

A Message from the Editor

Many years ago, I found myself sitting around the kitchen table of Art McCleer, KC8Z, with four or five other Michigan folks. In the middle of the table was a glass vase that was full of ticket stubs from Michigan football games. And when one of us pulled out a stub at random from the hundred or so inside, something amazing would ensue. Art could tell us about that particular game — who the quarterback was, and what the big plays were. Any game, any year. *Amazing!*

That memory came back to me as I read through our *NCJ* interview with veteran contester N6TJ that appears in this issue. Not only has N6TJ operated a lot of contests over his 60 years of activity, but as you'll read inside, he remembers the call signs used and how they turned out. From decades ago.

Memory is a funny thing, especially when it comes to contests. We operate inside a zone that is almost entirely mental, barely registering the weather outside or the time of day, save for the changes those phenomena produce on propagation. For me those images of the bands remain in my head when the contest is over. But not for long. After a day or so, most of the experience is gone, replaced by the list of contacts on a log page and the line score in a magazine or web page.

Do the math. Forty or so years of contesting would produce 400 contests even if you only did 10 events a year. Taking a look at my computer, I see that I operated in 46 contests last year! (Don't tell my wife). That's something like 1500 or even 2000 contests over a career that I hope isn't over yet. How can you really remember them all?

Yet some memories do break through. I remember the sound of the Collins 75S-3B receiver at my old college club station — the first decent receiver I ever used. I remember the JA openings in the early 1980s, when JA activity was at its peak. There was an ARRL SSB contest during that time in which, on two different occasions, I had given up on 10 meters at night, only to return there to run hundreds of more stations. And what can top the

excitement of hearing DX on 10 meters in the fall again, after enduring the years of the solar minimum? I remember hearing W4AN warming up 10 meters before the start of a WW CW and being stunned at the size of his JA pile. And speaking of piles, I think the biggest pile I have ever heard on a US station occurred when ABØI was calling CQ before the contest on 40 meters with his big 4 element Yagi. I swear that his European pileup was 5 kHz wide.

Sharing the Memories

These kinds of memories — the ones that go back decades instead of months — seem to bubble up in all of us as we age. And while the oft-noted dearth of young, up-and-coming contesters among our ranks who can take over as we all fade away is clearly a challenge for contesting, the flip side is that our older demographic yields a bountiful harvest of good stories and experiences from the past for us all to share. That's been the inspiration for the new feature "*NCJ* Interviews" introduced last year — to capture the flavor and essence of where contesting has been, as told by some of the giants of our sport.

But what about the other kinds of memories — the ones from the last contest? The things that made us smile or groan, the frustration or satisfaction with how our stations performed, or even the crazy antics of the folks we share the bands with seem to disappear from our consciousness after a day or two. Perhaps that's why many of us are so unproductive at our jobs on the day after a contest. Reliving and retelling tales from the contest can be almost as much fun as the contest itself, especially after a shower and a decent night's sleep.

Perhaps the most vivid example of this post-contest bliss is the immediate aftermath of the WRTC competitions, when the rooms and hallways fill up with competitors and referees who have just taken off the headphones and have fresh stories to share. It's always an amazing experience to gather some of the best contesters around the world in one location. It's even better when those contesters are ramping down from a shared competitive experience. The contest stories told on public websites like 3830scores.com are great, but there's nothing like those personal interactions.

Those encounters doubtless are one reason why multioperator categories in contests remain so durably popular. The winks and smiles that team members exchange during the ups and downs of a contest express the joy and satisfaction of what we do when we're sitting in front of our radios better than words can ever do.

Invite a Friend

Why do so many of us continue to barricade ourselves in our radio rooms on those contest weekends, doing battle as solo warriors, with only our watt meters and S meters to keep us company? I know why I do — because it's the only way I've ever done it. But that's a pretty lame excuse. The best marketing for contesting is, well, running a contest. Just as watching a professional golfer on TV nail a fairway shot and put the ball 6 inches from the cup makes you want to try the sport, it's got to be inspiring for many newbies to see the smooth communication experience of an experienced contester putting contact after contact in the log. Inspiring enough to make you want to do it yourself.

So here's a challenge for all of you. Whether you're operating one contest a year or (gulp!) 46, set a few aside to share the experience with a future contester or two. It might be nothing more than just splitting the headphone audio and sitting beside you in your radio shack, letting them see and hear propagation as you experience it, and to share with you the challenges of picking out call signs and defending a run frequency. Or perhaps it involves recruiting them to a team in the next North American QSO Party. Or even a multioperator event at your station, if you're so equipped.

Cover Picture Credit

It's easy to grab and use the material many of you kindly make available to us for *NCJ*. It's important that you get credit as well. My sincere apologies to Bob Wilson, N6TV, for failing to give him picture credit for the cover photo (the Spurious Emissions band, with guest front man former *NCJ* editor KØTO) in the last issue. I owe you one, Bob.