

## IN THE BEGINNING!

Remember when you were in the fourth grade and you got the opportunity to take music lessons? You wanted to play the trumpet but your mom talked you into the clarinet. If your parents were cautious, they rented that licorice stick for a couple of months, just in case you became bored or failed to demonstrate the skill of Benny Goodman. If they were too optimistic you probably still have an old clarinet collecting dust in the attic.

### Get to the point Skip!!!

Kids today grow up with many activities and gadgets to occupy their time. How can you get a young person to become interested in the radio hobby in a world that includes *Teenage Ninja Turtles*? And further, once you drag them kicking and screaming from in front of the television set, how do you get them rolling without "buying the clarinet" so to speak? This looks like a job for...

### Uncle Skip's Children's Guide to AM DXing

Okay, so right off the jump I have alienated the other aspects of the hobby. Sorry folks, before you go writing Larry Miller consider the fact that AM radio listening remains the easiest, cheapest, and "quickest to learn" of the radio hobbies. Remember that television has patterned kids into about a three minute attention span.

AM broadcast listening can be learned on almost any inexpensive radio. Initially the young person will be dealing with 10 kHz frequency splits so you can live with limited selectivity for a while. The 10 kHz split, coupled with mandatory regular station identification makes getting around the dial easy enough that you can use analog readout.

You are probably wondering why I am not recommending that you let your newcomer to the hobby play with your communications receiver. The fact is that all those buttons and the more advanced signal capturing and processing capabilities might overload the novice's noggin. We want to



The Radio Shack long distance AM portable is a very popular medium wave receiver

hook the youngster on the idea of listening, not just hardware.

If you want to go out and buy a specific radio you might poke around any Radio Shack affiliated stores for their recently discontinued "long distance AM portable." Sold under model numbers 12-655 and 12-656, this low cost receiver has an FEI tuned RF stage that makes it ideal for fairly serious listening. You will note that I stated the affiliated stores specifically because they tend to keep some of the older stuff on their shelves.

You might check out your local discount store for the General Electric SUPERADIO -- also discontinued but available. But don't get too hung up on the box, Bunkey! Any good quality portable with AM will be all you need to get a kid going.

### The Hook

Some evening after dinner, take the radio and the kid to the corner of your house that is as far away from the television set as you can get. This not only does wonders for the child's attention span, it cuts down on interference from the TV's innards that can be heard within the AM broadcast spectrum.

Start poking around the band. Look specifically between the known locals. In a minute or two you will probably run across a 50 KW station from several states away. This is the critical moment.

When this distant station IDs, you will see the kid's eyes start to twinkle. They will say something like, "How can you hear Chicago in New Jersey?"

Don't push into a deep conversation on propagation anomalies. Just smile and say, "Let's see what else we can hear."

That's it! They are hooked! After two or three more clear channel powerhouses you might recommend making a list of the stations you are hearing. After about a half hour you should be able to leave the room and let the young'un start browsing for himself.

Stay close though, because sooner or later the kid will come looking for you with about a hundred questions. Be patient. After you answer all the questions you might want to point out that this is a hobby and begin to explain how to listen and keep track of your listening.

*Hook the youngster on the idea of listening, not just hardware . . .*

### Beginner's Strategy

Now that your beginner actually wants to listen, you can begin to demonstrate how to listen smart. A good start for a budding broadcast band DXer is to develop *bandscans*. These are lists of commonly heard stations.

The first and easiest bandscan would be of all stations heard during normal daylight hours. Next you'll want to generate bandscans for after dark. Ideally you will want scans for before and after midnight but some parents might frown on letting their kids stay up that late. Don't worry, once the kid is hooked he or she will be sneaking a few listens after bedtime.

In developing the bandscans you will have already logged a good chunk of stations. You will now know what is normally out there in the air. Now the fun really begins.

The kid can now begin to look over, under, and around the regulars for other stuff. If the child has not already figured it out, demonstrate how to null out some stations by reorienting the receiver's internal ferrite rod antenna (in simple terms, turn the radio around). Now you can hear more than one station on any given frequency just by moving the radio around on the table top.

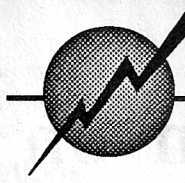
With all these stations to keep track of, it is important to help your beginner with record keeping. Teach them to log time, frequency, local conditions, and program content in addition to the call letters of the station.

If your kid is going to go after QSLs, the most useful data to help a station verify reception remains the time and nature of any commercials broadcast. Station logs vary quite a bit from station to station since the FCC deregulated the practice but you can bet every station keeps track of the commercials they air so they can charge the customer.

The QSL game can be a little tricky in BCBlund. If you write an accurate and complete report of what you have heard and include return postage (an SASE is even better) you will usually get some acknowledgment of reception. Many stations will even have QSL cards.

Wouldn't a map of the United States surrounded by QSL cards from across the nation make an interesting school project? Stations will sometimes send along coverage maps or promotional items and young people seem to enjoy collecting these items as much as the veries. Be sure to teach your young person the value of courteous reception reports.

Within the hobby there are a few stations that are notorious for not answering reception reports even if you send along a preprinted confirmation card. Such stations can only be logged and verified by



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taping. You won't have to prove anything to anybody because these stations don't verify for anyone else either.

Keep up to date on what's happening in the industry. A good place to find out this sort of information is *Monitoring Times'* domestic radio column, "American BandScan." It's an easy-going two pages and author Larry Miller welcomes your comments, questions and observations. The column will also help the new hobbyist learn about the more advanced aspects of BCB DXing such as Graveyard spotting, Pre-sunrise authority, antenna systems, station tests, and foreign DX.

### Moving On

Now your budding DXer is on a roll. Loggings are piling up. The first thing checked when coming in from school is the mail. A little of the allowance is getting set aside to buy a better receiver. Maybe it's time for you to start letting on that there is such a thing as the shortwave spectrum. It might be time to check with local amateur radio operators about novice license classes in your area. After all, you have helped to open the door to an exciting new world.

Start your youngster on a steady diet of *Monitoring Times* and it won't be long until he or she is helping you with your listening habits. The child becomes father to the man.

