of time and touch other minds in distant ages.”

For me, meeting another person ... through whatever means ... has always been a pleasure as well as a priority. Talking and listening to another’s thoughts and ideas, the events of the day, or things of interest to come has always been a way of glimpsing into another mind and getting another perspective on things. It is the only way to know or experience anything beyond one’s own senses, and it is a way of broadening one’s view of the world.

Since I have retired, one of the activities I have taken on is assisting with the Tenth District QSL Bureau. Each month or so I receive between 4,000 and 15,000 QSL cards to pre-sort into the 26 letter groups that are then distributed to other volunteers who manage those cards for a single letter group. Sorting is interesting, when the number of cards to sort is small, say 5,000 or less, I often take a little time as I sort and look at the cards. Many have interesting pictures that represent something about the individual sending the card or the place in which he lives. Cards come from all over the world. They represent greetings and confirmations of connections between individuals who may have never known each other before the contact. More often than not, they have little idea about the place, people, culture, and natural history of that far off place.

As I sort, I sometimes get a chuckle as I run across a card for one of my friends or marvel at the number of cards that certain call signs accumulate each month. Some of these calls belong to contest clubs and others are for individuals who work literally thousands of stations each month. Occasionally I run across a card that is for me, but more often than not the cards that catch my eye are those that are unusually beautiful, unique, or destined for someone I know.

Today, as I was involved in the QSL pre-sorting I found that the gifts it offers also include a sort of time-travel—talking across time, so to speak. This became evident as I sat in the dining room bathed in the light of an afternoon’s glow and methodically sorted through stacks and stacks of QSL cards. My eyes quickly scanned each card for the call sign of its intended recipient, spending only part of a second on each scan. Once in a while something on the card will catch my attention and I will pause to take a longer look. Often it’s an interesting graphic, or a kind personal message. Today it was the call sign of someone I have known, someone who is gone now.

DATE		
D	M	Y
05	06	1974

Mode 2-way	RST	QSL
W	559	PSE TNX
Vy 73 de Andrzej		

This call was one so familiar, but one that I had not heard or said for so many years. Its appearance here caused me to stop and, as I held the card, it evoked memories of a good friend. It was someone I had known and worked with many, many years ago. Someone who has been gone for several decades—a Silent Key as we say in amateur radio. As I held the card and remembered, the date jumped out at me. The QSO for which my friend was receiving a reply was dated only a year or so after I had first become licensed, and it made me smile.

That card’s discovery finished my sorting for the day as, in a way, it reached across time and shook me. The card was hand written which in itself gave away its age, as the greatest majority of cards today contain confirmation information on a computer-printed label. There are still some individuals who hand write that information but, for the most part, that is part of a by-gone era in amateur radio. The significance of a hand written card to me is encapsulated in the phrase that is occasionally passed around, which says in one form or another, “The end of every great QSO is a QSL.” To me this phrasing says that if you have made a connection with someone, and through that connection have become friends, then sending them your unique QSL card is the same as a friendly handshake. Not all QSL cards from today or from years past are of this more personal type. Many and most today are a confirmation of a successful contact between the two stations which is more often used to validate the stations’ ability to make connections over great distances and/or to be used for some award or as part of some contest.

My favorite QSLing practices are not of this sort. Instead they are of the sort that is exemplified by the phrase just mentioned. For me QSLing is a greeting, handshake, and a fair-well until we speak again endeavor. For the most part, the QSL cards I receive are of this type and each speaks to a personal conversation and connection with someone whom I have come to know and hold as a friend.



The card that halted my sorting today, and that weighs heavy on my mind now as I write these words, is addressed to my friend Gus, KØZZB from SP2GLS. It is of the sort that is only a confirmation of contact at a certain time on a certain date using a certain mode of communications. There is no personal imprinting on the card save the handwriting of the sender. But, to me, it speaks across time. The amateur for whom it was written and intended so many years ago, who is now long since gone, was my friend. Holding this card has allowed me to re-make a connection with my friend across those many years. He has been in my thoughts off and on ever since his passing because I often pass by the place where he lays. Each time I do this I look to see and think of him.

In a way, this card that I now will keep will keep my friend and those things that he held as important and of value alive for me. My friend was a wonderful teacher, a gentle individual who was always ready to help others. He was the type of person whom anyone would be proud to become. Finding this card addressed to him will not be forgotten but will become part of what I carry forward as a benchmark for what an individual might aspire to become.

Stephen Schmitz, WØSJS, is a retired public school science teacher of 36 years and has been a licensed ham for more than 30 years. Schmitz is OMIK's Secretary and an officer of the St. Louis and Suburban Radio Club. His contributions have appeared in both the ARRL on-line news and QST magazine.

(Outreach - Continued From Page 6)

want to learn more about wireless technology and bring that knowledge to their students.

The *Teachers Institute* is only the beginning of a participant's exploration with wireless technology. The goal of the *TI* program is to equip each teacher with necessary foundational knowledge, and through hands-on learning, generate the inspiration for teachers to continue to explore wireless technology and adapt relevant content into their classroom instruction.

Cost: *Teachers Institute* opportunities are virtually free for the participants. The grant to attend a *TI* covers transportation, hotel, a modest per-diem to cover meals, instructional resources for the electronics, microcontroller, and robotics segments of the course, and a resource library of relevant ARRL publications.

Graduate credits: Graduate credits are available through Fresno Pacific University for \$195 for 3 credits. These credits can be used to satisfy professional growth requirements to maintain teaching credentials. The class is self-contained and participants are expected to be able to complete all requirements during the class time. Graduate credit forms may then be requested at the end of the *Teachers Institute*.

To qualify, applicants must be an active teacher at an elementary, middle, high school or at a community college or university, or in a leadership or enrichment instruction role in an after-school program. An Amateur Radio license is NOT required. <http://www.arrl.org/teachers-institute-application>

Using these resources made available by the ARRL, OMIK members can advance our own educational programs, taking advantage of resources already in place. Contacts must be made and programs implemented on the local level. Even the Call Area regions are too broad in scope to develop a working relationship with educators and school districts.

This is a call to action . . . action to be taken today, so that OMIK and amateur radio will have a bright future. It is a call to service . . . service to our young people.

Thanks to the American Radio Relay League for the information on the programs mentioned here.