

# Life After Death: A New Beginning

Amateur Radio brings one ham back from the edge of oblivion.

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**A**fter nearly three years, I was back on the air. Not on CW, my favorite mode, but on the air, nevertheless. I was really on the air! It was a wonderful day! I'll never forget it! I might call it a miracle! My wife, Terri, helped me find the microphone and carefully guided my hand to the transmit switch. I pressed the button and gingerly put out a CQ. Thanks to my enthusiasm for Amateur Radio, I was regaining control over my brain. This was a major victory, following a long battle with a near-fatal affliction.

With my home-health aide, I had purchased an HF transceiver. George Howard, WK1M, and Rich Harkins, N1FHG, had set up my station and erected antennas. Everything was ready for my great adventure of getting back into ham radio. But getting back among the living was my adventure of adventures.

## Rapidly Fading Signals

My problem began at about 4:30 AM, January 15, 1988. I awoke with an exceedingly rapid heartbeat. For an hour, I tried to break up the rhythm, but failed, so I hollered for Terri. When Terri asked me for my heart rate, I tried to feel my pulse and said, "I haven't any! Call the ambulance!"

Gradually I seemed to be going into a long, dark tunnel. At the other end of the tunnel, a bright light glowed. I slowly advanced toward the light. Just as I reached the light, about to emerge from the darkness of the tunnel, I heard a voice say, "It's not your time yet. Go back." And then there was total silence. No rapidly beating heart, no bright light, no sound, no tunnel, no pain.

A week later, I began to come out of my coma. I was in Griffin Hospital, in Derby, Connecticut, where I had been rushed by the Oxford Ambulance Corps. I had suffered a cardiac arrest. My heart had been stopped for more than 12 minutes. In response to my

cries, Terri had dialed 911 and started CPR. This procedure was only partially successful because the soft surface of the bed didn't provide firm support. My brain received a greatly reduced blood supply until the medics arrived and applied their electric paddles and administered oxygen. They had to try three times before they could start my ailing heart, converting my "flat line" to something approaching "normal cardiac rhythm."

## Output Almost Zero

Coming out of the coma, I had no idea where I was, who I was or what had happened. I could move, but only spastically. I could only see shadows. I couldn't remem-

ber respiration returned to a semblance of normal, but I still couldn't see, control my movements or remember anything about my past accurately.

When the doctors were certain that my condition had stabilized, I was transferred to Gaylord Rehabilitation Hospital in Wallingford, Connecticut. For 5½ months, I was an inpatient there. This was followed by 8 months as an outpatient. The Gaylord doctors, nurses and therapists gradually improved my physical condition. With their remarkable skills, they taught me to stand, to walk with a rolling walker and to operate a wheelchair. What I could remember of my past remained a jumble. Still legally blind, I could tell light from dark and recognize

bright colors. Yet I couldn't walk or even stand up alone. I could remember nothing of my past. For quite a while, I didn't know my wife of 13 years—I didn't even remember I was married.

Finally, Gaylord officials decided they had done all they could for me. Further improvement would be up to me. All I could expect was a gradual change in my predicament over a long, drawn-out period. It would be like melting a glacier all by myself. So I returned home to Oxford.

I could sit up in a wheelchair, I could hear and I could talk a little, but I still couldn't stand alone, I

couldn't see and I couldn't remember my past. I required constant help in my daily living. Because a wheelchair doesn't navigate stairs well, we had to find a different house. After a long search and several false starts, we moved into our present home in Ansonia, Connecticut—an accommodating ranch-style house. A ramp was built so I could be wheeled in and out the front door.

## Ham Radio Gets Through

In the meantime, Terri, my ever-helpful, ever-loving wife, persisted in her belief that



Nat Wadsworth, WK1X, works toward his SSB WAS award. (W1NFG photo)

ber a thing. After a couple of days, my mind began to clear a bit. I kept screaming, "Get me back to the ship on time!" I thought I was still in the Navy, and was AWOL.

I lay there, more or less vegetating, for more than a month. My only exercise was when the nurses and therapists gently moved my arms and legs. If they pulled a tensed arm away from my body, it would snap back like a steel spring! This condition later led to my being dubbed "The Human Pretzel." Medication and rest, little by little, improved my vital signs. Heartbeat, blood pressure and

there was something that needed to be done, and could be done, to improve the functioning of my damaged brain. After searching for months, she entered me in the Jill Cohn Center for Head Injury Rehabilitation at New Haven. That was in March 1990. Under the scrutiny of Dr Eugene Piasetsky and his staff of specialists, I underwent a series of sensory tests, which ultimately reawakened my connection to Amateur Radio.

As I was being given the umpteenth hearing test, the clinician had me listen to a taped narration of Christopher Columbus' discovery of America. An increasing amount of static was deliberately added. The professionals observed that I could hear exceptionally well and respond to what I heard, even when the static level was, by their standards, extreme. Something in my past had caused my sense of hearing and concentration to develop beyond average. When Terri mentioned that I'd been an Amateur Radio operator, they concluded that this was the explanation for the keen hearing. Hereafter, my ears would become my "eyes." A key and oscillator were brought in, and we found that the code was starting to come back to me! This was my first recollection of my life before the accident. It was in June 1990.

### Back on the Air

Then, another breakthrough! The next morning, at about 3:30, I suddenly woke up with my brain in an extremely agitated state. I shouted to Terri, "It's all coming back!" I remembered that I'd been an Amateur Radio operator since an early age, and that I'd been

a radio operator in the Navy. I knew I could operate a radio again. I knew I had been able, while in the Navy, to copy Morse code on the "mill" at 30 WPM. I remembered that I had earned a WAS certificate on CW many years before. Very literally, "It all came back to me." Who would ever guess that merely being a ham could ultimately become the key to returning from the threshold of being a Silent Key?

I remembered going to college and getting my degree from the University of Connecticut. I remembered my career in the computer business and as a writer of technical books. Doctors and mental therapists agreed that listening through the heavy QRN and recollection of the code had actually triggered the restoration of my memory and my ability to concentrate. After nearly three years, my mind was being restored, thanks to my experience as an Amateur Radio operator. My hands and fingers still weren't fully usable. I couldn't operate the keyboard of a computer or typewriter, a telegraph key, or even a pen or pencil, but I was able to talk and to use a microphone. This condition still applies today.

No one answered that first CQ, but I know it went out, as Terri watched the antenna wattmeter for me. My frustration was brief. Soon I started getting replies. Since that fateful day, I've had hundreds of excellent QSOs. With my new transceiver, I can operate on 10, 15, 20 and 80 meters. My next goal is to obtain a WAS award on SSB. In 18 months of operation, I have more than 40 states confirmed. In spite of my disability, slow speech and delays in responding, all the

amateurs I've met have treated me with patience and understanding. I'm proud to be a member of such a grand group of people. QSO by QSO, they're helping me reestablish my life.

My doctors tell me that operating my station is the ideal therapy. I still can't read or write, I have to remember everything: call signs, names, locations, signal reports, etc. Terri makes the log entries from my "notes." This mental exercise is slowly, constantly improving my ability to concentrate and to remember details. Under doctor's orders (and Terri's), I try to spend part of each day at the rig, enjoying ham radio, making new friends, pursuing my WAS and restoring my mind, which had been virtually destroyed. Can anyone find a more appropriate excuse to stay in the shack and on the air?

*Licensed at age 14 in 1957 as WN2QKV, Nat Wadsworth upgraded to Extra Class two years later. He ran away from home at age 17 to join the Navy, served as shipboard radio operator in the western Pacific, studied teletype repair and earned his high school equivalency diploma. Discharged from the service in 1961, Nat completed his education at the University of Connecticut and in 1973, founded his own company, SCLEBI, to develop and manufacture personal computers. When major manufacturers entered the field, he switched his efforts to creating software and instruction manuals for the PC industry. Before his cardiac arrest, Nat authored 17 textbooks relating to PCs. He held the call sign K1MOT at the time of his cardiac arrest in 1988. His present call sign, WK1X, was issued in 1991. He can be heard regularly on the Green Mountain Net.* 

## A Good Day at Effingham

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reported it to the governor, who called the president, who scrambled the 82nd Airborne from Fort Bragg.

While all this was happening, I had made my way to the municipal swimming pool. My engineering appreciation study of a certain human female in a pink bikini was interrupted by my pager, which abruptly sent me packing back to the courthouse with orders to get every grisly detail on film. As I drove back to the courthouse, I was, to say the least, somewhat perplexed. How could all that have happened in eight minutes?

When I arrived, I set my minicam up on the corner of Manassas and Chancellorsville streets. Everything was calm, and I saw Aubrey walk across the street with a pitcher of water and put out the fire in the trash can. Everything was peaceful. And then....

Twenty-eight fire engines, three aerials, four squads, 168 off-duty firefighters, four tanks, 596 National Guardsmen, 38 highway patrolmen dispatched by the governor and three Effingham police officers showed up at the same time and ran running and shouting into the building. I grabbed for my

camera in time to catch water coming out of a top story window, to see a desk sail out of another, along with much shouting and cursing, and a stream of disheveled civilians vigorously vacating the building.

When the dust died down, Col Beauregard, who commanded the Guardsmen, came out and made a statement. It seemed that the terrorists had escaped. No one had been injured, but they had done considerable damage to our new building. Fire Chief Wilson said that the fire damage was minimal, but water damage and doors that had been broken with axes were extensive. Damages were apt to exceed \$100,000.

As the only reporter at the scene, I got exclusive interviews. Col Beauregard praised Amateur Radio, for what reason I still don't know, since I hadn't gotten a chance to mention it. Chief Wilson said it would have happened differently without ham radio, and that radio amateurs provided needed communications. Mayor Goldberg showed up and said he hadn't seen so many fire trucks and National Guardsmen since the freedom riders came through in '62. This interview was interrupted by lead units of the 82nd Airborne, as their helicopters touched down on the square.

There were several interesting twists to the aftermath of the great invasion that I'm

sure you won't read about in the history books. The Army awarded one silver star, five bronze stars, one meritorious service medal and a purple heart that was earned when Clarence Waddell got hit on the head by Judge Claghorn's gavel. The council voted that since the conduct of the CB club was in question, it could no longer use the courtroom for its meetings, and its radios in Emergency Services and the squad room were to be returned. They took delivery and after listening to us for several days, called a press conference to announce that they were receiving transmissions from UFOs.

Master Patrolman Bennet was busted back to policeman recruit, and was busted again, in the nose by his brother-in-law. The director of Emergency Services was arrested by the FBI for trying to take out a contract on both of them. IQ tests were ordered for the evening shift.

Ham radio was praised as the means that made the whole thing possible, and the media talked it up for days, in a generally upbeat and favorable manner. License applications soared.

Aubrey sold his story to a major motion picture studio and retired to work DX from Tahiti. I won an award for broadcasting excellence and became news manager. All in all, it wasn't a bad day. 