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Magic Carpet IN HER KITCHEN

*A ham radio takes this
young mother visiting with friends
from all over the world*



How would you like to sit in your kitchen and exchange pie recipes with a housewife in New Zealand . . . be given Spanish lessons by a professor in Madrid . . . and learn about Parisian styles directly from a French countess? A petite 27-year-old blonde from Worcester, Massachusetts, accomplishes all this—just a few feet from her kitchen sink—and furthermore is known throughout New England as a new type of heroine. She's a girl radio amateur who performed "outstanding and meritorious service" to her community during a tornado.

Tweet Hines, whose real name is Gertrude, is one of the nearly 3,000 girl amateur radio operators who have made their way in a field long considered strictly masculine. Compared to 100,000 men operators, it is still *largely* a male hobby. But the girls like Tweet, known as "YLS" (ham slang for "young ladies"), have their own special brand of amateur fun. They're a close-

knit clique, with an international club just for girl hams—the Young Ladies' Radio League—with fiercely fought contests that take place over the air, and their own newspaper reserved for lady hams. Their ages range from 8 to 80, and they spend for equipment anywhere from \$15 to \$50,000 (actual record of one station's value), though the average is far less than \$100. Much of this equipment is home-built and to many a girl ham there is nothing more exciting than putting up a new "rhombic" antenna, or rebuilding a power supply. A new transmitting tube becomes more important than a new hat, and may cost just as much!

YLS have their own world, which includes "ham fests" at which amateurs gather from hundreds of miles to discuss the latest radio laws and other mutual problems. They even have special visiting cards known as "QSL" cards and, of course, government-licensed call letters which

they use more frequently than their own names. Tweet, for instance, is known throughout New England as "WIULF," and her talk is peppered with such ham slang as: "CUL" for "see you later"; "OM" for "old man"; "88" for "love and kisses" and "73" for "best wishes."

When you first meet Gertrude Hines she seems like a typical young housewife—and she is. She's pretty, friendly, and has twinkling grey-blue eyes. She's the stay-at-home wife of a 32-year-old assistant sales manager, Jon, and mother of two tiny blond replicas of herself—Sandra Jean, aged eight, and Joyce, aged five. Her family's interests are her own—when Sandra Jean joined the Brownies, Tweet became active as a Brownie Leader in the neighborhood.

When Jon's business made him take frequent trips across the country, he took along a mobile station (receiver and transmitter) in his car; and Tweet arranged supper hour every night around a talk with Daddy, both for the girls and herself. She set up a card table right beside the home transmitting station, and a family reunion took place over the air.

It was Jon's boyhood interest in ham radio that started Tweet on her way to becoming a lady ham. This was in 1951, when daughter Joyce was a baby. Jon decided to renew his long-elapsed amateur license, and Tweet vowed to get herself a license the same day. Remembers Tweet: "I guess it began because I think a wife should share her husband's hobbies. Once I got my own license I never let Jon near the set—I kept it occupied myself. But at first it was to keep him company, since Jon loved ham radio."

"Every night, when I was exhausted after a day of diaper-washing, formula-making, cleaning, cooking, I'd sit down with Jon while he taught me the International Morse Code. Once I learned the letters correctly, I'd go around the house next day saying everything in code. I know some of my neighbors thought I was crazy when I came to the door spelling 'sugar'—'dit dit dit, dit dit dah. . . .' I never stopped until I finished the particular word I was practicing, and visitors stood there openmouthed."

Finally Tweet was ready to take the examination given by the Federal Communications Commission; every ham is licensed by the U. S. Government and must pass an exam in sending and receiving International Morse Code, plus a test about radio theory (how transmitters and receivers work) and about radio amateur operating laws.

"I wanted us to share this experience fully, so Jon and I took the test the same day. To add to the confusion," says Tweet, "we were unable

to get anyone to sit with the children, so we took them with us.

"We brought along crayons and coloring books with the idea of keeping the girls amused during the ordeal. It worked for the first hour, but after that they began to investigate the file cabinets and desk drawers. The 'stern' FCC tester amused the little darlings for a while until Joyce began to howl. Finally we finished the exam, Jon with Sandra Jean on his lap and Joyce on mine. I never stopped wondering if we passed because we were so smart or because the FCC never wanted us back."

Today Tweet, who now lives in Ansonia, Connecticut, spends a good two hours every day sending messages from American families to their servicemen abroad, and receiving answers from these members of our traveling Army. After handling over 500 such messages she was awarded membership in the radio amateurs' "Brass Pounder's League" (a "brass pounder" is one who frequently uses his brass transmitting key). She's often to be found until 3 A.M. and 4 A.M. "chasing DX" (hunting for the far distant stations), and already she has talked to hams in 60 other countries.

But it was in June of 1953 that the solidly entrenched male hams of New England admitted that Tweet was a girl to be remembered in the annals of ham radio. That was when Worcester, Massachusetts, was hit by the first tornado in its history.

Telephone and telegraph lines went down; houses collapsed in minutes—many were injured, homeless, dying. Doctors, ambulances, nurses, food, medicines, dry clothing, fire engines were needed desperately; yet the city was paralyzed and unable to reach untouched neighboring communities. It was then that Tweet went on the air, at first to send messages of reassurance to her husband's relatives that the Hineses were safe.

Within a few minutes Tweet—the first amateur in Worcester to rally to the emergency—was taking messages and transmitting them for the Worcester Civil Defense unit, the police and fire departments. And she never stopped that entire night sending out her messages of mercy and pleas for help to practically every state before the next dawn. Servicemen overseas became frantic about parents, wives, and their queries came in also; nearby communities finally began to pour in offers of assistance which Tweet relayed to authorities.

For her service Tweet was named "Woman of the Month" by the Whiting Milk Company and given an engraved silver Paul Revere pitcher, plus a certificate of merit from the Deep Sea Dragnet—a network of amateur radio stations that extend

all throughout New England.

Tweet, modern-day ham heroine, is just one of the many YLs who have used their telegraph keys or hand microphones in time of emergency. Every big catastrophe sees YLs at work. In 1944 Mildred Wildman, W8PZA, flashed emergency messages during Ohio floods. When a child was lost in a Maine forest W2HXQ, Kay Kibling, won national acclaim by successfully handling radio contacts with the searching party. Two Florida teen-age girls, Jane Hodgson, fourteen, and Jenny Seignious, sixteen, provided, by their battery-powered sets, the only link with the outside world for their Florida town when a hurricane wiped out telegraph and telephone lines.

It's hams like Tweet and the other YL heroines who recently inspired the installation of a Civil Defense radio network that has spread itself across every county and state in the nation. The sole purpose of the net is preparedness in case of war.

The FCC had these girls in mind when it brought into being the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service. Girl hams, along with the men, today are joining RACES. They're participating in weekly (or daily) drills on the air to be ready to serve their country if needed.

How to become an amateur? Anyone, as long as she is a citizen, can apply to the Federal Communications Commission for a free amateur radio license. The FCC in Washington also makes the rules you have to abide by—rules not much harder than automobile driving laws. There are books and pamphlets for learning the code and phonograph records are available for practicing. Licensed hams are always eager to help a newcomer learn the hobby. You can locate such hams in your own town by checking the phone book for ham club listings; by calling the local radio repair shops (where hams usually gather); by asking your local FCC branch for names of hams; or by writing to the American Radio Relay League, West Hartford, Connecticut, for names of amateurs in your area. The League also sells a 50-cent pamphlet on "How to Become a Radio Amateur."

Communicating to others the joys of radio is second nature to all amateurs. Even now Tweet is enthusiastically explaining to little Sandra Jean the intricacies of ham radio. "Is she ready now?" I asked.

"Not yet, but next year perhaps she'll be a ham," says Tweet. Then—wistfully, 'I want to pass on to her a bit of my love of the hobby. Don't you think it would be nice for a small girl to have her own magic carpet to take her all over the world?'"