

Bill Priebe, K9BTP, Silent Key

By Tom Macon, K9BTQ

Bill and I go back over 60 years. It will be hard to adjust to a world where he is not a phone call or a radio call away.

When I graduated from the eighth grade, my Dad bought me an S-38 (a basic shortwave receiver), which began my interest in radio. And through school and Explorer Scouts I came to know a guy with similar interests named Bill.

Besides his own interest in radio, Bill had an older brother Joe, who was a ham radio operator (W9YZS). With Joe as our mentor (called an “elmer” by hams), Bill and I spent a lot of time monkeying with old radios and learning how they worked.

A couple of years later, in the fall of 1955 (early high school), we both took the test for our Novice ham radio license, administered by Ray Frankenberg, W9RHT, another Rhinelander ham. We both passed and were assigned adjacent callsigns, KN9BTP and KN9BTQ. The following summer we again tested together for our General class licenses, passed and were able to shed the Novice “N” in our callsigns.

As luck would have it, Bill received his General “ticket” in the mail one day before I did. He immediately hopped on his bike, came to my house and put my station on the air on phone (voice) for the first time. I got to sit and watch. Over the years, Bill made sure I never forgot this experience.

After high school, I ended up settling in Milwaukee and during the busy family-raising years we didn’t connect very often. We did reconnect after retirement and one of the reconnections was a weekly radio conversation (QSO) every Wednesday morning on 75 meters. These weekly conversations were soon joined by other hams in and near Wisconsin and within a few months it evolved into a daily on-the-air group called the “Nut Net”. A bunch of nuts.



Bill with my S-38 receiver in 1954

On September 17, 1960 Bill married his high school sweetheart Jean Sparks and they made a family for almost fifty-seven years. They had four children; Mark, Julie, Katy and Christy. Bill and Jean also have twelve grandkids and seven great-grandkids

Bill was a 1960 graduate of Rhinelander High School and went on to work as a machinist at Printpack, Inc. for forty-three and a half years. He was loved and appreciated by everyone who knew him and was well known for being a hard worker, lover of water, motorcycles, airplanes and all things weather related. But above all, he was known as someone who cared for his wife, family and friends with the greatest of sincerity and love.

A memorial service for Bill was held Wednesday, July 5, 2017 at Grace Foursquare Church in Rhinelander.