



# How I Got My Novice and Found True Love

BY WENDY CLAY,\* WN7WEO

THAT WAS the funny thing about Bill. The night we met, the only mention of radio was whether I wanted to listen to AM Top 40 or FM Instrumental. When we finally settled on a Hi-Fi Easy Listening, the subject was dropped.

The next date wasn't much different. We played all the usual games of getting to know one another. I spent half the night trying to impress him with my theatrical sense of humor, and he spent half the night trying to impress me by laughing at all of my stupid jokes. But, finally, I asked the lethal question. "Bill, do you have any hobbies?" He gave me the old well-this-is-gonna'-blow-it look and said, "I'm a ham."

A ham? I just couldn't picture this fella' hamming anything up! It was surely beneath him to wave at TV cameras or to be the perpetual clown in the seventh grade who always crossed his eyes in the class picture. No, Bill was definitely not the ham type! Sensing my confusion, Bill explained that a ham is a slang term for someone who is interested in amateur radio, and he added, "No, I don't know Barry Goldwater."

End of second date. However, by our third meeting, my curiosity had been whetted. I had heard about hams before, but I had never met a real live one! I suppose Bill realized my interest, because he asked me if I would like to come over to his place and "see his rig." I wondered if that was anything like etchings. It wasn't.

First, I was ushered into his "ham shack" which, contrary to popular opinion, is not a shack at all. It was just an extra bedroom filled with complicated machines, wires plugged into overloaded outlets, and a couple of ashtrays that hadn't been emptied in about a year. Yet, despite the unbelievable clutter, I was very impressed by the idea that through all this electronic maze, Bill could actually talk to someone in California, Hawaii, or even Japan! How?? That question was

the key to the opening of a whole new world for me.

Learning the Code. . .

and Hating Samuel Morse

"I'm a reasonably intelligent human being. My memory is above average, I've got a good ear and furthermore, I was completely potty-trained before I was two and a half! I should be able to do anything that I set my mind on. So why can't I hear the difference between a dit and a dah?" But time passed and so did my frustration. Soon I was perspiring at five words a minute, and Bill announced that I was ready for the Novice code test. I didn't have the heart to tell him that I would flunk, so I let him go on with his wild ideas. There was a catch, though. Bill said that he would rather not give it to me. Instead, he would have his ham friend Bob do it so there would be no talk of cheating. I reacted the way any normal, rational, confident Novice-to-be would. I panicked. "But what if he sends differently than you do? What if he laughs at me?? And God forbid! What if he sends me a lot of Xs?" "Don't worry," my sadistic friend assured me. "We'll go over to Bob's house one night this week just so you can get used to him." Grudgingly, I consented.

So, Sunday night we drove over to Bob's house. He was very nice, and I had no trouble copying what he sent. I even had the nerve to send him some characters on the hand key. "Easy as pie!" I thought, so I bravely announced, "Ya' know, I think I can pass the code test!" to which Bob answered, "YOU JUST DID!"

Moonlight, Roses, and Electronic Theory

At my house, Bill was now known as the "Current Boyfriend." Now, Current Boyfriends are always under careful scrutiny by my over-

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protective parents, who tend to view them as prospective sons-in-law. However, with Bill, I guess I was a bit secretive, and my mother's subtle questioning proved futile. "How well do you like this one?" "A lot." "What do you talk about?" "Things." "Does he like you?" "Seems to." "Hasn't he said anything about future plans?" "Okay Mom. You might as well know. Very soon, we're going away together to a cold-water flat in the absolute worst district in San Francisco to live in sin. Maybe we'll have some illegitimate kids and teach them how to smoke pot and panhandle before they're six years old!" Of course, she didn't believe all this, but she wouldn't have believed the truth either — that we discussed electronics and tried to work DX on forty meters until the wee hours of the morning.

I remember the first theory lesson Bill gave me. "I think you ought to start learning about vacuum tubes," Bill said. "I'd rather neck," I said. "The test will be here in two weeks," Bill said. "Now a simple tube has two parts which current flows through; the cathode and the plate. . . ." "Fine," I said, "but what's current?"

Thus began my daily lessons on radio electronics. Poor Bill — with his dog-eared copy of the *License Manual* clutched frantically in his hot little hands, inadvertently saving it from being flushed down the toilet by a frustrated YL. Yet, despite my nightly hysterics, I learned a lot. I learned about half-wave antennas, QSL cards, repeaters, and block diagrams of receivers. I also learned how to spell schematic, that a microamp is less than an amp, that there is no good explanation of radio waves, and that the term "carrier" has nothing to do with tuberculosis or pigeons. As a matter of fact, I was beginning to feel like I knew everything! But then Bill had to spring it on me: the all-important Ohm's Law.



Be It Ever So Humble . . .

There's No Place Like Ohm

There are two ways of learning Ohm's Law: the hard way and the traumatic way. The hard way involves the equation at it's barest:  $E=IxR$  or  $I=E/R$  or  $R=E/I$ . It doesn't look too bad if you were a trig major at Cal. Tech. So, being a math flunkie from Camelback High, I was forced to learn the traumatic way, which involves tears, fights and logical assumptions which I was not willing to assume.

The multiplying part didn't rattle me a bit, but when it got into dividing, I got into trouble. Bill tried to simplify it with little mathematical tricks, but I am not mathematically inclined. Okay, so you have five ohms and four amps. What's the voltage? Easy! 20! But what if you have 100 volts

and three amps and you want to find the ohms? Well, let's see. . . that would be  $100/3$ . Or is it  $3/100$  — and oh I hope not, because that means decimal points! "How can I explain anything if you keep crying?" Bill would yell. "But even if you explained, I still wouldn't understand!" I'd sob back, "because I never learned how to divide!"

Silence. Would he finally give up and stop tormenting me? Would he make me write "Ohm's Law is fun" five hundred times? Or would he teach me how to divide? He would, and he did, and I finally learned to apply Ohm's Law. "All right, if Dick has four milliamps and Jane has sixteen volts, how many ohms does Baby Sally have?"

I've Been a Ham All My Life . . .  
and Never Had a License

After all the concentrated effort and dedicated studying, the actual written test was a bit anticlimatic. The real test was waiting to hear the results from the FCC. There was no way I could have passed, but Bill seemed totally undaunted! He even staged a dress rehearsal! "OK Wendy, I say 'CQ CQ CQ de K7UOP K7UOP K7UOP CQ CQ de K7UOP K7UOP K' — now, what do you say?" "I say you're being repetitious!" "No! You say K7UOP K7UOP K7UOP whatever-your-call-is WN7 whatever-your-call-is WN7 whatever-your-call-is. . ." "Wait a minute. Why are we doing this? I flunked, Bill! And I'm never gonna' be on the air, and I'm never gonna' talk to Japan, and I'm never gonna' make you proud of me!" But stubborn Bill would keep at it; "You're not thinking positive. Now, let's try it again. CQ CQ CQ. . . ."

Weeks kept passing, and so did the mailman. Finally, after realizing that the FCC had looked upon my test as a joke, which, after a good laugh, they threw away, I got my license — that little white piece of paper that you have to fold funny to make it fit into your wallet and signed by a dear Mr. Ben F. Waple. Had it been signed by God himself it wouldn't have been more important, for it means that I did it! I did something I never thought I could do. I became a Novice!

And that's the funny thing about Bill. I no sooner get the Novice, than he starts talking about a General Class License! But things will be better this time because of three things in my favor: I've got the confidence, I've got an interest, and I've got a wedding ring from Bill.

The End (and the beginning)



**Strays**

QST Contratulates . . .

Lt. Craig M. Nicholson, K7VEW, recipient of the Armed Forces Communication and Electronic Association Honor Award, in honor of attaining the highest class average in a Telecommunications class at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.

Ernest E. Sullivan, III, WB6HDJ, who has been an active ham since age 13 and was recently named an appointee to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Neal V. Latorraca, I0OUL/ON8UN, recipient of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences' Elemack Company Class III award for his Spyder camera dolly.