

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Just about March is when serious cabin fever sets in for most of us. Winter isn't fun any more after months of snow, ice and biting winds. Every bone in our body is aching to feel the nice warm sun baking the winter cold out of it. A few years ago, Charlie and Mary took a trip to the south about March to visit some old friends in Florida.

This winter has been particularly tough on our two friends. It surely has seemed more snowy and colder than normal but the TV weather people have been assuring us that temperatures and snow amounts have been just about average, despite some unusual January and March swings in opposite directions. Our friends from DX Hill weren't able to escape to the sunny south this winter, but promised that they would next year simply to insure preservation of their sanity. As you know, neither complains very much but winters like this one can make them wonder why they live in this cold and snowy part of our beautiful country.

It's a short lived feeling that most northerners have in March and sometimes, into early April. But then almost overnight, the springtime sun starts warming the ground. Crocuses appear and lawns start showing their bright green color. Magically, we're OK once more and the question of why they live in the northeast is answered. The region is breathtaking in springtime.....and autumn.....and winter and summer. The burning desire to fly south becomes lots less urgent and life goes on.

After a stormy and cold final few winter weeks, a particular Monday morning broke with brilliant and warm sunshine. The temperature was about 50 but the forecast was for the high 60s by afternoon and best of all, the rest of the week was going to progress to even warmer levels with record breaking temps by the weekend, likely into the mid 70s!

Mary was out early checking her planting beds and mentally assessing how much clean-up was needed and how many warm days she needed before the soil would be warm and workable enough for serious work. The last frost on DX Hill can take place as late as May 15<sup>th</sup> but somehow, Mary was thinking this year would be different, maybe by a few weeks. She's an eternal optimist, much like her husband. They make a perfect team.

It was about 10:30 AM. Charlie was staring up the tower, planning his day's work, thinking about what needed to be done first. Fortunately, there were no major repairs needed that he knew about. The winter had been merciful in that respect. Despite that, no ham can resist taking a screwdriver to a screw or turning a knob just because it might be improved the slightest bit. Preventative maintenance is worth its weight in gold. Charlie can still climb his tower but finally has admitted that his knees don't work as well as they used to. Mary knew that all too well since she can't kneel in her garden for hours at a time any longer either. Getting older is no fun but it still beats the alternative, doesn't it?

Charlie had laid out his tools at the base of the tower and was starting to cinch up his trusty climbing belt when a small pickup truck came into the yard. Charlie paused to see who it might be before starting to climb. An unknown man started walking toward Charlie and when about half way to him, asked "Good morning, Sir. Are you the famous Charlie who works DX?" Mary pulled herself up from her planting bed and walked over as Charlie replied, "Well, that depends. Do I owe you a QSL card?" The fellow laughed and said, "Well no, but I wish you did. I'm Jim Moore and I don't have a call yet." By this time, he had reached Charlie and extended his hand. Charlie greeted him, "Welcome to our little piece of heaven, Jim. How may we help you?"

Charlie introduced Mary who's first thought was to see if Jim has had any lunch yet. Mary said, "Charlie and I were going to have some lunch. We'd be very pleased if you joined us, Jim."

Jim looked somewhat astonished. "Golly, they said you were nice people but I'm a total stranger and the first thing you do is offer me some lunch." Charlie pointed out, "We're civilized here, Jim. It's our pleasure. Come on in." With that, Charlie calmly took off his climbing belt and placed it on the ground next to the tool bag for possible use later on this beautiful spring day and they headed for the kitchen.

Jim explained that he and his family just moved to the area from Illinois. His company has a policy that moves all mid level managers every 3 to 5 years between its various cost centers in North America. The company makes all sorts of building materials for customers in 43 countries. He became interested in Amateur Radio just before learning of his next move, none of which are optional. Refusal of two moves over a manager's career gives the company the right to pass you over for advancement and within two more years, the right to replace you as an employee. He learned of the move a month before and had very little time to study or take his exams. He's an industrial engineer and was confident that he could learn the material.

Mary was making some sandwiches and fresh coffee while Charlie listened intently to Jim's story. Charlie felt great compassion for Jim and his problem but being the pragmatist and engineer that he is, he wanted to cut to the chase. Charlie asked, "So, what brings you here, Jim? How may I help you?"

Jim grinned and said, "Well, it's a strange coincidence of circumstances that brings me to your home but to get directly to the point, an engineer who worked for me back in the Illinois office was a ham and taking graduate studies in the evening at the University of Illinois. One of his professors had mentioned that his dad was a ham back east. When my guy learned where I was being moved; he told me that his professor's dad lived there on a hill called DX Hill. The rest, as they say, is history."

As Jim was telling his story, Mary and Charlie started smiling more and more, anticipating the details and became certain that Jim was speaking about their son, Jack, who teaches at UIUC. "Well, I'll be," Charlie exclaimed. Mary said with a twinkle in her eye, "That rascal never told us to expect anyone. Just wait till I talk to him." She brought a tray of sandwiches, iced tea and cookies over to the table for their lunch. They started right in on it.

Jim smiled, knowing Mary was kidding and said, "I saved the best for last. I spoke directly with Jack just before leaving Champaign. I told him that I'd need help getting my ham license before my family moves out here after school gets out in a couple of months. Jack assured me that his dad would jump at the chance to help me become a ham. Until June when my wife and two children join me here, I'll have some time to work on ham study while I'm working on my new assignment here, living in a corporate apartment and looking for a place to put up a good tall tower." That made Charlie burst out in a laugh. "Well, you surely have your priorities straight, Jim. The tower is important. I can help you with both things, getting your ticket and finding a good home where you can set up a tower. I'll help you get some help working on the tower too."

Jim replied, "Well thanks Charlie, but Jack told me that his dad might appreciate some help from me. He told me that tower climbing is tough on dad's knees and legs and it worries him that he insists on climbing his tower at the slightest encouragement to tighten a bolt or adjust a connection. You see, I worked my way through undergrad and grad school climbing broadcast towers, changing warning light bulbs and doing repairs. I was trained to climb in the Marine

Corps and was able to earn some serious money climbing towers when my last enlistment term ran out and I went to college.”

Charlie was way ahead of Jim. “So my little 100 ft tower isn’t any challenge for you, is it?” Jim shook his head, “Not very much. I’ve worked at more than a thousand feet. A week’s work at that height will nearly pay for a full semester of undergrad studies. If you help me get my ticket, Charlie, I’ll be your tower man as long as I’m here which should be three years or more.” Charlie extended his hand, “My friend, you have a deal. Which should start first, study or tower?” Jim laughed and said, “Well, I brought my climbing belt and tool carrier. The weather is perfect and I know you were heading up the tower when I got here. Let me take a run up the tower first and do what you had in mind and then maybe you can start pounding some ham radio into my noggin. Oh, I almost forgot. I know I only need 5 words per minute but I want to get up to 20 or better.” Mary chimed in, “Oh golly, you’ve made a friend for life Jim.” Charlie laughed and added, “That is a deal and a half, my friend.”

They finished every bit of Mary’s delicious food before heading back out, but within a very few more minutes, Jim was scooting up the tower like a squirrel. Clearly, he was a professional and made it look so very easy. Charlie felt as though destiny had brought him a perfect new student to Elmer along the path to becoming a DXer. Charlie was certain that with a little effort, Jim would be an Extra class ham by the time June arrived and his family moved out here from Champaign, Illinois.

While the ‘boys’ were studying that evening after dinner, Mary called son Jack on the phone and gave him a sound lecture, all in fun. Oh yes, Jim stayed on DX Hill for dinner. Charlie convinced him to start his study right away, after spending several hours on the tower. The thought of enjoying more of Mary’s cooking made the decision an easy one, staying there or staying in his apartment. In fact, Jim will likely be spending a lot of time on DX Hill in the near future.

All Amateur Radio operators help one another by sharing their special skills. We all contribute what we do best to the common good. That’s the way efficient companies are staffed, clubs are mobilized and even neighbors help one another. By giving our best, we receive appreciation and gratitude, usually in even larger measure than we give. Ask an “Elmer” for help and count how many seconds it takes him or her to provide it. You won’t run out of fingers on one hand.