

HAAM Radio Carries Fellowship and Warmth 'Over the AAirwaves'

The illustration on the mailing card shows a hand lightly but firmly holding a stemmed wine glass upside down. Under the heading HAAM, one learns that "HAAM radio, established in 1953, is an international fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous members who also hold amateur radio licenses. These HAAMs extend warmth and friendship to their members who have difficulty attending regular meetings. A.A. short-wave listeners also are invited to participate. . . . For information, contact ARS N8KDW, 4121 S. Fulton Place, Royal Oak, Michigan 48073, U.S.A.; or call 313-549-5275."

The call letters belong to Henry K., who maintains an up-to-date list of approximately 250 HAAMs around the U.S. and Canada that he is pleased to share. "Our people come and go," he says. "We have an open door policy and never know who will pop in."

In the interest of anonymity, the regular meetings are called "Friends of Bill W." Moreover, they are more like informal get-togethers than meetings. "Because the radio bands (transmission channels) are open to anyone," Henry explains, "we don't have a format as such. One HAAM will ask, 'How's your week been?'; another will answer, 'Just terrific' or 'Could have been better' or 'I went to a meeting last night and the subject was gratitude . . . it made me realize how good life is.' Then someone else might share news about a new member, or about an old one who hasn't been heard from in a while."

Remembering to preserve the anonymity of individual members is hardly a problem since the HAAMs know each other mainly by their call letters. Ask them about A.A. friends with whom they've networked for years and chances are they'll speak of them affectionately as WA2DAX, N4CTC or KW3X. If you want first names, they frequently have to refer to their listing.

A.A. oldtimer Ben L. (W7FNE) of Klamath Falls, Oregon, is an old ham radio hand as well. "Because there is great camaraderie among these people," he says, "it was natural that A.A. members who also were licensed hams would get together." The first attempt to make contact, Ben believes, was initiated by an operator named Lew of Seaford, Delaware. In a letter that appeared in the June 1953 issue of the A.A. Grapevine, he wrote, "I have a small homemade transmitter that cost about \$20 (I have spent that much plenty of times for whiskey), and have contacted fellows 500 miles away. . . . I will answer all letters and help however I can."

A year later, in May 1954, the Grapevine carried a one-paragraph call for the signals of "amateur radio operators who would like to contact each other via the air waves." And in June 1967, it carried an article, "---Message by Morse," signed "Anon." but written by Ben, who "had started a ham radio net in 1964, using Morse code recovery signals aboard ship because I was sea-going at the time and needed to keep in touch with



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A.A.s over great distances, from the Indian Ocean for instance.

“We had a great little net going for many years, but as the oldtimers died, it gradually faded. Today there are only two of us using Morse code—Jim D. of Taney Town, Maryland and I use it about three times a week when we have our one-on-one get-togethers.”

One of the few women on Henry K.’s HAAM list is Lee H. (KB6MXH) of Sunnyvale, California. “There is a Mary Ann listed for Pennsylvania and a Sonya for New York,” she reports, “but I’ve yet to make contact with either of them.” Sober in A.A. for 19 years, Lee became involved in HAAM in the mid-’80s. “Joining in our ‘Friends of Bill W.’ meetings is like holding hands across the country,” she relates, and “it feels really good. Sometimes a strange voice will ask, ‘Who’s Bill W.?’ We’ll usually explain that the name refers to a Twelve-Step program, though occasionally someone will kid, ‘Bill W.? He’s George Washington’s brother. . . .’”

Lee adds that amateur radio is the only hobby regulated by international treaty. Amateur bands agreed upon by most nations are sandwiched in among the short-wave frequencies assigned to ships, aircraft, international broadcasting stations, the armed forces, police and others. To operate an amateur station, in the U.S. and Canada, a license is needed. Beginners are granted a “novice” license upon completing a test that most hams find relatively easy, and they can work their way on up to “extra” class, which confers some special frequency privileges.

The coordinator of the active California HAAM net is Robert B. (KJ6IL) of Santa Barbara. “In helping alcoholics who check into our meetings,” he observes, “I find that I help myself most of all.” Although non-A.A.s can and do wander into HAAM meetings, he stresses, “we do not violate the Traditions. We are amateurs all, and we’re not out to proselytize or promote A.A. in any way.”

Robert notes that he is in touch with A.A.s all over the world and has made “some wonderful friends,” among them Wilf MacK. (VY2AA) of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, who identifies himself as “always alcoholic.” As often happens, the two HAAMs

decided to become more than each other’s disembodied voice; they met when Robert flew up to Prince Edward Island. “The HAAM experience has a ripple effect,” Wilf comments. “I’ve been involved for about 23 years and have enjoyed every moment. We have a saying here that if you make an A.A. contact today, chances are you won’t drink today or get into trouble. In my case, that’s proved very true.”

Hank K. (N40X0) of Tarpon Springs, Florida, concurs. “This is another form of Twelfth Stepping,” he says, “and it provides a solid support system.” He points out that HAAMs carry A.A.’s “language of the heart” to the nth degree because “we use a language that the untrained listener cannot understand. For example,” he offers, “if someone’s not going to meetings, I might toss in a concerned 028 (‘A banana that gets away from the bunch usually gets peeled.’) or 229 (‘You might be the only Big Book that some poor alcoholic will ever read.’). Then, let’s say I’m signing off. I send you my 73 (for ‘going now’) my 88 (‘love and kisses to your lady’) and, for good measure, a 24 (‘stay sober a day at a time’). It’s fun, it works, and there’s always room at the round table for one more.”

1992 Membership Survey Under Way

In July, in preparation for A.A.’s triennial A.A. Membership Survey, anonymous questionnaires were sent to 496 Canadian and U.S. groups through their area delegates. The questionnaires were completed during the first two weeks of August at a regular meeting of each group and returned to the delegate, who returned them to G.S.O.

Questionnaire responses are being entered into the computer, and the compilation of the raw data will be reviewed by the trustees’ Public Information Committee this winter. Then, from the gathered information, the committee will prepare a proposed 1992 A.A. Membership Survey pamphlet for consideration by the 1993 Conference Public Information Committee.

A.A. has conducted this survey every three years since 1968. The General Service Conference approves taking the Survey and determines the content of the questionnaire. As stated on the 1992 Survey Questionnaire: “The purpose of the survey has been to keep A.A. members informed on current trends in membership characteristics, and to provide information about Alcoholics Anonymous to the professional community and to the general public as part of the effort to reach those who still suffer from alcoholism.”
