

CB DAZE

A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION ON THE HISTORY
OF CB RADIO

VOLUME ONE

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FORWARD

[From my beginning]



The AUTHOR, "*Back in the day*"

The hey-days of Citizens Band radio may seem to have come and gone for many, and I'm sure that to some folks, Citizens Band radio (C B) is nothing but 40 channels of garbled transmissions, many using objectionable language. To me however, CB has been a constant companion throughout the years. Yes, I'm also an Amateur Radio operator, but that came later a decade later, and this story is about Citizens Band Radio.

Communications of some sort had always fascinated me, starting with the coffee can/string phone system. While living in Groton Connecticut. I strung a long string the length of the backyard, over a fence, and then across the neighbors backyard, where another coffee can was attached and kept in the room of one of my friends. It may not have worked well, but it worked.

From there we progressed to cheap walkie-talkies (I think our parents were tired of us hollering "CAN YOU HEAR ME??" while they were trying to relax) and it was easy to talk from my room to his, but we didn't know who all of those other voices were that we heard, but couldn't hear us.

Naturally, signal tests were done around the neighborhood so that we could determine our coverage, and once again, we were baffled by these grownups who would say weird stuff like "*Break*", or "*10-4*". I was determined to get to the bottom of this, and, several years later – I did.

After moving to Hazardville (later named "Enfield") Connecticut my Dad bought an inexpensive shortwave radio kit. With his tutorage, I learned to solder and what many young adult can't seem to do – FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS. There were several people using CB that lived close by. That, along with a generous helping of front-end overload, I was able to hear these one way conversations. I had to get in on this.

I lived in the world of 23 channel CB's back when it was like the wild west. My CBing days continued to the beginning of the 40 channel transceiver, and in the mid-80's, thanks to the persuading of co-worker "CW DAVE", I got my Novice, followed by Technician+ HAM license. Citizen Band radio was still my favorite choice and I use it today, as well as my HAM rigs, along with my General Class Amateur Radio privileges. I know some folks say that when you look back at the past, you see things through rose colored glasses, but in retrospect, those early radio days were the best I've ever had.

In the later years I wrote articles for Trucker Magazines, had a column in the Copper Electronics catalog, as well as my own periodical – "WoodyWorlds CB GAZETTE". A pet project, and something I had wanted to do for many years. With the

help of computers, desktop publishing software, and a laser printer I was able to realize that dream.

Blending old nostalgic articles with current gear, and about the size of the older S9 and CB RADIO magazines, I managed to self-finance the bulk of the costs for about five years. Guest writers like Bob Millum, Charlie Zafonte, Glen Hendrix, David McCombs and others made this project very special.

Chapter 1: CB IN THE OLDEN DAYS

I was only 13 when I received my first radio, a used *Lafayette Comstat 23*, for Christmas. *The year was 1969.* Naturally, it wasn't an easy sell to talk Dad into letting me use a CB because of two big reasons: 1. it was illegal to operate without a license, and you had to be 18 or older to get one – and 2. I was in those ungrateful teenage years (*and you're lying if you don't know-what-I-mean*). Not that I was uncaring or ungrateful, but, following the procedures and by-laws set forth by many teenage generations before me, it was generally accepted that it was okay to feel that way, but by no means should the ungrateful teenager display happiness; and I must admit, *I was a master of the art.*

Needless to say I worked all year towards the goal of getting a CB, along with the help of a neighbor down the street, who went by the handle "The Joker". He was around my parents age, owned a respectable business, and of course – had ulterior motives himself (he wanted to upgrade his beginner station to the *"DAMN!! That's-impressive"* level and I, err, my dad, was his meal ticket). While my rotten teenage attitude had something to do with this (and along with that comes issues at school), the biggest hurdle was my Dad's desire not to get in trouble with the "Uncle Charlie" (the Federal Communications Commission, or, FCC) because his ungrateful teenage son had broken a rule or two or three.

When fall arrived I remember that some sort of bribing came into the picture:

"We'll think about this 'CB', but ONLY if you improve your grades"

Since I'd have none of that, I had the mindset that this was not going to happen and because it wasn't going to happen I was preparing myself for the worst.

Come Christmas day, when I found a used Lafayette Comstat 23 wrapped up and waiting for me, I said the most backward-thinking thing I have ever said: "*I DON'T WANT IT!*" and if that was as far as it went, you and I know that this would be a very short book. Luckily, common sense and the year-long wait for a radio quickly reversed those thoughts, and while I didn't show it right away (remember; I was in those sullen teenage years), *I was thrilled.*

I had to wait until my dad applied for, paid-the-fee, and received his license before I could transmit, so I spent the next three months listening to the radio and understanding who the locals were and how they talked. It was also the middle of a very cold, snowy, icy winter and this gave us time to wait for a decent day to mount my used Antenna Specialist "Super Magnum" ground-plane up about three stories from the ground.

Woody's Antenna 1970-1974



I TOLD YA IT WAS COLD AND ICY...

The Joker said *"Go ahead, you can talk before the license comes"*. But my dad was a stickler for Federal Regulations and had no desire to visit any Federal facilities for any length of time. This worked well though, because by listening, I learned what was or wasn't acceptable regarding the CB Language. And when the license came and I could talk, well, let's just say that I had a severe case of "Mike Fright".

Unlike the *"Smokey and the Bandit"* or *"Convoy"* movies, the lingo back then was mostly plain talk and the occasional 10-code. Yes, the truckers on channel 10 had their own brand of CB Slang, but it hadn't caught on with the majority of CBer's yet. Conversations were much like sideband conversations later on – common language with a minimal amount of slang. Of course, EVERYONE had a "Handle", a mysterious name that they had picked for themselves,

except for me; I couldn't decide so I let my Mom pick – “Lil Abner” (or ‘Abner for short) it was to be. Rules were very specific as to using your FCC assigned call letters, but everyone forgot about that part, unless “Uncle Charlie” was in town for a visit. When Uncle Charlie (FCC) came around it seemed as if we were all at a Baptist revival – the channels were silent. If you did talk on the radio, call letters were used, by God. In Enfield Connecticut, the 23 channel spectrum was sparsely populated. The largest group was on channel 2, followed by the “geezers” on channel 8, with the local calling channel being channel 11. Un-licensed 100mw walkie-talkies (remember Radio Shack’s ***“Space Patrol”***?) almost always came with channel 14 installed, so it was dubbed the “Kiddies Channel”.

Even though my mom claimed that I was *“born as an old man”*, I found it hard getting adults to take me seriously on the airwaves with my squeaky voice. Sure, they would put up with me somewhat, and they were polite, but I was a teenager. It wasn't until word got out that I had a CB (along with others) that teens across town either got one themselves, or used their parents' rig when they could. Several of my radio friends had CB parents (yep, dad AND mom's alike), while some were radio orphans like me. My closest friend at school went by the handle “Big Tom” and you might say that a rivalry began between us. When one of us got a new radio – so did the other. Power mike (ditto), Beam and finally Sideband? Ditto.

Many base station CB's were found in one of two places: the kitchen or the basement. CB radio was a family event for most folks, so it was very common to hear the sound of pans being washed in the background while someone talked.

My CB "Elmer" was the "Joker".

His main job was furnace repair and furnace oil delivery, so he had plenty of time to yak on the radio. The Comstat 23, which I now proudly owned, had come from the Joker after he upgraded to a Tram Titan. It was always pretty neat when we visited his house because he was one of those guys who didn't care if you were 13 or 33 – he talked to you as an equal. He was very equipment competitive with those around town as well, so if I wanted to see the latest and greatest, all I had to do was take a little walk to his house and see what he had sitting on the kitchen table. When he decided to replace his current antenna with a Moonraker 4, I got first dibs on his old one.

"THE BEAST"

The antenna he was replacing was nicknamed by those who drove by his house as, "The Beast" – a giant five element Hy-Gain Beam which the manufacturers themselves had named the "Long John" due to the very long length of its boom (the horizontal part of the antenna where all of the elements were attached). *It was twenty-four feet long!* The story of my purchasing and installing this monster is the stuff from many a Greek tragedy was written, and you'll find it later in this book. It was then, and, as I think of it today, *a really-really sad story.*