We've been hearing a lot recently from accomplished hams about why they think amateur radio is important to young people. Well, now we hear from one of those young people, 14-year-old KB1OGL, about why ham radio is important to her.

Saving the Hobby for KG7HF

BY BRITTANY DECKER,* KB1OGL

Two years ago, my father was cleaning out his closet when he found his old Kenwood TS-680S. While licensed as KG7HF, he hadn't operated a ham radio in about 15 years and decided to sell his only radio because he never thought he would get back into the hobby.

I was walking downstairs to the basement when I saw a large radio on his desk. I said, "What's that?" He replied, "It's a ham radio." Then he was off. He talked about foreign countries, engaging contests, and all-around fun. I begged him to throw up an antenna and let me talk to someone, so we went out to the shed and made a light-gauge wire dipole. Our antenna was not very good, so my dad did not expect to hear many people. At first we did not hear anyone at all. However, after a couple of days we heard a very strong station. To my amazement, here in New Hampshire, we heard a Texas man nearly 2500 miles away calling CQ. I wanted to grab the microphone and respond, but I wasn't licensed.

My dad eventually let me get on and I had my first QSO. My amazement didn't stop at that. I later received a QSL card and a letter from the man in Texas, and even though the card was plain and blue, it still is very treasured to me. After that, my dad and I went to the local radio store and got the Technician study guide. We studied and I got my license in December 2006.

Becoming a DXer

I then started my avid DX chasing and was excited by hearing places as close as Canada. I enjoyed HF much more than VHF. For a long while, my dad had to be control operator since I did not have HF privileges. I would work for hours at a time on one DX station until, finally, I made a contact or he got off the air. Once I wanted to try 17 meters for the first time and I heard a station in Belgium calling CQ. I got so excited and I called and called through the pile-up until finally I made the contact. The Belgian station was weak, but my dad taught me all the tricks to working weak stations. Some tricks he taught me are to call at the right times, like after everyone else has finished calling or before everyone starts. Another trick is to emphasize parts of your call (**OGL** for KB1OGL) so that the DX station will be more likely to catch at least part of your call. The last trick is the most important. He also taught me to be patient because even if you don't have the fanciest antenna, or the best equipment, it doesn't mean you have to give up.

I also was itching to get into contesting. I participated in Field Day, Winter Field Day, November Sweepstakes, and the Winter VHF Contest. Winter Field Day is an event sponsored by the Society for the Preservation of Amateur Radio (SPAR) that started in January of 2007. The objective of Winter Field Day is to test a ham's ability to operate during an emergency in the winter time.

During the Winter VHF Contest, my dad and I went to Grafton, New Hampshire on a long, winding dirt road. The weather was very cold and snowy and we set up our antenna, a multi-element quagi, in the back of my dad's truck. We tried very hard that night, but we didn't make a single contact. I wasn't disappointed, though, because I found it fun to go on an unplowed road in the middle of nowhere and just spend time with my dad.

My father and I also participated in the U.S. Islands program (http://www.usislands.org/). We activated Burton Island in Lake Champlain, Vermont, and had

The author, age 14, at the station she shares with her dad, Paul Decker, KG7HF, in Hudson, New Hampshire.

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a small DXpedition from there. Burton Island's U.S. Island number is VT020L. During our DXpedition we worked many DX stations on 40 meters while running 5 watts SSB on battery power. My dad had to go to India for a business trip and he used Echolink to link into the local NE1B 2-meter repeater so he could keep in touch without running up an expensive phone bill. Also, while in India he met up with Sanjeevi, VU2SJV, who lived close by. My brother is involved in Scouts, so we operated for Jamboree on the Air (JOTA). We went to the local Scout camp, Camp Carpenter, and operated from there. We were able to introduce ham radio to many younger kids. I enjoy introducing ham radio to kids my age or younger. Many of the Scouts are interested in amateur radio and some are shortwave listeners.

A Teacher Named Ham Radio

Amateur radio requires so many skills, including math, science, language, and geography. The math and science aspects are mainly associated with antennas, radio waves, and electricity. Language is a skill used when hams decide how to handle stations calling in a contest, as net control, or even off the air waves in a ham radio club. Geography is a huge part of amateur radio because, for example, if you have a directional antenna and you are trying to work Spain, you have to know where Spain is located to turn the antenna to the best possible route. I have learned that through ham radio these skills can be obtained and utilized. When I studied for my General Class license, the math and science parts were giving me the most grief. I could not understand simple things such as capacitors, inductors, duty cycles, and NAND gates. It was after many failed tests that I began to understand how those things work. It gave me a better understanding of how other things in the world work, such as telephones. I then passed my General test on December 1, 2007.

The geography aspect of amateur radio helped me in school. Usually after I make a contact outside the U.S. I look at a map to see where the person was located. Since most contacts are each different, I can remember where countries are located based on the contacts I made. In the U.S. there is a test called a National Geography Bee. Last year I scored a 36/50 and made some of the top scores in the school because I knew the world's geography better.

Language is also a large part of amateur radio. Without language skills, successful communications over radio would not be possible. Ham radio helped my language skills when the usual net control for the Nashua Area Radio Club's weekly 6-meter net could not be present and I volunteered to be net control, even though I had no experience as net control. My

Paul and Brittany's station is small and compact, in a corner of their basement, but that doesn't keep them from working the world or trying a variety of operating modes.

The rig that snared a new ham (as well as an old one!). Paul's Kenwood TS-680S transceiver (top) was about to be put up for sale when Brittany saw it, asked her dad about it, became interested in ham radio, and got him back on the air after a 15-year absence. Not a bad day's work for a radio that wasn't even plugged in!

QSL card from last year's family vacation/island DXpedition to Burton Island, Vermont, in Lake Champlain. Brittany and Paul activated the island for the U.S. Islands program, operating with just 5 watts on battery power.

dad and I looked up the standard procedure for being net control. I learned how to use language to coordinate and direct people so that I could get the correct information from everyone calling. Plus, when I operated Field Day, I needed language skills to know how to pick out callsigns from a pile-up and call them to receive the correct information at a fast pace.

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Because of my interest in ham radio, my dad's interest has been sparked again. Now that his interest has been rekindled, we've built up our antennas from a dipole, to a giant loop, to a complicated phased array. We added a kilowatt amp, tried new modes such as RTTY, set up Echolink, and tried working Low Earth Orbit satellites. I still enjoy contesting, DXing, and the HF bands to this day. But if I had not walked downstairs that day, my dad would have sold his only radio and I might never have known about amateur radio. This would have been a great loss, since amateur radio has given me so much already.