

third-floor apartment. We moved in the summer, so there was no school, and there I was, 12, all alone in a huge city with no friends and nothing to do. That was a very long summer. We lived in Fresh Meadows; it's an apartment-based community in a rather nice part of New York. There was a Mosley TA-33 Jr. on the roof of our building. Sometimes it would turn. In the course of the summer I got on the roof and...traced the wires down to a first-floor window, got up enough courage to wait for the antenna to turn, and then knocked on the door. My Elmer, Jim Walden, W2IEY, now W6ESJ, answered. He invited me in and took me under his wing. He gave me my Novice exam that fall. The first radio I ever saw was his Collins KWM-1. My Novice call was WV2KAC.

CQ: Tell us a bit about Jim. What was he like at that time?

JW: He was the coolest guy on the block, the coolest guy I had met since leaving Ohio and I still think that. He was a hell of a guy to put up with me. I don't know where he got his patience to put up with all of my questions. I was very insistent about ham radio.

CQ: How did you master the code for your Novice exam?

JW: I taught it to myself, I guess from being musical. I didn't know I was musical at the time, though. My mom actually helped with flashcards, but I really wanted to learn it so I taught it to myself.

CQ: After you got your ticket, what was your first station line-up?

JW: I had a Heathkit DX-20 and a [military surplus] BC-348Q receiver. I had a paper route and saved up the money to buy it. But the DX-20 didn't work the first time I plugged it in. I had to go back and rewire the oscillator section. That tears the ladder out from underneath you—when you spend hours and hours on a kit and it doesn't work. I wanted to throw it out in the snow, but instead I just barreled into it. I guess that's how you learn.

CQ: When did you upgrade your license?

JW: I wasn't active during high school. I kept my receiver and I listened to shortwave a lot, but my Novice license expired and we moved to New Jersey and I didn't know any hams. I was pretty much a loner, and I didn't have any motivation to go ahead and get my General. I was into [playing] football and discovered guitars and girls and stuff, so I took a little sabbatical from ham radio. But in college I went to Kent State [University] and I got my General. That was in 1965.



WB6ACU's connection with the ham radio world — a KLM KT-34 beam at 60 feet.

CQ: During your early band years, first with The Measles and later The James Gang, did you get much into the electronics of music?

JW: Yeah, audio circuits were a lot more basic back then and more serviceable. I didn't know a whole lot about it. Basically, I disconnected components to see what would happen, and if it sounded better I would leave it that way. But I found out a lot about guitars and audio modifications and stuff. It was fun. In those days you had to fix your own gear; we didn't have roadies. So if something broke, you didn't play unless you fixed it, and you didn't get paid unless you played. Makes one a bit more self-sufficient.

CQ: Your first big solo hit, *Rocky Mountain Way*, popularized a vocal effect that was innovative at the time—the "talk box," a device employing mouth movement to modulate an audio signal. While the effect had been around a while, your use of it first brought it to the Billboard charts. Was your talk box home built?

JW: Yeah, I built that. It's a good example for illustrating modulation. Instead of driving a guitar speaker, your amplifier drives a public-address horn—



Joe's main living-room operating position including (from left) a Viking tuner atop a Racal RA-1772 shortwave receiver and a complete Hallicrafters station — an HA-33 linear amplifier, HT-32 transmitter, and SX-115 receiver.