

# POPULAR COMMUNICATIONS

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A publication of



CQ Communications, Inc.  
25 Newbridge Road  
Hicksville, NY 11801-2953 USA

Popular Communications (ISSN-0733-3315) is published monthly by CQ Communications, Inc., 25 Newbridge Road, Hicksville, NY 11801. Telephone (516) 681-2922. FAX (516) 681-2926. Web Site: <http://www.popular-communications.com/> Periodicals Postage Paid at Hicksville, NY and at additional mailing offices. Subscription prices (payable in U.S. dollars): Domestic—one year \$32.95, two years \$58.95, three years \$85.95. Canada/Mexico—one year \$42.95, two years \$78.95, three years \$115.95. Foreign Air Post—one year \$52.95, two years \$98.95, three years \$145.95.

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Printed in the United States of America.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Popular Communications, 25 Newbridge Road, Hicksville, NY 11801.

## EDITORIAL

### Tuning In

# It's The Meaning That Counts

by Edith Lennon, N2ZRW

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While putting this Holiday Season issue together, my thoughts started to drift toward how people throughout the ages may have struggled with gift ideas. I entertained myself with visions of Mrs. Hannibal fretting over what type of semaphore to get the famous general for the Holidays (they were pagan then, of course, and I believe Hannibal actually used signal fires, but hey, it was my fantasy). Should she give the homely but durable woven flax or the top-of-the-line silk just out of Asia? Perhaps the great elephant driver himself grappled with what to give his favorite mahouts.

I followed the obvious path of my mental nonsense back to reality. What was behind the kind Carthaginian lady's semaphore gift? It was a means of communications, naturally. But just what was behind *that*? Surely, it was more than just "the thought."

So, okay, I wondered, what *does* it mean to give the gift of communications?

Well, it may mean "just" giving entertainment, although that's something to be devoutly sought in these stressful times. Luckily, there's a host of cool commercial products out there with hobby applications. For instance, C. Crane's CC Witness, an MP3 recorder-player with built in AM/FM radio, provides more than a dozen hours worth of high-fidelity full stereo music or as much as 35 hours of radio calls. It's reviewed in this issue's "Tech Showcase" by Gordon West, WB6NOA, who also looks at a small cornucopia of radio-related gifts in our cover story.

But also it may mean giving valuable information. A shortwave radio is nothing less than a window to the world, and what's available runs the gamut from tiny portables for under \$30 to high-end ground-breakers like the Perseus software-defined radio from Microtelecom

(reviewed in our November issue) that covers VLF-LF-MF-HF. A GPS makes the technophile on your holiday list right at home anywhere in the country, and also offers the fun pastime of geocaching (on the downside, it eliminates the excuse of getting lost when one is late for holiday gatherings).

The gift of communications can be one of safety, as well. When you give a pair of FRS handhelds, a NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards alert receiver, or a CB rig, you play a big part in helping to protect the people you care about.

And most important—I think—the gift you're giving can be camaraderie. Really, what says friendship quite like amateur radio, the very essence of which is a vast community built on a shared passion? Off the top of my head, I can't think of anything else that offers so much for such a small expenditure in time and money as helping someone get started as a ham. It truly combines all of the above.

But whenever you reach out to another in a way that fosters communications, in a way that says "let's talk, let's listen," you shrink the world and the distances between people that inhabit it. And it doesn't have to be with something shiny that came in a neatly wrapped package: a hand extended in assistance with a problem, a patient explanation of how something works, an afternoon offered to help pick out a some needed accessories may be the best gift someone gets this Holiday Season.

So if you still have a fellow hobbyist on your list, remember that you don't have to break the bank to give something precious—just encourage our shared passion: communications.

That's good advice not just for the hobby, but also for every aspect of life and any time of year. I like to think Mrs. Hannibal would agree. ■