

A brief history in time for Ken Klotz W4IJK

To start at the beginning, I was born just after Christmas in 1947. That also marks the event of The Great North American Blizzard of 1947. (really, look it up on Wikipedia). Two points of significance for that has been my lifelong fascination with weather in that the stork needed to divert from my planned location of birth in the heart of Appalachia and followed the clockwise wind rotation around the low pressure area and ultimately dropped me North of the intended target and in the Ohio territory.

My Grandmother was a retired school teacher and spawned my interest in reading and learning new things. I took an immediate interest in Science as well as Mathematics. A short walk from my first home lived a relative named Herbert Huddle. Herb was a Ham radio operator, one of the first ever licensed in like 1920 plus or minus and held the call of W8JR. Herb had a good sized property and outside his home he had three very large wooden utility poles that held a full sized 160 meter dipole antenna. His radio room filled a whole bedroom and looked like a radio studio from the '20s era. The transmitter was a huge cabinet and the final transmitting tubes looked to be the size of water jugs like what you would see on top of a water cooler! They produced wonderful heat in the winter! I was hooked at a very young age for sure on Ham radio. I was initially licensed in September of 1963 as I entered my Junior year of High School. My original call was WN8IJK which became WA8IJK when I ungraded to Technician class, then General Class of license. When I finally retired (semi) to where I belong in "4" land I acquired the call of W4IJK and am now an "Extra Class" license.

The years have provided a very interesting work carer history. Trying to be brief, I began working in grade school at odd jobs. Up North it snowed a lot in winter and I cleaned up earning pocket money by shoveling snow in the neighborhood. I progressed up to buying and delivering two newspaper routes that while even being somewhat from a poor family I had more spending money than many of my friends and enough to buy a used Ham Radio station that consisted of a Hallicrafters S-40 receiver and a 90 watt Heathkit transmitter. With the enthusiast assistance from my dad and a long wire antenna out my second story bedroom window to a big 'ol Maple tree out back I was on the air at 15 years old. I've radiated the airwaves ever since!

While in High School and while still delivering newspapers I got a stint at being a remote DJ at a dance hall for a local radio station. That was a hoot! Unfortunately that was seasonal and went away for the summer and wasn't renewed the next Fall. By then I started College, dropped the newspaper business and worked part time first in a Pizza shop and later in gasoline service stations.

After two years at the local University I obtained an Associate degree in Engineering Technology, Electronics Major. That was in 1967 and back then there were not the simplest of four function calculators available to us. We used slide rules, log tables and manual mathematics! Upon graduation I was offered a job for a local company called Presto-lite who was a supplier of electric motors and generators for the military. My position was in instrumentation for performance / destruction testing of their products. After a good year at that I came to the attention of a head hunter recruiter who facilitated a move to a subsidiary of Reliance Electric Corp. and became a member of a robust R&D facility where I became part of some of the most interesting and rewarding projects utilizing cutting edge technology. My time there is a story book in itself and involved many things but just one tidbit from this time for example was that I worked on the instrumentation for developing and testing the jet engine built by Teledyne CAE for cruise missiles for the US Air Force. This was pretty cool for the 1960's! I guess the only thing that might have been better was if I worked for NASA. (I actually looked into that!)

My tenure in R&D came to an end unfortunately and I went next into local government public service, actually into "public safety". There I was engaged in Communications and Traffic Signal infrastructure. I had a FCC 1st class commercial radio license at the time as well as being a HAM so I jumped right in! This is a story book unto itself also, but while there, we developed one of the first ever computerized background timing control systems to interconnect traffic signalized intersections allowing the timed co-ordination of intersections to allow a smooth flow of traffic along major arterial roadways in the city. Cutting edge at the time! That along with the contrast of maintaining "police and Fire call boxes" that I think were installed about just after the turn of the century (1900!). It was certainly by now that I began to realize just how much my life was blessed and what a great journey I was on!

Another lesson in life, ~ things change ~ even when you don't want them too. Budget crisis time and I was just shy of enough seniority to keep my position. I guess one of the hard facts with the result of union labor. Us younger electronically minded and educated folks were let go leaving things to the older guys who basically were great at connecting "green" to ground and the like but who had to struggle to keep the new technology running and in fact things slipped back in time as a result. I feel for them and also am thankful and appreciate them as well. They taught me many things and allowed me to see things that I would not have otherwise. Hopefully they benefited by knowing me as well. I am forever grateful and I think they all did pretty well in the end and the city continued on, but like many big cities the decline was beginning.

Hey but that starts a new chapter! Through a Ham Radio friend I was connected to a manager who needed a micro wave radio Field Engineer and I was smack dab at the right place and the right time. This company was MCI telecommunications and man I

could write several story books about my time there! But just a simple overview at the beginning of this adventure the company employed mostly a 6 Gigahertz microwave radio network and was competing head to head with A T & T, lovingly known as the “Bell System”. At the start we used Collins analog transmission technology from the 1950's. I was blessed, or maybe cursed (it was a challenge for sure) to overbuild the very first SSB microwave long haul section ever. Collins is of course a leader in SSB technology and what this did was allow modulation of each sideband separately thus allowing the doubling of traffic per radio channel. It was almost a disaster, things worked well in the lab but we had issues in the field. Again I was blessed at the right time and the right place to spot a problem that was causing the system to fail and crash and in being able to pass that observation on to the brilliant engineers in Texas who came up with a fix literally over night and produced and shipped the necessary replacement modules to the field also virtually overnight. We unfortunately had a negative impact on a lot of customers for a couple of days but when things became stable we felt like we saved Apollo 13 or something. Any way that cutting edge technology led to another called Fiber Optics where once again I was blessed (or cursed) to be right at the beginning installation of some of the very first Fiber Optic buried cable network in the county! All in all this chapter lasted nearly two decades until corporate “money manipulators” (as I call them) merged us with other companies like Worldcom, sold off all the assets to look like profit increases, gave themselves stock option bonuses that they then sold to cash in on and bankrupted the company. That ended my career there and closed that chapter of life.

My next gig was back into public safety where I became a one man radio shop for a medium sized city. A city that was fortunate enough though to have their own Motorola 800 mhz. Trunking system with about 500 user radios to maintain. This was a wonderful time as well and very fulfilling but only lasted until the financial collapse of 2008 which led to the city losing revenue and downsizing operations and contracting many services out to the private sector.

With being over 60 years old by this time I have not been blessed with wonderful full time employment any longer, but the journey continues and I have found many seasonal, and part time endeavors and continue to have great experiences, particularly in fellowship with friends, many of who are Ham Radio Operators. I was asked to provide this story by a fellow HAM and I hope it was interesting and not too long. Now that I've said my piece, I would really like to hear others stories. We all have a story to tell and it would be interesting to say the least to hear yours!

Kindest Regards;

Ken Klotz W4IJK