

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Golly, it's tough to get old. How many times have you heard that? You'll hear it more often as you get older yourself, believe me on that. Charlie realized that fact some time ago when he noticed how much tougher it was for him to climb his tower than it used to be but it hit home solidly last week when his favorite student, Brian stopped by to visit. He's been so busy in the last couple of years with his doctoral and research work that he hadn't been able to spend very much time on DX Hill. Brian owes a great deal to Charlie because when he became interested in radio back in high school, it was Charlie who took him under his wing and introduced him to what eventually became his career field.

Brian reserved most of a day last week for visits and to their sincere joy, he spent it all with Mary and Charlie. They always considered Brian to be another one of their sons and that was just fine with him.

Brian has reached the final stages of preparation of his dissertation and starting in August, will be defending his work to the review team at MIT. If he doesn't have too much work to do in satisfying his defense, he may be completed in October or November. His official PhD graduation will take place in May of 2009 but his work should be completed before Christmas time. He told Charlie that if he had realized how much work was required to get a doctorate degree, he doesn't know if he would have gone for it.

Charlie loved hearing Brian's story and assured him that he knows that he would have done it again. He told Brian that he loved watching him grow and admired his endless energy, still finding time for a little ham radio and even Elmering some fellow students along the way.

Brian came to DX Hill about mid morning, intending to stay for lunch and then leave about three or so. Well, the morning slipped by very quickly and not only did Brian stay for lunch, he was still there when Mary prepared dinner. Of course, Brian very happily enjoyed all of Mary's great cooking and was very pleased that Charlie and Mary insisted that he stay for dinner and spend the evening with them.

During the afternoon, Brian slipped into Charlie's well worn and comfortable ham shack. "Oh Boy", he said as he sat in the padded swivel chair, "this is what a ham shack should be." Brian slowly tuned the 17 meter CW band and heard Jacky, 3B8CF on Mauritius. Charlie reached over and flipped on his amplifier. "Go ahead, give him a call," Charlie suggested. Brian snapped off a 1 X 1 call and the Mauritius Island station came back with a 599 report. He was also a genuine S9 on Signal Hill as well. Brian smiled and tuned for more. Charlie only had a wire antenna on 17, so he suggested trying 20 where his 4 element yagi would give him a little edge. Sure enough, on 20 there were strong signals from Africa and the Indian Ocean. Charlie quickly retuned the amp for 20 and then told Brian to go ahead. Of course, Brian worked a few more stations on 20 CW before asking if he could go to SSB. Charlie had no problem with that and helped Brian switch his station to SSB. After a half hour of SSB contacts, Brian turned to Charlie and said, "I had better leave or you'll never get me out of here". Charlie chuckled and said that he understood. It was getting near time for dinner anyway and the delicious smells of Mary's edible magic had overpowered the ham shack. It wasn't possible to concentrate on much other than dinner.

Brian has enjoyed operating time before on DX Hill, of course, but the thrill of operating Charlie's station where everything is so effortless is an experience that he always enjoys beyond belief. Now that

his years of constant study are coming to an end, he's planning to build his own station and styling it after that of his mentor, Charlie. With an MIT doctorate in signal processing, he knows that his services will be in great demand by several companies around the country and his salary expectations can logically jump quite significantly, probably well into six figures, pretty good for a first "real job" after college. He'll be able to afford most anything he wants. Brian suggested those thoughts while they chatted over dinner. Mary, although not saying anything, gave one of her looks to Brian as only a loving mother can do. The message was unmistakable that she disapproved.

Brian quickly changed the subject a bit to his long term plans to settle down and try to find a home as comfortable as DX Hill. Charlie smiled and stated that much of the country is flat and unless he plans to be a serious VHF operator, being atop a hill isn't much of an advantage. A good HF location is flat with an unobstructed view of the distant horizon in all directions, or at least in any direction where DX might be found. Having nice rich uniform damp soil is normally an advantage. A peninsula with salt water all around is also great. Usually, rocky dry soil is not very good for an HF DXer.

Charlie finished his short speech by saying, "Just about anywhere can be a good DX location if the operator sitting in front of the radio is a skilled operator and knows propagation. George DeGrenier, W1GKK, now a Silent Key was one of Amateur radio's greatest DXers. His philosophy was 'be there when they're there' and 'they'll always be on 20 meters'. Like other top DXers of his time, he didn't have 100 ft towers or stacked yagis. He used a 4 element yagi at 60 feet and sat at the top of the DXCC Honor Roll despite the fact that he lived deep in a valley with Berkshire Mountains all around him. Despite that, he worked everything." Brian just nodded and said, "Every time I've ever come here to visit, I learn something more. I'll remember that, Charlie. Thanks."

After dinner followed by a couple of generous slices of Mary's incredible blueberry pie with vanilla ice cream, they all adjourned to the house's small and cozy den area. Mary sat in her rocker, next to the oversized basket full of yarn, knitting needles and partially completed pieces. She looked at Brian and said, "Dear, you know that we love you as much as any of our children. I hope you understand that I only have your interest in mind. You said that when you start earning some of that big money after graduation, you're going to put a ham station together like Charlie's. Of course, you know perfectly well that I'm not a ham and Heaven knows that this house is only large enough for one of those shack things. But, my Charlie hardly spent a dime on hamming while we had small children running around and he was building up his career. We spent everything we could scrape together on the kids and I think the investment has paid off with large dividends."

Mary looked at and pointed to the large array of pictures grouped on the wall of their children and grandchildren. "All our children graduated from college and are professionals making good money today. Now, they're saving every dime to give all that they can to their children. You should put some of that money aside for later but now, you should be planning on finding a nice home for your family. That's a lot more important than spending your big paychecks on ham stuff. That will always be there for later on. By the way, as long as I'm butting in like your mom, how is your girlfriend? We haven't seen her for a while."

Brian loves Mary and Charlie deeply and respects what they always do for him. He didn't take any offense at all, even though he might have if it came from someone else. This was all good and said out of true love for Brian. He said, "Well gee... where do I start? Let's see. I haven't been seeing Jennifer very much because of my thesis work. She has been very busy, completing her Master's work and holding a part time job also. So, both of us have been pretty busy. But, despite all of that, we manage to stay in touch by texting one another pretty regularly, sometimes several times a day."

Mary had to ask, "Are you getting more serious?" Brian was a little shy to answer that but after some hesitation, admitted that one of the very first things he had planned when he started earning some serious money later this year was a diamond for Jen. He added quickly, "My parents know my plans but Jen doesn't know, so please don't tell her." Charlie chuckled and said, "Brian, we never see her. You can be sure that the word is safe with us. We're very happy that you told us. When was this decision made?" Brian replied that it was in the last week.

Mary instantly realized that her motherly concern for Brian's priorities possibly not being placed into proper order was unnecessary. As usual, Brian had the matter clearly thought out and ham radio was not interfering. Charlie broke the silence that seemed to settle over Brian by asking, "Well I'm going to finish up the pie. Anyone want to help out? Brian raised his hand and got up to go to the kitchen. Mary was pleased. She could already imagine what a fine father Brian would be. That's the way all mothers think, I guess.