



Betty Jo (Watts) Byrd, KB5CSQ

By

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Betty Jo Byrd (BJ to her friends and family) became a Silent Key in the early morning of December 6, 2018. Although she showed no symptoms, she suffered a massive heart attack at home.

BJ was 64 years young at the time of her passing. Stunned

and shocked are the only two words that can express the feelings of her family and ham radio friends. She was affectionately known as "MOM" to all of her very extended family. Her funeral was attended by over 450 visitors, to include over 50 hams.

From an early age, BJ loved horses. She had her first child's saddle from her pre-teens. She loved to participate in wagon trains and rodeos all over the region. She tended the horses that were entrusted to her in the family barn. Her family owned a western store where she helped out after school. Her family also owned a horse ranch just outside of Gulfport, MS. Although the horse farm is now inactive, she spent her entire life living on the property.

She loved all things pink. Her collection of pink pigs depicting Porky to an astronaut was very large. Friends would present her with pink gifts of all descriptions. Pink ink pens, pink Diawa watt meters, a pink Heil microphone, pink pig USB drives, pink USB cables, pink pig slippers, and the list continues. Each gift was met with a smile and word of thanks.

Betty Jo held an Amateur Extra Class license and kept her original call sign. She came from a multi-generation ham family. Her Father-in-Law, Melvin Byrd, W5MLB, husband Ed, KA5VFU, two sons, Robert, N5UDM, Steve, N5WGE, four grandchildren, Steve, KE5MVV, Rebecca, Technician Class, call sign not available, Hailey, KF5WTU, and Brandon, KF5NYQ, brother-in-law, David, WD5FBE (SK), Brother-in-law, Jerry, N5UCF, sister-in-law, GENE, AE5FB, sister-in-law, Karen, KE5MVR, and nephew Justin, KE5MWA.

Betty Jo held an Amateur Extra Class license. As such, she felt the need to give back to the hobby. She became an Elmer for young ladies and women hams in the local area. She headed a Volunteer Examination team to proctor ham radio license exams. She earned DXCC and other Amateur Radio awards. She loved operating RTTY, chasing DX, participating in YLRL radio events, and checking into various 2 meter nets. One of these radio nets was the Southern Mississippi YL 2 meter net.

As an XYL in an OM's hobby, she was keenly aware of the need to encourage other women and young girls to take up the hobby. She was the driving force behind the formation of the Southern Mississippi Young Ladies Radio Club, KB5MZ, (SMYL). The KB5MZ call sign was issued to one of Betty Jo's mentors, Bill Applebee. She organized YL/XYL only radio functions. The SMYL group operated ARRL Field Day events, held fund raiser bottle slumping events, as well as becoming affiliated with the ARRL and the Great Southern DX Association (K5GDX).

The SMYL club sponsored a weekly 2 meter radio net for YL's to practice operating on the radio so they can get over "mikc-fright". With the assistance of the radio net, several YL/XYL hams have been able to hold their own in the pile-ups to earn coveted wall paper for their shacks. Betty Jo also penned a column in the YLRL news publication. She was the YLRL district 5 representative, Betty Jo gave SMYL, and YLRL presentations at local club and hamfest events around the area. Without the help of her husband, ED, and her many OM friends, Betty Jo could not have kept the SMYL group in the forefront of ham radio activities in the region.

BJ was a founding member of other radio clubs in the area. They are The Great Southern DX Association, K5GDX, the Magnolia DX Association, and was a member of the Mississippi Coast Amateur Radio Association. YL hams knew they could call Betty Jo for advice or encouragement at any time. Her smile was contagious. Members of the various clubs in the area would hide from just a glance from Betty Jo if they were doing something that was not in the spirit of ham radio.

Betty Jo's ham station was world class. She had an ICOM 7800, a TH11DXX, 3 element 40 meter beam, two 70 foot crank up towers, a PW-1 amplifier, and too many computers to count. With her OM, Ed, they had capability to put out signals on the air from 160 meters through 440 Mhz. Imagine having an XLY/OM radio team. BJ would open her well-equipped station of YL's and OM's alike. During operating events she sponsored, the operators were well fed and mentored. Betty Jo would stay up all night to assist operators, YL and OM, to make radio contacts. She would even go so far as to leave her shack door unlocked at night so YL's and OM's could operate during the night. One could always tell if Betty Jo liked you. Lucky night time operators found treats in the refrigerator for a mid-night snack.

Betty Jo is and will be missed by all who know her. Members of the SMYL and Great Southern DX Association have earmarked an honored location in the Hooterville Operations Complex, Shady Rest building for a tribute to Betty Jo. Friends, family and SMYL club members are still shocked and in dismay. One member of the GSDXA group held a special "Roll Call" on their 2 meter DX net for her. When she did not respond to the Roll Call, her station was declared "Cold-Iron" and her key declared "Silent".

Mom, we miss you something terrible.