



The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



Hobby or utility?

There was a time when people got involved in amateur radio because of the electronic tinkering, the building, and the sheer joy of making a wireless contact with another. Even today, many get interested for the same reasons, because maybe they have an inner desire to learn and make stuff. For these folks, amateur radio was *an end*; that is, it was the goal.

But today, it seems most get interested in amateur radio because of its *utility*, as in family and emergency preparedness, a need to communicate with loved ones during hikes, and helping with events, such as marathons and other races. For these hams, amateur radio is a *means to an end*; that is, it's a *tool* to help them reach a goal.

Ok, so, which is it to you? I recently started a poll on FB, asking for which of these two (or other) reasons people got into the craft of ham radio. The responses weren't terribly surprising, but they did offer a few insights.

It's a hobby

One of the biggest reasons I used to hear people tell me, about why they started, and stayed with, amateur radio, is that *they could*. Ham radio seemed to be within the reach of the common folk, for whom even a little electronics knowledge went a long way.

My grandpa originally got me interested in ham radio because he was fascinated with how stuff works. But life, being what it is, took a toll on my time, and my grandpa's passing found my interests leaning elsewhere, like school, girls, cars, and the Army.

It's a utility

Even though my grandpa got me interested because of the hobby, a good friend, Jim

N7XGA got my wife and me back into the craft because of the utility of EmComm (emergency communication) for our stake trek in Wyoming.

At last, I turned to my wife Lisa KR5LYS, the undisputedly most intelligent person on the Earth today, and she mentioned the *social aspect* of amateur radio. In light of the shut-ins and crippled and medically house-bound friends I have, I realized what a genius she is, no surprise there.

Amateur radio has become a lifeline to these good folks, and others who rely on radio for friendship, and who might otherwise find themselves in a very lonely world. Yes, of course ham radio is a social medium. Some of these impaired folks have cast off ham radio years ago, only to jump back into the craft after remembering how radio bridged that social handicap.

Does it really matter?

So, back to my question for you: which is it? And more importantly, is that reason enough to keep your interest going in the craft?

To me, I suppose it doesn't really matter why a person gets into ham radio, so long as he or she finds it to be something that can fill a need, inside or out. The problem I'm trying to solve is how to make ham radio *relevant* enough to people, so that they can continue finding it either useful or fun...or both.

At this point in my life, amateur radio is a tool for emergency communication that's also a fun, social hobby. Guess I can find enjoyment in all aspects, but for these reasons, I no longer refer to amateur radio as strictly a hobby. What about you?

— Noji Ratzlaff, KNØJI (kn0ji@arrl.net)