

A Ham Radio Love Story by Patti Donahue KE7IR

Tom lived in Kent, Ohio, in Silver Meadows apartments. Patti lived in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, in a 3 story brick, stand alone, apartment building.

Both of them had recently begun enjoying Citizens Band (CB) radio as a past time. Tom was learning about antennas and having restrictions in his apartment complex decided to push his newly purchased vertical antenna into a closet bending it as required to fit the space. Needless to say, it didn't transmit very well. So, Tom did not exist so far as Patti knew.

Patti, on the other hand, had no lease agreement restricting antennas. So, already having adopted the philosophy that begging forgiveness was far easier than asking permission, Patti's brother erected a vertical antenna on the top of the apartment building. Her signal was strong enough for Tom to hear Patti.

As a result, Patti did exist in Tom's world. A CB Picnic was being arranged by some of the CB'ers and Peppermint Patti was planning to attend right after her cousin's wedding that same Saturday in 1973.

Tom arrived at the picnic on a loud motorcycle wearing pointed toe black boots with horse shoe cleats, looking like he had been up all night. (He likely had been up all night.) Patti was oppositely dressed in a baby blue knit top with matching shorts and sandals. An odd couple from the start.

After monopolizing Patti's time and conversation the whole afternoon, Tom, the T-bird, asked her to go out that evening. Patti replied that it wouldn't be possible as her cousin's reception was that night and her parents, aunts and uncles, the whole family would be there. "I'm sure it would be very boring for you", said she.

Unknown to Patti at that time, Tom was not going to be easily deterred once he had set his sights on something. He assured her nothing would be more fun for him than meeting her family. He would be at Patti's apartment at the agreed time to attend the reception.

She walked to her parked car, a 1972 powder blue Plymouth Duster with standard, on the floor 3 speed transmission, to drive home. For reasons unknown, the car was stuck in 2nd gear and would not shift to any other gear. Patti drove the car home, carefully parking in the bank parking lot behind the apartment. Even though a bit rattled, Patti realized parking in the garage would require the unattainable reverse gear to get the car out. Driving a car stuck in 2nd gear was not so bad in home territory, but, out of the question for a trip across several towns to the reception hall. She was sure the motorcycling CB'er would never show. But, just in case, she got ready for the reception wearing a sleek, black, halter top evening dress. At that time in Patti's life, she "cleaned up" pretty well and could fill out an evening dress nicely.

Tom arrived in his maroon Ford Thunderbird, dressed in navy blue pants and a Maroon sports coat, looking far different from the motorcycling CB'er Patti had met earlier.

While still in shock over the chameleon act just witnessed, Patti excitedly told him of her car's problem. With no regard for apparel, Tom immediately went down the 3 stories of the apartment building and fixed her car. In later years, this habit of getting right to work without regard to clothing choice was considered less gallant by Patti. However, at that time, she found it most appealing. Never in its remaining life, did the Blue Dustpan (so named by Patti's dad) ever get stuck in gear again.

Love would soon follow as Tom had become Patti's knight in shining armor, handsome companion, and more importantly her personal handyman! For the next nearly 50 years, Tom would cleverly fix the multitude of things Patti managed to break. So strong was her reputation that in years to follow, Patti, also known as Mighty Matilda, became the test driver/user for any newly repaired item, because, if it could be broken, Patti would accomplish it without even trying.

About 6 months after they met, Tom drove west to Tucson, Az., to visit his sister. Tom's brother in law was attending University of Arizona. The wide open Sonoran desert quickly captured Tom's heart and he decided to move there.

A long distance friendship ensued for about 2 years while Patti continued working for General Electric as a secretary and attending night classes at University of Akron. Initially Patti thought this was a phase that would quickly pass, but, she was wrong!

Vacations were taken both directions, but, after Tom's visit to Ohio, Christmas of 1976 a change was coming.

Tom called Patti and told her they had a Geography problem. There was too much land between them. Although love was in full bloom by then, ever the realist, Patti announced she would have to get a job and make sure her college credits would transfer before a move could be made. In about this same time frame, both of them passed the Novice test administered by volunteer examiners in Ohio for Patti and Arizona for Tom. CB radio was still their main pastimes but a new course heading toward Amateur Radio was set.

In June of 1977, Patti purchased a small trailer, loaded up her belongings and used her 2 weeks vacation to relocate to their new home at 511 W. Marcus Dr, Tucson, Az. Tom's GI loan and Patti's down payment allowed them to be first time home owners. I need not tell you, Patti's parents were sure she had lost her mind; while Tom's parents were praising God and being thankful that Patti and her "cautious nature" might be a balancing influence. The journey made by Patti

with her small, not so strong trailer is worthy of its own story. Suffice it to say, CB radio came to her rescue several times. But eventually in early July, Patti came rolling in, dust swirling behind the blue Duster and trailer, to a rural field where Tom was participating in a Ham Radio Field Day event.

Their home was a ranch style 3 bedroom home with 2 bathrooms. It was about 1600 sq ft with liberal use of bright pink paint. Standing in the kitchen Tom laughingly told Patti he felt as though he were living in the "Pepto Bismol" stomach. For those too young to remember, look up old commercials for the stomach relief product and you will understand. They set about painting, wall papering and making the house their home. One of the first projects was to rent a jack hammer to get through the cement-like caliche that was the prominent "soil" in their yard. Caliche is as hard as low quality concrete. And yes, Patti was down in that 6 ft x 6 ft x 5 ft hole shoveling out "dirt" right alongside her man.

Amateur Radio was growing in importance during this time frame. Tom was attending classes at Johnny Taylor's home. Patti studied Amateur Radio independently along with working full time and finishing her BS in Business at University of Arizona, Tucson. Both got their General Licenses; WB7EAW Tom; WB7QXW Patti. Later Tom upgraded first to Advanced then Extra WQ7Q, then Vanity call W7PD. Patti later upgraded to Advanced class and luckily got assigned KE7IR, which she retains to this day.

In the meanwhile, they decided to marry December 22, 1978. Always pragmatic, in November, Patti figured their taxes for 1976 as single vs. Joint returns and showed Tom how they could save \$800 or so. That was a good enough reason for Tom and so, they married before year end. Very romantic, right? Patti was 26 and Tom was 33 when they married. Both wanted children, so, before long, son #1 was conceived.

Patti graduated from U of A in May of 1979. Thomas Timothy was born November 25, 1979. He was a beautiful, blue-eyed, baby boy who taught us how to parent. His brothers can be grateful we improved with practice.

Tom was a night owl, often hamming well into the night. Tommy, dubbed W7BABY by our dear friend Bart Paine, K7CC, was often with Tom at night while Patti slept. Tom said Tommy could really drive the microphone well with his piercing cry.

19 months after Tommy arrived, Jonathan James was born. And 22 months later, Christopher Clark joined our team.

Needless to say, with 3 little ones, work, and Tom's Satellite TV business to run, we were very busy and Patti's air time reduced to the occasional add on in a QSO of Tom's, or 2 meter conversations to and from work.

For the next 30 years, Tom was active in many facets of ham radio, along with running a business, volunteering at the school, and playing the role of Mr. Mom while Patti concentrated on a management career which included a fair amount of travel and being a good mom, whenever she was home.

Tom and Patti centered their lives around their sons. Seldom did a trip or event not include the boys. From taking Tommy for his first trip to the sand dunes at one month old to vacations at the lakes, they always they traveled as a team. Some thought they didn't trust anyone else to watch their boys. And without family nearby, that may have been an element in their thinking; but, mainly they just didn't want to give up a moment of joy watching and growing with their sons.

There are so many stories to tell, many hilarious, but this story will end by explaining how amateur radio has become the revived hobby to bring purpose and life back to Patti.

On February 24, 2022, Tom became a silent key. All during the month that Tom was in the hospital, Patti's mom had been quite ill. Patti had to go to Ohio one week after his passing to care for her dying mother, honoring her mother's wish to spend her remaining days at home. One month after Tom's departure, Evelyn Friedrichsen Clark joined him, Patti's dad Dick Clark, and so many other loved ones waiting for her in their heavenly home. A sad time here on earth, but, a joyous time in heaven, to be sure.

In April, Patti flew home to Arizona. In the middle of May, Patti drove to Ohio to assist her siblings in preparing properties owned by her parents for sale. And then, she drove to her cottage in Canada, on Lake Nipissing for a time of respite. Surrounded by loving Island friends, and with visits from her sons to help with maintenance/projects, it was a time of rest, learning, and confidence building.

After about 3 months, Patti returned home to Arizona and discovered eldest son Tommy had been communing with his father's spirit by working in the shop and learning about the gear in the radio room. He had purchased a golden engraved Heil PR-40 microphone, honoring W7PD, and set it up. Tommy wanted us to be able to "talk to Santa" via Ham radio with the grandchildren for Christmas. He didn't want Tom's tradition to end. And so, Tommy and Patti worked together to streamline, clean and organize the radio room to allow this to happen.

Right after Thanksgiving, we signed the children up for an on line visit with Santa through the 3.916 Amateur Radio Group. Each ham could only sign up 3 children. So Tommy W7EAW was control operator for Anthony, Aron, and Adeline Donahue, son Chris's children. Patti KE7IR was control operator for Hailee Donahue, who is Tommy's daughter. That was a happy night, in sharp contrast to months of finding it hard to smile.

After Christmas, Patti started just listening to the radio to drown out the quiet of an empty house at night. Then, gradually she learned how to tune the antenna for operating on 80 meters. Eventually, she did the same for 40 meters. Finally, by taking copious notes and cautiously trying new bands, Patti has gone from short wave listener to "DXing" (talking to hams worldwide). Amateur Radio has opened up a convenient and safe new world of possibilities. Smiles and hope have returned thanks to the Magic of Ham Radio.