

IBMers Are Instrumental in Helping Blind Girl Find New Lease on Life

Not too many people have heard of Ootewah, Tennessee.

How about Snowflake, Arizona? Or Ideal, South Dakota? Anyone ever been to Paragould, Arkansas?

Jean Fox can't see. But she knows people in all of these places.

She "met" them on her ham radio set and has "talked" to them and to other operators in 21 different states and four foreign countries largely because of the efforts of three Kingston IBMers.

Donald G. Wood, of Dept. 746, Walter J. Short, manager of Dept. 771 and Stephen P. Krosner of Dept. 707 spend much of their spare time as amateur radio operators. They introduced Jean to a new electronic skill and put her in touch with a world she otherwise never would have known.

It all started last summer, when Jean met a member of the Amateur Radio Society of Kingston, N.Y. and voiced an interest in the hobby.

Don Wood, also a member, later contacted Sister Lauren of St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Minn. She is associated with the Piconet's Handi-Ham System for handicapped persons who want to become radio operators.

Jean talked to Sister Lauren over a phone patch hooked up to Don's radio station. The sister told her about the Hadley School for the Blind in Minnesota, which later forwarded to her a set of magnetic tapes containing recordings of radio code and theory. So Jean went to radio school.

Blind Woman Contacted

One day in October, while Don was working in his shack—the place where an operator keeps his radio—he tuned in on Susan Oswell of Newington, Conn. It turned out that Susan, a skilled operator for nine years, was also blind and acutely aware of the problems facing the handicapped ham. Jean switched onto the phone patch and learned from this Connecticut colleague how to set up a station and get an operation going, how to braille messages and what kind of tuning apparatus is best for blind operators.

Then Walt Short and Steve Krosner got into the act. Steve built Jean a radio rig, which transmits and receives signals over three bands set at 80, 40 and 15 meters. Walt fixed up a special sightless operator's tuning



Jean Fox, unable to see for the past four years, makes contact with another ham operator.

bridge, so she could tune up the rig by listening for varying tones.

Later, Don Wood and James Glennon, a locksmith in Kingston who is also a ham operator, went to Jean's home on 33 Grandview Avenue and installed her antenna.

Special Procedure

Under ordinary circumstances an operator simply watches a meter to tune up his rig and get on the air. Jean starts by tuning up the bridge, listening for her tones and finding her frequency by feeling a crystal which Don brailled for her.

But before she could operate on the air waves, Jean had to learn the fundamentals of radio operation. This was grueling work. After hours, days, and weeks of studying and practicing with Don, she passed the two qualifying examinations on International Morse Code, basic electronics, radio regulations and problems authorized by the Federal Communications Commission.

Passing the tests meant that Jean knew the elements of radio operation and could send and receive code at the rate of at least five words per minute. It meant that she was now eligible to operate her own radio station and to contact any other ham almost anywhere in the world. The FCC gave her a license and a call number—WN2MJM.

The Big Moment

The afternoon of Dec. 28, 1969 was a day of drama for Jean Fox. It

was her first chance to send and receive code. With the dits and dahs that by now had become a second language for her, she transmitted her CQ inviting anyone to respond to her call.

Then she waited.

The big moment was only a few seconds away. A man from College Park, Md., answered her signals. Jean Fox, 24, unable to see for the past four years, was on the air.

"It was marvelous. It was such a thrill to turn the set on, with no idea whom I'd be talking to."

Since then, Jean has been busy trying to develop greater flexibility in sending and receiving. At first, all she could do was transmit, receive and acknowledge code signals. Now she's able to handle more extensive "conversations" in code. One night, for instance, she "talked" to a ham in Nashville, Tenn. about Johnny Cash. "I try to find out something distinctive about each of the places I get signals from," says Jean.

At present, Jean has a novice ticket from the FCC, which means that for at least two years she can operate only in code. To get a general ticket, which provides for voice transmission, she must develop a 13-words-per-minute code capability and pass another complicated exam.

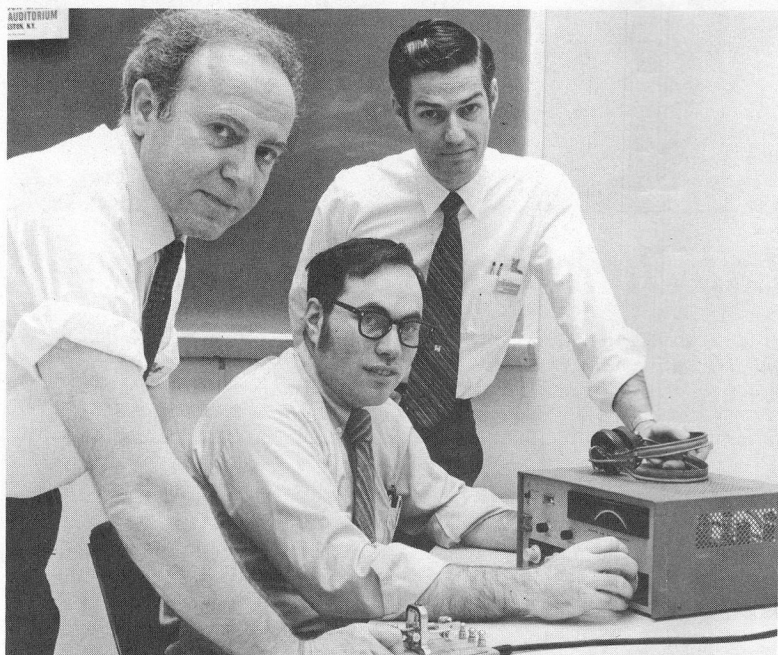
But that's in the future. Right now she's having as much fun as she can, signalling as many different states and countries as she can, learning as much about the world as she can: she's already contacted Germany, Belgium, British Columbia, Czechoslovakia, and Puerto Rico.

"Jean is a model, a wonderful example to the handicapped of how much satisfaction they can achieve in this fascinating hobby, and how quickly," Don Wood says.

His point is well taken, particularly since ham radio operation has become so popular an after-hours hobby across the country. And it has caught on quickly with Kingston IBMers as well. Among those connected with Jean's story alone was Bob Anderson, who got a code oscillator and record for her. Bob works in Dept. 559. Bob Barnett and Herb Sweet contributed novice crystals to the project.

They say the world we live in moves too fast for any of us to keep up with it. They say there is no time anymore to go out of our way to learn something new, no time anymore to get involved with stimulating but difficult, hobbies.

A group of IBMers who operate ham radio stations in their spare time, and a blind girl who lives in Kingston, have proved this isn't true.



Don Wood (left), Walter Short and Steve Krosner (seated) helped Jean launch her ham radio project.