

How Illness Brought Me to Ham Radio

By Mike Jackson

In February 2006 I was given a grim diagnosis from my doctor. She told me I had cancer (Non Hodgkins Lymphoma, a blood cancer) and needed to see an oncologist as soon as possible. So, she scheduled an appointment with one in Kingsport who discussed my condition and began scheduled rounds of chemotherapy that lasted for two years. Fortunately, the treatments and subsequent medical procedures were successful, and I have been in remission since. But this is not the end of my brief story.

When I learned that I had cancer, I had just checked into amateur radio and had contacted the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) because I did not know anyone in ham radio. The ARRL put me in touch with Jim Flannary (K4GV) with the Scott County (VA) Amateur Radio Society who gave my name to Mike Van Winkle (W4HV) who was teaching newcomers to amateur radio who were studying for their Technician license.

Mike, who is a Silent Key, guided me through my studies of the popular Gordon West Tech book, the learning of Morse Code because I planned to work on my General Class ticket that still had the Code requirement, and was one of the volunteer VEs at my exam in Scott County. He was also one of my first contacts on the Gate City 146.820 repeater.

Before I took my Tech exam, however, I thought about giving up my plans to enter ham radio because as my doctor said, "you've got a tough road ahead during treatments," and I wanted to focus all my attention on my health rather than ham radio. However, a mutual friend of my wife Betty Jackson (KI4PWN) who worked with her at the Holston Valley Medical Center, Mike Darnell KE4ICS, convinced me to "keep at it and stay the course" as he put it and

pass my exam. I recall Mike telling me that the best thing about ham radio is that his wife Lisa had her license, and that Betty could get her license. That would provide a way for us to keep in touch when she was at work and I was either at home or at treatments.

In short, I continued my studies with Mike Van Winkle, earned my Tech license in April of 2006, and then I helped Betty study and pass her test late June of that year. A year and a half later I passed my General Class exam and completed the Code requirement. Betty and I became active in the Kingsport Amateur Radio Club and quickly found a host of good friends in this exciting and rewarding hobby.



So, in a way, I believe my cancer diagnosis and Mike Darnell's urging pushed me onward to continue learning and passing my exam while fighting and winning my battle with this terrible disease.

Pictured at left is my first radio Betty Jackson KI4PWN bought me in 2006, a Yaesu VX-7R that still works!