

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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All hams are evenly balanced and keep their dedication to radio and their hobby in general from overtaking obligations to their family, job, and other social commitments. Am I correct? After all, that's item five in the official Amateur's Code. One item reads, "the Amateur is Balanced.... radio is an avocation, never interfering with duties owed to family, job, school or community." That code appears in every ARRL Handbook and was authored by Paul Segal, W9EEA in 1928 as part of a simple six item creed that has been cited thousands of times over the last three quarters of a century to offer some calibration to our behavior as Amateurs and try to make some sense of our obsessions. Are any readers of Charlie's Whistle acquainted with hams that don't live by this thesis? OK, don't all yell at once. I know a few as well. Some go over the top. Some go WAY over the top. But, who's the one to decide what level of obsession constitutes excessive behavior? One whose behavior is only a little excessive or someone outside the hobby who can't possibly appreciate the need for a room filled with radio equipment?

Some non ham friends and neighbors of Charlie can't help but shake their head whenever they drive past the top of DX Hill. After all, normal people don't have or want 100 ft towers standing next to their house, especially with several gigantic aluminum frameworks on top of it that resemble a giant silver creature about to drop onto the small house. Would "normal" folks consider the residents of Charlie's and Mary's small hilltop home to be over the top? Likely, I would guess.

Most fellow hams would view Charlie's tower and yagi tree as a thing of beauty and something they'd love to have in their yard. After all, Charlie's antenna setup isn't extreme. It only has three stacked yagis on the 100 ft tower; a two element forty meter beam, above a four element fifteen and a four element twenty meter beam. Actually, pretty modest compared to the antennas of many serious DXers and surely so when compared to the antenna farm of any serious contester's station.

That brings me to the point of this month's story. Being excessive about anything may be determined subjectively merely by comparison to what the first person considers normal in quantity, cost, effect, or behavior. Actually, the process is usually so subjective that defending it or even discussing it with anyone can arouse spirited dialogue and strong opinions in most every direction. But the point here concerns the perception of excessive or extraordinary behavior with regard to Amateur Radio. In order to limit the size of this month's story, let's only discuss one actual experience Charlie and Mary had recently.

Mary had offered to meet with the presidents of nearby church crafts guilds from the communities on all sides of the valley. Mary had gained some support for a fairly ambitious plan to consolidate the teaching programs she had developed in her church group into a regional program that would cover dozens of similar groups from many miles away. If it met certain qualifications, the group would receive some grant support and even some seed funding to develop a program that would provide new students with a selection of materials for their first year. The grant was funded by a huge chain of craft stores where Mary and most other crafters buy their supplies. It was a very clever marketing scheme by the store, encouraging new crafters will make more customers who in turn will result in a wider customer base, greater sales and profit. It's very elementary in thinking. Create crafters and that will create new customers. The store's investment will be repaid very quickly and best of all, the store's cost is tax deductible as advertising expense. New students from the various teen programs would receive training in a unified manner in the planned program but that of course,

was the reason the crafting leaders were meeting, to maximize the benefit to their clubs and members as well as think about ways to attract new people into their hobby.

One particular craft president, Nancy Burgess, who Mary had become close to by telephone and e mail, had never met Mary and was looking forward to doing so at this meeting. She was recently widowed and found comfort in producing craft items and helping young people learn quilting, pottery, macramé, making doll figures, etc. However, she lived sort of far from the meeting place which is a large church hall 70 miles south of DX Hill, that she was nervous about even coming. This would be the furthest she would have driven alone since she lost her husband a year before. He did all the driving for their more than 50 years together.

Mary, always the one looking for a challenge and never one without a plan, suggested that she come to DX Hill, a more reasonable drive of about a half hour, leave her car in their yard and go the rest of the way with Charlie and herself. Then on the return, she should plan to stay for dinner and spend the evening with them and return home the following morning, after a good night's rest. It was too tempting to turn down so she accepted.

On the day of the meeting, she arrived ahead of the planned time and was able to come in for some coffee and Mary's famous muffins. But, on her way up the hill, she saw Charlie's tower and three good sized beams from quite a distance away. In fact, Mary had given her the tower as a landmark to follow in the directions she had sent her. Upon arriving, Nancy parked and just walked around the yard staring at the tower. Mary, upon seeing her, started out to greet her guest and by the time she reached Nancy, saw her just gawking up at 100 ft of steel, reaching for the clouds with several very large pieces of tubing on top of it, all gleaming in the morning sun. Clearly, seeing it up close had overwhelmed her.

Mary's warm greeting changed Nancy's appearance. She pulled up her chin and hugged Mary sharing friendly greetings. They chatted about some things as Charlie appeared and headed to the car. He saw Nancy "admiring" his tower and said, "Good morning, Nancy. We're happy you could come." But, beyond shaking hands and some friendly greetings, she had been completely overwhelmed by the tower and it was obvious to see. Charlie asked if she knew what that was she was looking at. She politely said that she had no idea at all. Somehow, she had gotten to this stage of her life without ever seeing such a tower in a person's flower bed. It was beyond her ability to comprehend the need for anything like this or why anyone would do such a thing. Charlie tried to explain what the tower was for and Nancy politely listened and nodded but it was plain that she could not relate to any of it. It's one of those right brain versus left brain things, Charlie guessed.

Charlie took her overnight bag into the guest room and after some coffee and muffins, they were ready for the 90 minute drive to the meeting. Charlie drove and the ladies chatted. At one point, Mary said to Charlie, "Dear, would you take the road that goes by Henry's barn? That's on the way, isn't it?" Charlie grinned and said it was. He knew exactly what Mary was doing. She's always a few steps ahead of most people, including Charlie. You see, Henry maintains a very serious contest station and has several towers, some of which are nearly 200 ft tall. Seeing it, even from a simple drive by will put Charlie's tower into better perspective.

About a half hour later, Charlie took an exit off the Interstate highway and said, "Nancy, we thought you enjoy seeing a friend's property." It's only a few minutes from the highway and we'll be on our way to the meeting. Nancy was agreeable and very soon, Charlie called her attention to the hill they were approaching. It was a long gentle hill with a large white house and a large red barn at the top. Gleaming in the mid day sun were dozens of reflections. As they got closer, they could see four huge towers with large sets of tubing at their top and at different

points lower on the towers. They all looked a little different but all resembled what she saw at Charlie's, except they were larger, there were more towers, many more of the metal frames on them. Getting closer revealed another half dozen "smaller towers", about half as tall. They had more metal on them as well as many wires hanging between the towers in a seemingly random fashion. Nancy was somewhat intimidated when Charlie swung their car into the long driveway and up to the barn. They parked next to one tower and under several wires. The barn and house doors were closed, so Charlie knew Henry wasn't home but he knew it would be OK to show his antenna system up close for Nancy's benefit.

Henry and Charlie know one another although their special interests are quite different. Henry and the hams that come to the barn to operate are contesters, not DXers. Charlie is a DXer and not a contester. Some would argue that there's little difference between them since some noted hams in the country are top guns in both specialty. Most however, are not.

Nancy got out and looked up; left, right, and straight ahead. Mary walked with her with Charlie close behind. Charlie explained, "Henry is a very serious contest operator. Several times during the year, 15 or 20 other serious and skilled operators come here and put this station on the air for the weekend. They contact as many different stations in as many different places on earth as possible. Those who do the best win the contest." Nancy asked, "And what do they win? A new radio? Another tower?" Charlie explained that they receive a certificate and possibly, a plaque. Nancy shook her head and said she cannot begin to understand doing all this for a piece of paper. As she turned back to the car, Mary pointed out that seeing all this makes what Charlie has look a lot smaller, doesn't it? Nancy smiled and admitted that it did.

During the 30 minute drive remaining to the meeting, Charlie mentioned that he knew a few other hams who maintain super stations like this. He mentioned Frank Donovan W3LPL, Richard King K5MA and Tim Duffy K3LR. All have major multi/multi stations where, during certain major contests, multiple operators simultaneously operate multiple stations all under the same roof and with the same call letters. It's a very major undertaking to maintain these stations and support them between contests. These stations and antennas can easily be worth a hundred thousand dollars or much more.

Nancy asked Charlie if he thought that doing this was excessive behavior and beyond what he considers normal. Charlie grinned and replied, "Well, not really but it's more than I would do. It's strange but if you met any of these fellows; Henry, Frank, Richard or Tim, you'd never think of asking that question. They're as normal and even tempered as you'd ever find. But, they're over the top when they set out to win a contest. Everything they do is aimed at winning contests and little else. There are exceptions. I personally know one. Richard King is as strong a DXer as I am as well and is on the air every day, not just in contests. Does that make him even more excessive? Well, you might think so but I don't. I think that makes him more like me." Mary quickly added, "And that's good."

They reached the meeting site early and had time to meet some other attendees informally before the formal meeting started. About fifty craft club leaders came to the meeting as well as the Vice President for Marketing and Promotional Programs for the store chain. She had flown up from corporate, prepared for action. The meeting went on all day. Most of the crafters were women. They came from all age groups and from different backgrounds. Not all were hobbyists either. Some taught in the different community colleges and others were looking to learn more from others. All shared the passion for crafting and all were leaders of some crafting group.

There were quite a few husbands who came along who quickly realized they would be happier meeting by themselves in the coffee shop a block away. After Charlie had more than enough

coffee and discussion about politics, baseball, taxes, and other barber shop topics, he went back to the car to read his latest book that his daughter had bought for him, "Ham Radio for Dummies". She emphasized that she hadn't given him the book to state any personal opinion. It was recommended to her by Amazon Books as a book she should consider as a gift since it was similar to others she had bought in the past. It was suggestive advertising at its best.

The meeting ended after five hours, just before six o'clock. Wow! And Mary says that hams can talk! On the 90 minute drive home, the ladies chatted excitedly about all the plans they had discussed and how perfect some ideas were and how poor some others were. They agreed that the program was off to a good start, though and they looked forward to getting started.

Soon, they were driving up DX Hill and could see the top of the tower shining in the last rays of the setting sun's light. Rufus was happy to see them and barked his welcome and that he was very hungry. Of course, they were as well.

Mary had dinner prepared and only needed heating. She had made a delicious country style chicken stew, one of Charlie's favorites. After dinner, they chatted more about their day and what each would do to start out. Charlie moved himself to the shack along with Rufus. The bands were filled with interesting DX this evening. He fired up his amp and swung his beam around to the west. He called and worked several Pacific stations and was tuning for more when he sensed that he was being watched. He turned to see Nancy and Mary watching him enjoy his hobby. Nancy smiled and said, "There's so much I need to learn. If this is considered excessive by some, I wish I could show them how boring life would be without such dedicated interest as you have." Mary caught the idea and added, "Or that we crafters have."

Mary is right. There's no limit to enjoyment of any hobby or outside interest as long as it doesn't "interfere with duties owed to family, job, school or community" as stated by Mr. Segal 75 years ago. When time or money spent takes away any needed resource from those essentials, a reasonable person could be justified in calling it excessive. Every hobby or interest has the potential, so a balance must always be found and maintained.

Happy DXing until next month.