



Episode 421 – Art Bell – W6OBB (SK)

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Eric 4Z1UG:

QSO Today, episode 421, Art Bell, W6OBB revisited.

This episode of QSO Today is sponsored by Icom America, makers of the finest amateur radios and accessories for your ham radio station and by Nuts & Volts Magazine.

Welcome to the QSO Today podcast. I'm Eric Guth, amateur call sign 4Z1UG where I demonstrate that diversity and relevance of the amateur radio hobby and its impact on society by interviewing ham radio operators, many of whom played vital roles in shaping our technology through the amateur radio hobby.

And while many people might say ham radio, do people still do that? This podcast demonstrates through in-depth interviews just how amazing, diverse and dynamic the amateur radio hobby continues to be.

Growing up in Southern California, I was a big fan of Los Angeles AM radio, 93KHJ top 40 KBC talk radio and late night radio with Brian Williams on entrepreneurship and Coast to Coast with Art Bell. Art Bell, W6OBB, now a silent key was my guest on episode 85 in March of 2016, and the interview that follows is a remastered version. Art was a very active ham from his QTH in Pahrump, Nevada, and his 160 meter Rhombic antennas were legendary.

He was also one of the most popular late night talk radio hosts for over 30 years, syndicated nationwide until his retirement in 2007. I was a great fan of Arts and like many of his fans truly miss him on the radio. Due to the confluence of a combination of the expo last month followed by the Jewish holiday season, I'm repressing this episode with Art Bell, W6OBB for your listening enjoyment. W6OBB, this is Eric 4Z1UG. Are you there, Art?

Art Bell W6OBB:

4Z1UG, Eric, this is Art Bell, W6OBB in Pahrump, Nevada. How are you doing?

Eric 4Z1UG:

I'm great, Art. Thanks for joining me on the QSO Today podcast. Can we start at the beginning of your ham radio story? How did you become interested in amateur radio?

Art Bell W6OBB:

It is a very long story. I'm now 70 years old, Eric and I began, I'm going to say I began my interest when I was about 11 or 12 and I would go to my grandma's house and she had this old, I'd had to stand five feet up old radio and it covered the short wave bands, not sideband, which we didn't even have then actually, but just am short wave. And I would listen around, I'd hear other countries and I thought it was magic, Eric. So I became more and more interested. I finally ran into a fella who lived down the street from me. This was in Pennsylvania at the time, and he actually, believe it or not, was a nuclear scientist. However, he in his basement had a full setup and would entice me by having me come over and sit and watch him talk to Europe and around the world.

And I was hooked. I was hooked line and sinker hooked. So he slowly trained me to become a novice and I took my test and my first rig was a Heathkit AT1 transmitter, which was crystal controlled and good for about 30 watts on a good day. And so I got on and that's how it happened. I think I was licensed either when I was 11 or 12, no, I'm going to say 12 or 13, I'm sorry, 12 or 13. And either late 12 or early 13. And that's all I did. I would sit in my room and I would operate day and night. Didn't particularly enjoy CW, I still don't, but I know it. For some reason CW came easily to me. It's strange because I don't really like CW, but it came easily to me. I'm one of those people, I guess.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And do you remember what your first call sign was?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Sure. Who would ever forget that? KN3JOX licensed in Pennsylvania, Media, Pennsylvania. And that really brings back memories. So KN3JOX became K3JOX as I obtained my general. And then finally I became, I've not had that many calls in my life, Eric. I became W2CKS, got very lucky when I moved into the two area. And so I got a pretty good call W2CKS. Then finally as an adult I wanted to live on the West Coast of the U.S. So away I went, I believe I sent a letter with my license, Eric, and I begged to get a W call because I had been lucky enough to get one in the two call area. So I literally begged the FCC and sure enough they came back, believe it or not, and gave me W6OBB and I have had that ever since. So we're talking about from the age of 12 or 13 to 70. Never not been a ham, never not had a rig that was working in operable.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You're an extra class licensee. When did you upgrade to extra class?

Art Bell W6OBB:

What happened is I was a general, I then in San Diego, California, as I mentioned, I went to the West Coast, took the advanced class and I became an advanced for a lot of years. I thought it was sort of a badge of honor because an advanced class license indicates that you did pass the CW test, so...

Eric 4Z1UG:

For the general?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Right. So I passed the advanced and kept that for years. And then finally when the commission came out with the new allocations and the extras were given so much more bandwidth on bands that I love, like 75 meters, I finally was pushed over the edge and went and took my extra and passed it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now you mentioned that you had the Heathkit AT1 as your first rig. Do you remember what the receiver was?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Sure. The AC3.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Also a Heathkit?

Art Bell W6OBB:

That's right. And I can tell you a funny little story about that. I, of course, needed a receiver. I got the transmitter and then needed a receiver, so I ordered that from Heathkit and I was not what you would call a technician at that point. In other words, I didn't know a lot of technical stuff. So when I got the Heathkit, I got all the parts out like everybody does. Didn't read the instructions the way I was supposed to, Eric. And so I didn't know that I was supposed to shorten lead length. My assumption was that all capacitors and resistors had to be the length they were given to me as.

So I didn't shorten any lead. Now I built the entire built thing, and you can well imagine capacitors and resistors were sticking out like spaghetti from the bottom. And I had built it correctly with that exception. So when I finally proudly slid this thing into its case and turned on the power, it sort of caught on fire because as you can imagine, all the resistors and capacitors meshed together and it was pretty big disaster. So I finally realized the error of my ways. I redid the whole thing and, God bless, it worked.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And what kind of antenna did you use on your novice rig?

Art Bell W6OBB:

These really are things you never forget. It was just a long wire, a 65 foot long wire.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Uh-huh. Were it end-fed tuner or something like that?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Well, you get 81 lent itself to a long wire antenna. There was one screw there and that was it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

On the output, yeah?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Yeah.

Eric 4Z1UG:

No coax output on that?

Art Bell W6OBB:

No, no, no, no, no. Not that I recall. Maybe there was, but I don't recall it. I just recall a single wire attachment point. I used a long wire in the beginning.

Eric 4Z1UG:

After the first mentor that you had in Pennsylvania, did you have any other Elmers or mentors that kind of helped you along?

Art Bell W6OBB:

When we'd be riding down the street, and by that I mean when I would be in my mom's car and we'd be headed somewhere, I would typically see an antenna and I'd go, "Mom, stop, stop." And we'd stop at the antenna and I would go and knock on the door and I'd meet the ham and inevitably, inevitably, whoever it was would hand me some piece of equipment that he didn't want anymore and say, "God bless you son, see you later." So I don't know about mentors, but donations I did receive

Eric 4Z1UG:

Anything really spectacular that you received as a donation?

Art Bell W6OBB:

No, slow additions to the shack. Little things, clocks occasionally. Another rig of one sort or another. I think I had a Hallicrafters receiver that only changed frequency slightly when you touched the desk and I slowly moved up in the world. I think I went pretty much through the Heathkit line, Eric. I went from a AT-1 to a DX 20 a DX 40, a DX 60, and then finally an Apache. So that takes you pretty quickly through my early days. I couldn't afford a lot, so that's what I had. I loved the Apache. It was plate modulated, sounded like a million dollars and that sort of, I hate to rush you through all those days, but I was on the air every day, mostly all day to my mother's dismay and enjoying myself.

I have always loved lower bands, 75 and 40 because you can kind of hook up with people that you met the day before or last week and pretty reliably know that you'll be talking to him again and meet up with him on the band. I also did as a young ham, operate an awful

lot of the higher bands and as I do today, I operate all bands. So God, I had a blast one, I was a kid, Eric, and I mentioned to my mother's dismay, I think she thought I was overdoing it and I'm sure I was. But ham radio then is quite quickly what led me into broadcast radio.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So we'll go there in just a minute, Art, but let me ask a question because it sounds to me like your parents were quite supportive of your hobby. They might have complained that maybe you were infatuated with it. Mine did. What kind of impact did amateur radio have and still have on your family life?

Art Bell W6OBB:

I guess, my ham hobby has impacted my family life all my life. And I've had a couple of families, Eric, so sure it's always impacted it. There was never a time that I didn't devote one room of whatever a boat I was in to amateur radio, and that includes today I'm sitting in the shack right now. So it's impacted my family life always. And my mom was afraid that it would lead to no good things for me. Quite to the contrary, it led to my eventual career. I found that as I entered my career in broadcasting, Eric, and I know it's rushing you a little bit to get you there already, but now what I found is that I got eternal connections. In other words, amateur radio is kind of a brotherhood.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Yes.

Art Bell W6OBB:

And once you walk in a place and you're applying for a job or something like that, and the other fellow mentions that he's a ham, you can almost know it's a lock. Not absolutely, but the brotherhood has always taken care of its own, Eric, and it certainly took care of me. I was only 13 years old when I finally, toward the end of 13, went and got a commercial first class radio telephone license. So there you go. I went from ham radio and never left ham radio. Not one day in all these years.

And then I entered broadcast realm and I did so pretty much in engineering, but quickly moved on on the air work. And I'm telling you, Eric, and this is truth and I suspect it's still pretty much true today, that if you mention you're a ham and the guy sitting across the desk from you is a ham, you've probably got a lock on the job. So ham radio has served me all my life. It's not just a hobby, it's an absolute love.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Boy, I got that. Here you are a 13 year old with a first class radio telephone license. What happened there? You've got ham radio, it's opening doors for you. It, obviously, influenced career, but did it also influence education?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Yes, I think it's fair to say yes. Although I have a limited formal education, some college, I don't think it propelled me toward a further educational goal of some sort. I wanted to get in radio, Eric, and by radio I mean commercial broadcasting. And so I would go to the local radio station, whatever that was. We moved around a lot as I was a child, Eric, my mom and dad were both marines. My mother was one of the first women marines in the country and she was a drill instructor, if you can believe that, at Camp Lejuene in North Carolina. My dad is a retired colonel, was a retired colonel from the Marine [inaudible], and I was born on Camp Lejuene in North Carolina.

So you can imagine I had fairly strict parents. At any rate, I began going to hang out as much as they would let me at local radio stations, meeting the disc jockeys, meeting the engineers, going ooh and awe at the three 500 or three 400, I guess, it was transmitters and digging into stuff and just doing everything I could at a radio station, whether it was engineering or it was air work or bringing somebody their coffee, what have you. I did that endlessly as a child. And every day, literally every day, Eric, I was either on ham radio or at some radio station trying to figure out what I could learn and glean and whether I could get a job.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And now this message from Icom America heard it, worked it, logged it. This summer keep your competitive contesting edge with Icom. Our high-powered base stations cut through pileups letting you work the bands and log those contacts, contest from the comfort of your home or remotely with the RS-BA1 app. The Icom IC-7851 gives you a new window into the RF world and it's on air excellence is unparalleled. With faster processors, high input gain, high display resolution, and a cleaner signal, it's truly the pinnacle of HF perfection. Features include dual receivers, digital IF filters, memory care, digital voice recorder, high resolutions, spectrum waterfall display, enhanced PC connectivity, and an SD memory card slot. The Icom IC-7610 is the SDR every ham wants.

This high performance SDR can pick out faint signals in the presence of stronger adjacent signals. The Icom IC-7610 is a direct sampling software defined radio that has changed the world's definition of an SDR transceiver. Its features include RF direct sampling system, 110 DBRMDR independent, dual receiver and dual digi cell. Create your own band openings with the Icom IC-9700. This transceiver brings direct sampling to the UHF/VHF weak signal world. This all mode transceiver is loaded with innovative features that are sure to keep you busy, that include faster processors, higher input gain, higher display resolution, and a cleaner signal.

This has become the new defacto standard as a base-band rig for microwave operation as well. Features include 4.3 inch touchscreen color TFT LCD, real-time high speed spectrum scope and waterfall display, smooth satellite operation with 99 satellite channels, dual watch operation and full duplex operation in satellite mode. The Icom IC-7300 is a high performance innovative HF transceiver with a compact design that will far exceed expectations. This innovative HF transceiver digitizes RF before various receiver stages reducing inherent noise in different IF stages.

The IC-7300 change the way entry level HF is designed. It is the go-to rig in my station now and I love it. Features include RF direct sampling, 15 discrete band pass filters, large 4.3

inch color touch screen, real-time spectrum scope, and an SD memory card slot. Just know that you'll be very pleased with one of these fine rigs. To enhance your contest DX and general ham radio operation in your station, be sure to check out these Icom rigs and their full line of base stations and portable radios at an amateur radio dealer near you. And when you make that purchase of a fine Icom rig, be sure to tell your dealer that you heard about it here on the QSO Today podcast. And now back to our QSO Today.

Well, we've had a number of guests on the QSO Today podcast who were engineers at radio stations as kids because the kids with the first class license walks in the door and he is got the job, but not many of them end up on the air except maybe because there's a spot in the middle of the night to fill and the station manager says, "Well, why don't you fill it, read the news." Or something like that. How did you end up on the air?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Well, I'm laughing because that ultimately is exactly how I ended up with my big career in radio. Somebody who said, "Well, I guess, we're going to have to put you on at night." But that's a story for down line, I guess, a little bit. I started, as I mentioned, to finally get jobs. I guess, I had a decent voice and I landed a job at a station in little FM religious station in Franklin, New Jersey. And to get to work, I had to climb this mountain. It was literally on the mountain instead of just putting the antenna on the mountain, the whole thing was there. It was a religious FM station, Eric, and all I did was read the news every hour, but I stayed there full-time to do it. And the man who owned and ran this station was of an unusual sort. He had a thing about people who get too close to the microphone.

He liked my news, but he thought I got too close to the mic. And so in the middle of a five minute newscast, he would walk into the studio, grab the back of the chair and yank it out from under me. And right on the air you would hear me take a tumble onto the floor and he'd start ranting at me. And needless to say, I didn't stay for a long time at that FM station, but that's kind of start I had, [inaudible] rough start, I guess I had. And then from that point, Eric, I was looking toward, I'm a kid, so I'm looking toward rock and roll radio, and I did secure some jobs at some rock stations. I'm talking about top 40 here. And it did pretty well, actually did pretty well. And then I finally said, the heck with this, I'm going to go in the Air Force.

So I took a break from everything, went into the Air Force, all set for a radio career, and they said, no, it looks like you are going to go into, brace yourself, Eric, medicine. So I became a medic. I went to Amarillo Air Force Base after basic training in San Anton and was a medic and then made my way to the far east. Inevitably, you can guess the years, touchdown in Okinawa. Spent a lot of time in Okinawa, Eric, on Okinawa, and of course Vietnam, the Philippines and spent a lot of time in the far East. Now, when I left the Air Force, I did four years and out, Eric, when I left the Air Force, I had fallen in love with the island of Okinawa.

And so I wrote a letter. There was a commercial broadcast station at that time, we administered the island of the Ryukyu Islands were administered by the us, Eric. And so there was a commercial broadcast station owned by an Okinawa company, Ryukyu [inaudible], actually. I wrote them a letter. They had a rock and roll station that served the GIs on the island at that time. That was about a quarter of a million if you included the

dependence. And I got an answer and they said, "Come on to Okinawa, we're going to pay your way and you can do air work." And so I spent a total of 10 years, Eric, on the island of Okinawa.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Wow. You're a handy guy. Were you also the station engineer as well as the on air talent?

Art Bell W6OBB:

No, no, no. That was all Okinawans, but it was quite an experience. I fell in love with the far east, Eric. I remember we had an old teletype machine in a little soundproof room, and the only way that one could get news would be to pick it up by radio. I think there were two or three different frequencies, but it came from the U.S. by radio. And so if you can imagine the selective fading that was coming from California, which is where the signal was coming from all the way to Okinawa, typically halfway through a story, it would go into a selective fade and you would have complete garble. So you couldn't just run into this little room and rip. You had to read as well. If you didn't read, you'd get halfway through a story, it'd go in total garble. So that's how we got our news from the Associated Press halfway across the world.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you remember the station call letters?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Sure. KSBK.

Eric 4Z1UG:

KSBK?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Yes. Kilowatt sugar, bravo kilowatt. And I was a ham there. Of course, I was a ham everywhere I was KR6BK.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What did you schlep along with you as far as ham radio gear when you were in Okinawa?

Art Bell W6OBB:

It wasn't so much a matter of schlepping. For example, two Okinawa. I took very nearly nothing to Okinawa and bought the rig that I wanted, which at that time I believe was at Tempo, bought it and lived in a little Japanese house with at that time a cute little Japanese girl. And I constructed my antenna on the roof from bamboo, and my brilliant idea, Eric, was to take long sections of bamboo and cover them with aluminum foil, which is not bad actually, Eric, worked very well. And you can create dip holes from that. You can create beams from that. You can do a whole lot, Eric, with bamboo and aluminum foil. And so that's the way I operated for any number of years as KR6BK on the island of Okinawa. And

those were pretty good condition times. You could typically work any day you wanted into California, no problem at all.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So what brought you back to the United States?

Art Bell W6OBB:

My radio career. Now, if you want to get anywhere in radio, probably Okinawa as a launching point career-wise is not the ideal place. So if you ever really want to get anywhere, you've got to come back to the continental United States and begin getting on bigger and bigger and bigger radio stations. And that's exactly what I did. I slowly climbed the ladder of rock and roll in those days and enjoyed it very much. Now, I was up and down the dialect, WKRP, for example. I was in so many states and I kept moving to a slightly bigger, slightly bigger, slightly bigger radio station. And spent about total of, I would guess, 20 years, Eric, doing rock and roll. That first class radio telephone license served me well and got me in a lot of doors that would not have opened otherwise.

I did quite a bit actual engineering, considered myself to be a pretty decent audio engineer and was hired by some stations to just work on their audio chains and would travel and do that. Now, what I really loved was being on the air, Eric. And so I did pretty well. I went not all the way as far as one might go in the rock and roll world, but I was almost got a job in New York City, actually auditioned for WABC in New York. Didn't make it, but auditioned, worked for XETRA down in Tijuana, worked for New Haven, WABZ, which at that particular time was a pretty decent job, to be honest with you.

And so up and down the dial and did about 20 years total of rock and roll. And then one day, Eric, somebody asked me if I thought I could do talk, if I thought I could do a talk show. This was up in Anchorage, Alaska at KENI, pretty good size station in Anchorage actually, Eric. And so I did a talk show and it was immensely successful. And then I came back to the lower part of the U.S., again, this is really where the action is worked in the Monterey area doing talk.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I want to take a minute to tell you about my favorite podcast, the Ham Radio Workbench podcast with George KJ6VU and now joined by Rod VA3ON, Mike VA3MW, Mark N6MTS, and Vince VE6LK. Every two weeks, George and Company offer up a status report on the many amateur radio projects on their workbenches and explore projects on their guests workbenches. This group is project active and prolific covering many technical areas of amateur radio. So the next time you want a deep dive into ham radio, electronic project building, or to learn about technology tools, test equipment, construction techniques, and the rest, listen to the Ham Radio Workbench podcast available on every podcast player and channel. Use the link in this week's show notes page to get to the Ham Radio Workbench podcast directly. And now back to my QSO. What did you talk about? Because it's my understanding that you actually changed gears on talk?

Art Bell W6OBB:

I did. I began in talk radio the way everybody in those days began. And that was with political talk radio. And so I talk politics, I don't care. I got interested in it. It was fun. You could have on the air fights. It was pretty wild. So that's what I did. And then I took a break after all these years in radio. I was married at the time, it was no life because you had to keep moving from town to town and, again, up and down the aisle, right? No sort of life to continue with. So I said, okay, that's it. I'm getting out of radio. I went to work in Las Vegas, Nevada, for a cable company, and I became their chief technician. I built their, what's called their head end. That's where all the video processors are. It's where all the satellite antennas are. It's where the microwave shots are. Cars, band, microwave, pretty big facility actually, Eric,

And I worked my way up. I became the chief technician after I built everything. And I took care of it for a number of years. When I was building that facility, Eric, I loved it. It was all technical stuff. I was off to school at Hughes [inaudible] and learning all sorts of new things and doing all sorts of new things. And every day was a new adventure. Unfortunately, after I built it and I had a large crew of people working for me, I began to get bored, Eric. Sitting around waiting for something to break. Very well paid frankly, but I don't know, it started to get boring. So one day I got a call from a friend of mine whose name was Jack Daniels, I think he may still be around.

And he was working at KDWN in Las Vegas, Nevada. And it was, and I believe still is a talk station. Now, it's a 50,000 watt blow torch on 720 in Las Vegas. And he said, "Come on you. I know, I heard you did talk. Come on over. You don't have to take the job. Just do a talk show every morning during the week with me and let's see how you like it." Well, it was like a hook with a worm on it. And I bit really hard. I did do that talk show for about six months, Eric, during the day. And of course 50,000 watts is good, but from Las Vegas, after it covers Las Vegas, it goes out to the desert and stops, right? It can only go so far in the desert, even with 50,000 watts.

So after about six months, I knew this is what I wanted, Eric, and I went to my wife at the time and I told her that I was going to give up this really well paying job, and I was going to go and be on the radio. Well, that kind of did end my marriage, Eric. She thought I was absolutely out of my mind. I had a high paying job. Every benefit you could imagine, lots of security. I had built the cable company and I went to them and told them I was going to walk away, begin working, well, not for peanuts, but it would be peanuts plus not much. And she thought I was crazy. And ultimately that cost me the marriage.

But I went to work for KDWN, and every minute I was there, Eric, I had my eye, you mentioned the nighttime, I had my eye on the nighttime. Because while 50,000 watts goes out and covers Las Vegas, which is great, after that, it's just cactus. But aha at night, even though slightly directional, KDWN covered 13 states at night, 13 states.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That would be regarded as a clear channel station, right?

Art Bell W6OBB:

As close as you can get, there really aren't any exact clear channels left, but yes, huh-huh, that's right. Every night at sunset, we would have to throw a couple of switches and go

directional. I think we were protecting WGN in Chicago. By the way, Eric, I can't tell you how many nights I came within, I actually had my finger on the button. I worked at KDWN, Eric, for a total of 10 years. I worked late nights. I came to work at about 10 o'clock at night. I would go on the air at one o'clock in the morning and I'd frequently be on the air until six o'clock in the morning during talk radio.

And again, in the beginning, it was absolutely political. So I did that for a long time and really, really, really enjoyed myself and did very well in the ratings. But just for the hands out there, I thought I'd tell you, Eric, there were about 10 or 15 times that I actually went over to the console, put my finger on the switch that would turn us non-directional because I wanted to see if I could get calls from other parts of the country. I came within just that much of turning that baby non-directional. I can't tell you how many times, but I was in mortal fear of the Federal Communications Commission, and I was sure they would come marching in and chop my head off within minutes. So I never did do it. I'm kind of still, sorry, I didn't, frankly.

So what happened, Eric, is here I am pretty successful doing this nighttime show, being heard across the 13 states as advertised, getting a lot of calls. And one day I got bored with politics. I said, "Not another night, not another five hours of politics. No." So I had a friend, you may have heard the name or know the name, Lear, as in Learjet. Well, John Lear is the son of the man who put together an owned Learjet, John Lear. And John has some unusual ideas about virtually everything, including UFOs, including Area 51 that I'm very close to as I speak to you right now, and the things that have gone on out there.

So I thought, I wonder what'll happen. Now, bear in mind, the owners of KDWN were conservatives. They ran that as a conservative radio station. Anything else was heresy. So I thought, well, just one night, let me give it a try. And I had John Lear on. I thought, how interesting would it be to talk about Area 51 to talk about UFOs, to talk about all sorts of different things. So I had them on, and that was the beginning of the end, Eric. I began getting so many calls that, well, we had an 800 line that was back in the days when you had to have an 800 line if you wanted out of state calls. That's how you got them. And I kept doing these kinds of topics, and about a month into it, Eric, of course, my boss was going totally berserk, not wanting me to do this, ordering me not to do this, threatening to fire me.

And by the way, they did fire me. I think three and perhaps four times. Problem was, Eric, the ratings were so good. During the day, the radio station had virtually no ratings. At night when I was on, we were number one. Everybody loved it. Well, everybody except the owners, they hated it. Absolutely hated it. You can imagine some very staunch conservatives trying to answer to their friends how their radio station was talking about UFOs and things of that sort at night. It drove them crazy.

Eric 4Z1UG:

About what year was this?

Art Bell W6OBB:

By the time we were talking about this sort of thing, it would've been the mid nineties. So I was taken in there and fired at least four times, Eric, and then almost immediately rehired.

I remember one day that somebody came to me and said, "Art, we love your show. The Concorde, the Supersonic Concorde is going to be in Las Vegas, and then making a trip to Paris, France, and guess what? We're going to get you and the lady friend of your choice onto the Concorde and go to Paris." And so I went to the lady who owns a show, the station rather, and I said, "Look, I've got this chance to go to Paris for free on the Concorde Supersonic." One of the last flights actually, Eric, and I'm going to go, it means I'm going to miss a night, maybe two nights of radio. And she said, "No." I said, "Okay. Then I quit." She said, "You're fired."

And so I left. I went to Paris. I had a ball. I came back home and got immediately rehired. Okay, so I spent a total of 10 years at that radio station, two or three of them talking about UFOs and the paranormal and weird stuff, Eric. And it was so much fun. It was so different. And from that, I began to get syndicated. I began to suddenly show up in Phoenix. I had a fellow who syndicated me. So then I was in LA, then I was in Seattle, then I was in Portland. Then I began going east. And before you know it, I think I was on about 530 radio stations, something like that.

So radio has treated me very, very well, Eric. I would say to anybody out there, a ham, anybody interested in radio, if this is what you're going to do, then good luck. You mentioned the late night thing. I actually felt guilty after a while, Eric, because the fact that I was so successful at that time, working for Premier Radio Networks, Clear Channel Corporation, that if I'm on 530 radio stations, I am taking jobs away from 530 people, and they're probably starter type jobs. And so I actually felt guilty about that, but...

Eric 4Z1UG:

Right in the middle of the night, I think that's where I actually first heard you was I used to fly into cable systems that I operated in the Midwest in the nineties and would have to drive from the St. Louis Airport out into Indiana or Illinois. And there you were.

Art Bell W6OBB:

There I was indeed. And so, I guess, people can look me up on QRZ, but I'm still at this time a very, very active ham, Eric. I guess I should add that I had yet another pretty good DX experience. I'm married to a Filipino lady, beautiful Filipino lady. I ended up, after the white father was married to some years ago in 2006, passed away, very sad. I met this Filipino lady and I decided, what the heck? I'm going to the Philippines. So met her after talking with her for a long time and decided, well, you know what, why don't I live in the Philippines for a while? That should be fun.

This is as I'm, let's see, 65 years old, no, 62 years old. And so, I guess, I've spent a total of three or four years in the Philippines, Eric, and again, ham radio was with me. I had all kinds of good radios in the Philippines. Got them over there by hook or crook. And more times than not, it's crook because it's not easy getting them in over there. The Philippines is still sort of operated by a bit of graft here and there. So you have to grease a palm to get in what you want to get in, which is what I did. I had a condo, Eric. In fact, I still own that condo up on the 19th floor, 19 of 20 floors in Manila.

And I actually, I guess I should hang my head when I say this. In order to get on the air, I snuck up to the roof of our condominium, very modern, very nice, sort of reeled a rope

until my wife could get her hands on it, tied a coax onto the rope and had her yank pull it on down into the window. If you can imagine on this modern condo. Here's a coax going up to the roof, and I snuck an antenna up there. I was at the very, very peak of the roof. They had no idea it was there, Eric, just a dipole to begin with.

And finally, they about had cats and dogs when they saw it, they got hold of their lawyer, made me take it down. About a year later, I did manage to get a real antenna up there, a two meter 440, which was great, and a multi-band dipole. Ultimately, however, even though I caused not one moment of angst nor problem for of any sort, I was ordered to take it down by the board of directors and their attorney. And so I had to take it down, and that's really why I came back to the U.S. But while I was over there, I took the test, Eric, and became 4F1AB, four Foxtrot one Alpha Bravo. And you can only do that when you originally get to Philippines. They dubbed me DU1/W6OBB and I got so sick of saying that, that I studied for the Philippine test, the highest class test they've got and passed it.

And that's how I became 4F1AB. A lot easier to say than DU1/W6OBB. And I operated from there until, as I mentioned, the lawyer made me take the antennas down, and this will give you a sense of how much I love ham radio. When they told me I had to take my antennas down, Eric, I said, "Okay, then goodbye." I would've stayed in the Philippines to this very day, Eric, if they had allowed me my antennas. I had delivered unto them, and it was my fault. I had the multi-band antenna and the two meter 440 antenna and all was well. And then I thought, well, okay, if I got that, then why don't I get an engineer? They love local engineers.

So I got a local engineer who designed a tower and a tri band antenna beam along with a dipole, and all of this well designed, paid for, submitted it to the board of the directors board of directors, said, "We didn't, no, you had an antenna up there. Not only can you not have this, but you've got to take down what you've got up." And I was devastated. And so that's how my wife and I decided to come back to the U.S.

Eric 4Z1UG:

We'll return to our guests in just a moment. Nuts and Volts Magazine is a new sponsor and it's an amazing resource for new and old hams alike. Click on the banner to get your online or paper subscription of Nuts and Volts. A new way to show your support of the QSO Today podcast is to buy me a coffee. I consume gallons of coffee to create this weekly podcast. Invite me for coffee by pushing the yellow button. Buy me a coffee on the QSO Today show notes page, and now back to our QSO Today. Were you involved with the ham radio community there and what did you think?

Art Bell W6OBB:

I was. I think that they're quite a nice bunch actually, and they've got unusual operating habits as compared to the U.S. I'll tell you a funny story. When I first got my antenna up, Eric, I would listen every day during the day, during the morning and afternoon to 2015 and 10 meters, hoping upon hope for an opening of some kind. This is before we had the recent uptick in conditions, and I wouldn't hear a thing. The bands were shut down tight as a drum. And so one night I went in, there had to be about, I think it was seven, eight o'clock at night, something like that. The sun at that latitude reliably goes down at six

o'clock. Anyway, suddenly 2015 and a few signals were there on 10 meters at eight o'clock at night, and I went, "What?" Well, it turns out, Eric, that down at that latitude, that part of the world, those bands strangely open up at night. And so I had been checking day in and day out, not hearing a thing, and suddenly I discovered they were open at night and away I went.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Could we go back to broadcast radio for just a second?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Sure can.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Broadcast radio and talk radio, it seems as kind of morphed over time. Can you speak about the changes that you see in the industry and where talk is headed?

Art Bell W6OBB:

I think that live talk, Eric, is going to be fine. Where it's headed, that's a harder question. I think that here in the U.S., AM radio is on its way out, Eric, I think it's on the way out. I think it's going to be replaced by the digital modes. That process is well underway now. Talk, it's just talk. It will always be around. It's a matter of how it's delivered. So I think that a lot of what's on AM now is going to shift to FM in the U.S. I can't speak for the worldwide situation here in the U.S., it's going to go to FM and there it will be for a period of time.

Then finally, I think everything's going to move to the digital modes. Here we all carry around these phones that at this point in my career, I consider all those phones kind of like little portable radios of old. How frequently now does one go down the street and see somebody holding a portable radio up to their ear the way he did when, well, when I was young anyway, Eric. That was a frequent site. Now it's the phone they're holding or little earbuds in and listening as they stroll down the street. So the world is changing, and these little phones are the new portable radios.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What do you think of podcasting and its ability to track a worldwide audience?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Well, podcasting is still not caught up to radio, but it's catching up quickly. Of course, my most recent effort, something called Midnight in the Desert, was done as a, I won't say as a podcast, Eric, because I did it live. But then of course, we would allow people for a small fee to purchase copies of the show later, and so what do I think of it? I love it. You can do high quality work, you can do it live, you can do it and make money. I think that it's got a wonderful future.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What's next for Art Bell professionally?

Art Bell W6OBB:

I'm not sure. I never know, Eric. Professionally, I may go back and do, I think I'm probably going to end up doing a weekly show instead of trying to do it five nights a week, which that's a lot, Eric, at my age, that's a lot. So I may end up doing one or two shows a week, something like that. Just kind of keep my hand in.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, if you're doing a podcast, Art, it wouldn't be hard for you to attract an audience. I think at your peak, you had 15 million listeners on a night when you were on 530 syndicated stations.

Art Bell W6OBB:

Correct.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I'll look forward to your podcast. I was a time traveler. The time traveler is someone who pays for the podcast version, which is what I liked when you were on up until December.

Art Bell W6OBB:

Well, we had a problem here. We had somebody who either did not want me on the air or has a personal grudge and took a shot at me, that was kind of discouraging. I don't like getting shot at it. I had that experience when I was young, and that was enough for me. So somebody took a potshot at me. I had several bad experiences, and so I stopped doing the, we'll call it a podcast for the sake of conversation. But I'm going to go back and I'm going to do a show or two a week, Eric. I'm born into radio, and I'm sure until my last day I'll be doing it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

On your QRZ page, you show an elaborate farm of wire antennas in your desert location. What antennas do you have on your property?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Well, I've got a hundred foot radio tower, single tower, and on that tower, I've got a KLM log periodic. I've got a six meter beam. I've got a two meter, 440, 1200 antenna at the very top, and then I use that a hundred foot tower as the main support for my very, very large antenna. I think I may have the largest private loop antenna, actually double loop made of number 10 wire that completely encircles a five acre piece of land, Eric. What can I say? It's kick butt antenna. There's, I believe that it's actual resonant point, believe it or not, is six 40 down in the AM dial, and again, it's made of number 10 wire. It's a double loop. The wires are separated by about seven feet. It was inspired by W6AM I don't know if you know that call sign?

Eric 4Z1UG:

Sure, I do.

Art Bell W6OBB:

Okay. Read his book and that inspired my antenna. The antennas held up by a total of 13 towers, and those towers are about 76 feet tall a piece. Again, each one's supporting this double loop, and it's an amazing antenna, Eric, I don't know what to tell you. It's simply amazing. It'll make a hundred watts sound like several thousand. It's that effective, and I put it up mainly for 160, 80, and 40. I really, really love 160 meters. I love 75 meters, and I spent a great deal of time on 75, and I want to talk briefly if I can, Eric, about my lost love, and when I say lost love, that's 75 meters. There are some pretty bad actors on 75 meters here in the U.S, Eric. Both, I believe on the East Coast and the West Coast.

We suffer a particular dysfunction here on the West Coast of people who seem more like they want to harm ham radio than they do as they claim help it. They use bad language, they have bad manners. They are not what I would call part of the fraternity of amateur radio. Now, the commission has made some recent moves to try and clean some of this up, but frankly, it has not yet been cleaned, and as a result, I built this, God, I don't know how much I spent on that antenna, Eric. I bet I spent \$20,000 total on that antenna, and it was to have fun on 75 meters. But fun for me does not include bad language. It does not include jamming. It does not include the bad behavior that you can see exhibited up and down the 75 meter and to some degree, the 40 meter band, to some degree even the 20 meter band. So I'm not sure what's happened to amateur radio to hams that once were well-behaved and part of a fraternity. I don't know what's going on, Eric.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, I seem to remember in the seventies when I got started, even when I was a novice, I used to listen to 80 meters at night in California. I think there was even that stuff going on then.

Art Bell W6OBB:

There was, to a far lesser degree, we have become somewhat of a less civil society in the U.S. and, I guess, it's a reflection of the less civil society. That's all I can say, but I hope the commission cleans it up and they're making noises as though they may do so. One wonders though, because it seems as though the FCC here in the U.S. is doing less enforcing closing offices and not doing, well, frankly, what people like myself hope they would do.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, you would think considering what the FCC charges for channels when they sell spectrum at auction, that they would put some of that money back into their enforcement division?

Art Bell W6OBB:

Yes. Well, they don't. There was a day when you had to, you actually got charged if you wanted a ham license. When you applied for a license, you had to pay a certain fee. They eliminated that fee, and I always thought that, well, maybe that had something to do with the fact that no money was going into enforcement. I don't know, but I would gladly pay whatever to see that enforcement is done. I don't know. It's just kind of discouraging, and so as a result, I don't go on the 75 meter band and very rarely now on 40, so I built all of that and it sits up there to a large degree unused because of the kind of behavior I just talked about, one hopes one day that will change.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you see yourself going back to CW or the digital modes, anything like that?

Art Bell W6OBB:

No. As I mentioned to you, CW was an interesting thing for me. I used it, of course, every day, every hour that I was awake as a novice, and it came to me very easily, but it always struck me as a, frankly, slow way to communicate. I'm a talker now, what can I say? I'm a talker, so I prefer AM, I prefer sideband, which of course, I'm on now and I prefer, for example, I'm very much into high fidelity audio and the commission, and I have had go rounds about that because when I say high fidelity audio, I'm thinking of four kilohertz type audio, which can be made to sound virtually pretty close to a broadcast type signal if you work at it. It's just another aspect of the hobby, and I worry that the AWL would like to see us get more and more narrow. If they had their way, I think we'd be transmitting nothing over about a kilohertz wide.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you have an AM broadcast transmitter on 160 or 80?

Art Bell W6OBB:

No, I don't. I, of course, for many years had exactly that. Right now what I've got is what most people or many people would have if they had the money. I've got a Yaesu FTDX9000 delta. I've got an Icom 7800. I've got an Alpha 77 Amp, and then I've got really good antenna, so I get out really well, Eric, really well.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Sounds great. If you were looking back on your younger ham radio self, is there anything that you would've done differently or something in the hobby that you would pursue that you're not pursuing now?

Art Bell W6OBB:

No, I don't think so. I've stuck my hand in almost every aspect of the hobby. I've been on, I went through the slow scan television phase. I went into [inaudible] television. I've been into the various digital modes, so I've sort of examined every aspect of ham radio I can. We've sent radios up on balloons. We've done all sorts of fun things. It's never ending. This

is one hobby that will continue to deliver the fun your entire life. I'm not sure how many hobbies can make that claim, but this one certainly can.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, I think you're right. Is there any advice you would give to new or returning hams to the hobby?

Art Bell W6OBB:

That's an interesting question. What advice would I give? I worry a little bit that the medium that you and I are using right now, the internet, Eric, may supplant ham radio to some degree. But for me, and I can only make my own claim, there is still the magic of radio going through the air. No matter how good the internet gets, it's not doing it through the air. So what would my advice be? I guess, it would be discover the magic of radio going through the air because we do have the internet. It's convenient. You and I can talk at thousands of miles and it sounds great, but it's not going through the air, so if you really want to know what radio's all about, ham radio's the way to find out.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Actually tell people that when we're using Skype, we're only using a trillion dollars worth of infrastructure to talk from one end of the world to the other, but a ham can throw a piece of wire out the back window and talk around the world.

Art Bell W6OBB:

That's right. I hope that sort of magical thinking continues, Eric. I worry again that the internet, as you point out, seems to be what's attracting young people, but Eric, I still run into young people, even people who are into the internet who look at a radio and they go, "Oh my God. You can talk to people around the world on that?" "Yes, I can. Want to see?"

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you have neighborhood kids that show an interest in ham radio where you are?

Art Bell W6OBB:

We do have neighborhood kids. It's been a long time since I mentored anybody. My wife has a license. She was licensed also in the Philippines, took the test and passed, but as most wives, I think she did it because she knew it would please me, not because the hobby electrified her as it has me all my life.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I get that. Well, Art, it's been a true pleasure to have you on as a guest on the QSO Today podcast. With that, I want to thank you very much and wish you 73.

Art Bell W6OBB:

73, Eric, and thank you.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That concludes this episode of QSO Today. I hope that you enjoyed this QSO with Art. Please be sure to check out the show notes that include links and information about the topics that we discussed. Go to www.qsotoday.com and put in W6OBB in the search box at the top of the page. My thanks to Icom America for their continued support of the QSO Today podcast.

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