

It was with great sadness that the Colorado QRP Club (CQC) learned of Jane Wodening's passing in November, 2023. Jane was one of the 13 founding members of CQC at our first official meeting in Aurora, Colorado in 1994. Jane was CQC Member # 009 and was a very active Morse code and low power enthusiast who will be missed by the amateur radio community. She was also an active writer and published a number of books about rural/mountain living and the outdoors – often times mentioning amateur radio in her books and other writings.

The following is a self-published article Jane wrote sometime in the late 1990s:  
Edited by Roger J. Wendell – WBØJNR (CQC #007)



Talking With Drums: CW's \*Ragchewing\* Side,

By AAØZR\*

(There is a glossary at end of story!)

Even on my dear old 2W\* HW8\* which was my base rig for the first five years of my ham radio life, I ragchewed a lot. My QTH\* is a tiny cabin in the mountains with only a couple of solar panels to keep the radios going. I ragchewed from 5wpm\* to 13wpm - using the little straight key given to me by NØBLU\*, the one he had learned on at the age of twelve. "One QSO\* a day and you'll be up to 20wpm in a year," said Tom, N2CO, who sold me the HW8 in 1991.

My CW learning was done alone and vigorously. Springs would fly. So that when I emerged in the Colorado QRP\* Club as Charter Member Number 9, when my call was KBØHPH, they watched my keying and laughed. They called me "The Hammer." Bill, K5IMP, made a workable key out of an actual carpenter's hammer and they presented it to me in a grand ceremony. A picture was taken and I got into QST's\* Forum in September of 1996.

CW is so fun. Even at 5wpm with the sweat running down your brow from the effort, there's the achievement itself and the blatant magic of radio –

"Oh! His name is John! He lives in Dallas! And I 'm 559\*! I wonder what he looks like? What he does for a living?" As the speed increases, so also do the possibilities of finding out about each other.

One friend I made at this time was Wes, KEØNH. With Lou Gehrig's disease and other complications, he lived in a wheelchair and was often having medical emergencies. At one point for several months, he was unable to talk so Larry, NFØZ, put together a gadget which would allow Wes to do CW at 25wpm and the words would come up in a little window attached to the handle of his wheelchair. Thus, he could talk with the nurses, and with slow-code friends like me when we'd visit.

I'll never forget my first great ragchew at 13wpm when I could finally talk about the pain and horror of divorce. Using CW, one is obliged to be succinct. Blather has no place in CW. And so there's a clarity that can be found nowhere else. With that ragchew, I realized that real communication could happen in CW. And it was then that I determined to increase my speed.

And Larry, NFØZ, was my Elmer\* for CW speed. Sparkling humor and fascinating info would rattle rhythmically at 13wpm, slowly increasing to 15wpm. Then one day he said at 15wpm, "I'm going to 20 now." "Well, make it short," I said, in consider- able terror. And I listened with everything I had. And I copied\* it.

"What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?" he asked at 20wpm.

And I cannot describe to you the pride and joy with which I answered at 15wpm - "Double chocolate." It was like receiving a medal. After that, a world opened up that I could hardly believe. Calling CQ\* at 25wpm is asking to speak with people who have been through a lot of trouble to learn this form of communication -- for whatever reason.

Some of the best fists\* are WWII vets: "Where were you stationed?"

"Guam."

"What was Guam like?"

"Hot, and lots of bullets."

I'll never forget talking with a Lakota Indian named Chuck in California who seemed to be wheelchair-bound. "When the bands are bad, I do bead work," he said. I asked him about the great porcupine quill patterns in the Lakota tradition and he was pleased that I knew about that. He also had a friend who was setting up a solar house in Colorado. When the band changed and I lost him, I about cried.

There was a fascinating guy in Canada who, after a long and delightful CW QSO, informed me that he had a degenerating condition of the ears so that now he could hear and converse only in CW.

One of my most interesting single QSOs was with a man who owned a fishing boat in the North Pacific (the antenna up the backstays, of course). He loved the ocean and cared a lot about sea life so he had worked for a while for Green Peace, but it was too scary, he had to stop.

I've been a member of a weekly sked\* for a few years now. Every week a few of us get together on 80m\* and gab about whatever is going on in our lives. It was on that sked that I was given complicated instructions to a picnic at 20wpm and got there on time. Then I knew I could copy code.

That sked has taught me too some of the ethics and graces of CW that keep good CW ops\* from bumping into each other. Good manners take time to learn and good manners are a lot of what differentiates ham radio from the free-for-all of CB.

Some other friends I've made on CW I've met again and again and gotten to know them. It began, I think, when I was driving up the East Coast and found myself on a ferry going to Cape Hatteras. Naturally, true ham that I am, I spent the entire boat trip in my car, calling CQ and signing AAØZR/MM\* -- something I'd always dreamed of doing -- and I gabbed the whole two hours, with half a dozen or so different hams. And at least three of those hams kept track of me on the rest of my trip -- we still keep in touch.

When the ferry docked at Ocracoke and I got out of my car, a man in a car near me asked how fast I was going? He had World War I I written all over him. Big smiles.

"About 25," I said.

"A bit too fast for me," he said, "but I could tell you were just having a lot of fun."

"Oh gosh," I said, still aglow with all my new friends, "If I'd known you were listening, I'd have slowed down!"

The personality shines out through the fist. I learned the bug\* partly because of the wonderful musicality of AI8Z Mike's fist with the bug but I now stick with the keyer\* because I can go faster on the paddle\*. I feared I'd lose my fist, my identity, with it, but somehow a lot of personality still shows through. I can tell Tom W6XF of Reno NV from Jim WIXU of Payson, AZ within seconds, even if they're going 40 wpm talking to each other. (I can't send at 40 yet. Although my ear can often differentiate the dits, my hand can't). The cleanest fist I know I think is Mike of Tucson, N7FC. Next time I find him on 30m, I'll have to ask him if he plays the drums.

I've always thought of it as talking with the drums, ever since I first heard it, slow and smooth and a fantastic rhythm, on my HW8. CW seems to me to reach straight to the heart and straight back to prehistory when information was sent across the land via drums and beacon fires. But with ham radio, and good CW ops, the drumming flies around the world.

A lot of the joy of CW is musical.

Sometimes it feels like flying. Often, after a good QSO, I think of all the 'no-code Extras'\* I know, and wonder how many E-glets\* just sit on the edge of the nest and never spread their wings to learn how to fly!\*

Glossary for "Talking With Drums"

CW - stands for 'continuous wave,' a misnomer for Morse code.

Ragchewing - gabbing; casual conversation. Particularly in Morse code. Some ragchewers go on for hours.

AAØZR - This is my ham radio license moniker or 'call sign.' We are distinguished by our call signs and are supposed to 'ID' with them about every ten minutes.

Ø- zero. The line across shows it's not an '0' but a 'zero.'

2W - Two watts. Try to imagine that in a light bulb.

HW8 - a low-power four-band radio sold as a kit during the 1960s.

QTH - location. In this case, my home station location.

wpm - words per minute. Straight key - a Morse code key that you tap for each dit and dah.

NOBLU - Another ham 'call.' Naturally, everyone calls him 'Blue.'

QSO - conversation.

QRP - low power (i.e. under five watts output power). Such a rig can broadcast around the world but it takes finesse, a good antenna, a good location, and luck.

QST - (means 'attention all hams!') the big ham radio magazine.

559 - a measure of readability, signal strength, and tone. The best of all signal reports is '599,' so the central number '5' instead of '9' shows that my signal strength is weak, although the other two numbers show that tone and readability are just fine.

Elmer - tutor in ham radio.

Copied - received and understood.

Calling CQ - CQ means 'I'm seeking you'- 'you' being anyone who's listening. It's a general call for a QSO with anyone who can hear you.

Fists - each person doing Morse code sounds different from every other and that recognizable difference is called that op's fist.

Sked - a schedule, or a time and frequency chosen beforehand for two or more people to meet.

80m - The eighty-meter band. Somehow, when I realized that these radio waves were over eighty yards long and galumphed through the air at frequencies of 3.5 MHz, that is to say over 3,500,000 of 'em per second, then it seemed to me that I was in touch with the cosmos.

Ops - operators. Also, we use 'op' for 'name.' So that by way of introduction, one might say: 'DE (from) AAØZR (that's me, my call) OP JANE QTH MTNS WEST OF BOULDER CO K' (The 'k' means "It's your turn to talk now')

AAØZR/MM - my call plus /MM - the slash (/) says 'plus' and the MM says 'maritime mobile.' One M means 'mobile,' which is interesting enough, and something I've done only while driving through quiet country. But if you're /MM, you get a lot of attention.

The bug - another form of Morse code key. This one has balances and weights, so that although each 'dah' still has to be keyed (i.e. struck with the finger, like the keying on the piano), the 'dits' can be set to rattle at whatever your speed is. This gadget does speed up the wpm somewhat. And it has a recognizable slurry rhythm that only a musical ham can make really copyable.

Keyer & paddle - an electronic device set up so that one can run both the 'dits' and the 'dahs.' Thus, '73' '| | ... .. | |' (which means 'Best wishes') can be keyed in four moves instead of the six a bug would take or the ten on a straight key.

'No-code Extras' and 'E-glets' - The highest level of ham radio license is the 'Extra Class' license. To achieve this license, the ham has to pass a 20wpm code test as well as a big theory test. But there are so many interesting facets to ham radio that many hams, although they want the honor of the top-class license, don't want to use Morse code. So they get their 'Extra,' or 'E' licenses and then let the code go. Thus, the image of E-glets with all the potential of 'flight' but never taking the plunge.

\*Within a year of my writing this article, CW has become no longer important in ham radio; the 20wpm test is no longer given and people are getting Extra-Class licenses with only a 5wpm code test. CW has been legislated out! It remains to be seen if it will be allowed to keep its places on the bands. And I doubt that potentially serious code people will be given much scope to develop the skill.

Posted at; [https://www.coloradoqrclub.org/text/cqcmems/sk\\_jane\\_wodening\\_aa0zr.pdf](https://www.coloradoqrclub.org/text/cqcmems/sk_jane_wodening_aa0zr.pdf)

November, 2023: CQC webmaster Roger J. Wendell – WBØJNR (CQC #007)