

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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It was summertime on DX Hill. Days were fairly hot and slowed everyone down during mid day. Rufus was enjoying these long dog days by napping in the shade of the tall plants in Mary's flower garden, being careful to stay away from the thorns of the rosebushes. It may have been the scent of the garden that Rufus liked most but the shade from the mid day sun was most important to this big ole feller. He just loved to sprawl himself out on the nice cool garden soil and take nice quiet naps. The frequently visiting bees don't ever seem to bother Rufus either. But, watching them work so hard tires him out so he must take extra naps. Yep, he just loves summertime on the hill.

Charlie always enjoys summertime as well, even when the heat gets cranked up. He just adjusts his days so that anything that resembles work gets done in the morning before things start getting difficult. Serious antenna work gets done in spring and fall with only emergency temporary repairs done in the middle of summer, early in the day while the sun is low in the sky.

Summertime is normally the time when many of Charlie's students drop by or call to say hello. Over the years, many young hams move away from the DX Hill neighborhood after college to pursue their careers and raise a family. They invariably leave parents and relatives back home and every year, some return to visit and show off their children. This year was no exception. In fact, Charlie feels that it was probably a record visit count this year. Mary knows that he's likely to be correct. She learned long ago that Charlie's engineering mind keeps track of metrics very well. Her expertise in crafts and baking do require metric skills but in a very different way. As we've observed in this column many times, Charlie and Mary make a great couple and complement one another perfectly.

Summertime permits plenty of quiet time to catch up on reading and finish some of those outdoor projects that were put on hold all winter and spring because of bad weather. Other than heat, there's no excuse in summertime. Days are long, weather is favorable and young hands and legs are available since they're on vacation from school. Did I mention that one of Charlie's visitors this summer was his best student, Brian? He appeared one day with several of his friends from the company where he's working. You may recall that he accepted an offer to work for a signal processing firm while studying and completing his doctoral work.

Naturally, Brian is always welcome on DX Hill regardless of circumstances. In fact, Mary and Charlie consider Brian another one of their sons. He wanted to show his friends what a real DX station looks like and meet his "Elmer". He had apparently been talking with them about Charlie and there was fairly general interest in the group, especially when Brian told his friends about Mary's pies, muffins and just about everything that comes out of her kitchen. They decided to come as a group and surprise Charlie and Mary. Brian was certain that they wouldn't mind. This visit happened about a week ago, on a cloudy and rainy Saturday. They stayed several hours and seemed to thoroughly enjoy their visit. None of them other than Brian was a ham except one who had gotten his Tech license while in high school but hadn't ever used it. So, he didn't really consider himself to be a ham either.

Mary was delighted that all these nice hungry boys came to visit. She had all these appreciative hungry boys to feed while Charlie took care of answering their questions. Most wanted to know more about DXing, such as why Charlie or anyone else chases new countries or entities. One fellow expressed that he thought it was a little silly to have all this equipment simply tell one another that you are hearing the other one and then say good bye. When one thinks of it that way, it is fairly difficult to defend. In fact, it reminds me of the question my mother used to pose concerning how silly golf was. "Why would a bunch of grown men hit a little white ball into the woods and then go look for it. Why didn't they hold onto the ball?" Some of the world's puzzles are indeed difficult to fully understand, much like pondering propagation or sun spots.

They seemed genuinely surprised to learn that Charlie is regularly on the air before dawn virtually every morning as well as at many other strange hours of the day and night to follow propagation to certain parts of the world on a particular band. Brian selected these six friends because they had been asking questions about ham radio and wanted to learn about the big antennas that hams use. Whether any of them actually become serious hams is unclear at best. They're far more interested in the clinical aspects of what a DXer is and why he or she behaves in such a bizarre manner. Until their visit, they only had Brian to be their example of a DXer. Brian quickly reminded them all that they need to meet a "real DXer", hence this visit.

These young engineers who came with Brian were all recent graduate engineers and were taking part time graduate courses related to their work in signal processing. But, as any new engineering graduates will tell you, contemporary college engineering curriculum includes very little if any practical material on RF circuitry, antennas or transmission lines. It seems that the switch to digital technology years ago replaced most analog technology in undergraduate programs and even in many grad programs.

As sharp as these young engineers were, they could not mentally visualize an actual dipole or monopole antenna and how its specific sine wave for its resonant frequency was presented over each element of a Yagi or how any fractional wave length vertical using a ground screen or radial ground plane can work. Determining feed points based upon impedance points and designing matching methods was a complete mystery to them. Charlie realized how dramatically engineering curriculum has changed over time to teach the skills industry demanded of a university's graduates. Now, all course work is digital and nearly entirely devoid of reference to RF technology. What a shame, he thought. Charlie knew he could help fill in the spaces in their knowledge and Brian will help. He surely has absorbed his teaching very well.

As I said earlier, the boys stayed all afternoon and were treated to a wonderful dinner after their time with Charlie. They learned a great deal about the thrill of being a DXer and living with such a scope of technology every day. Whether any of them, other than Brian, ever make the investment of time and funding to become a serious DXer like Charlie is anyone's guess but it's a lot more likely now than it was before they came.

A couple asked if they could call Charlie and possibly return with more questions.

Of course, Charlie absolutely insisted that any of them return any time at all, even if it's encouraged by Mary's cooking.

Without a real person to serve as an example for them, it's doubtful that any of them would have enough motivation simply by reading manuals and information from the Internet. "Elmers" like Charlie bring ham radio to life and his endless enthusiasm motivates these young guys who are one third his age. If we expect new hams to climb aboard in sufficient numbers to keep pace with old timers who are moving on, we have to find ways to reach out to them. The challenge has never been greater. With Internet, cell phone messaging and sun cycle minimums to deal with, our competition is strong.

We all know that throwing a wire over a tree branch hook it up to their transceivers and say hello to fellow hams hundreds or thousands of miles away is nothing short of MAGIC. That magic bit you and me and it needs to bite more new folks. Let's help spread the word. Go to <http://www.hello-radio.org/> for help. Good luck to you all.