

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE  
By Bob Beaudet, W1YRC

Well, Charlie surely was surprised when young Brian drove up DX Hill in his dad's truck. It was late Saturday afternoon and he had just returned from his advanced placement classes at MIT. Now that he has a driver's license, Brian has taken on many extra chores. Recently, Mary had requested his help in providing cover for her to surprise Charlie with a new computer. She was presented recently with a new computerized loom, the one she saw at her craft supplier and naturally, Charlie had to get it for her. Down deep, she knew he would buy it for her since it is so much like him to do that. After so many years together, they really know each other like a pair of books. Charlie expects so little from others and sometimes shows the naiveté of a little boy, Mary has great fun surprising him with something like new ham equipment or as in this case, a computer.

Brian contacted some suppliers and found a Pentium III at a surprisingly good price for Mary. It had a 500 MHz processor with a 10 Gbte hard drive, a 17-inch monitor and a 56K modem. Yup, it was a real rocket ship. Brian spoke with Mary about going for something like that over a more moderate configuration that would have certainly done everything Charlie wanted but when a few hundred dollars was all that separated the latest technology from last year's, she asked, "Brian, what would you buy if it were for you?"

It was an easy question for him. "You should always go for the most the market will offer. Added features encourage the user to add programs and files he couldn't use or store otherwise simply because his or her computer couldn't support or even hold them. Also, by buying up like that, you add about a year to the point at which the system will become obsolete."

She trusted Brian's judgment completely even though she didn't entirely understand everything he said. She gave him a check for the computer system one evening when he came over to see Charlie. Brian had it ordered and shipped to himself for delivery to her as soon as he could, allowing for his school schedule.

Brian backed the truck carefully into the driveway just as Charlie emerged from the kitchen door. He spotted the large boxes marked with the various signs of what was in them. "Brian, what did you get? A new computer for yourself?" he asked sincerely. As Brian climbed out of the truck, he considered how to answer but Mary saved him as she followed Charlie out the door. "Hi, Brian. I see you've got those things we picked up for Charlie," she called out as she walked past the old mentor, giving his arm a little squeeze as she walked toward the truck. Brian nodded as he removed the boxes from the truck. Charlie was stunned but very excited as he realized what they were up to.

"Oh my goodness! What have you done?" he exclaimed. "Oh hush" Mary said, "Why don't you help Brian and me get these things into the house?" In shock, Charlie did exactly that wearing a big grin. Several weeks later, after he had become familiar with the incredible speed and capability of his new computer, he had developed a new appreciation for the Internet. He found that his connection with DX Summit at <http://oh2aq.kolumbus.com/dxs/> brought DX spots up so fast that it was nothing short of amazing. Another of Charlie's favorite sites are <http://cpcug.org/user/wfeidt/index.html> and <http://www.wwdx.org/dxinfo.html> but the one that he enjoys most of all is <http://www.dxer.org> which is run by an old timer like himself.

Herb Blair, K5IDX, has been a ham for three sunspot cycles but only found DX during the last one. Despite that handicap, he reached 323 on the DXCC list and only needs a few more to get them all. True to the contradictory competitive/helping nature of a true DXer, he runs an information packed website aimed at spreading DX news and helpful information. He calls it The DXers Notebook and it's truly spectacular. It is rich with multimedia features and items on the pages change weekly to honor recent DX operations. Charlie stumbled upon Herb's site accidentally but one day early on, he e mailed him and since then, have spoken on the air and telephone several times. Herb is a slow talkin', fast drivin', suspenders wearin', truck ownin' Texan who earns a living as a Senior Design Engineer in the telecommunications business. About the only area Charlie and Herb share no similarities in is their mode preference. Herb prefers SSB and we all know that Charlie knows that DX IS but that CW is forever! They hardly knew each other's call signs since they rarely are in pileups together and neither of them does very much in contests. Regardless, they are much alike and have become quite good friends. The only complaint Charlie has is that Herb insists on featuring links to the Texas Tourist Board, having nothing to do with DX. Arrggghh!

With all this enthusiasm, Charlie felt courageous enough to have the local High School's ham club come for a tour of DX Hill. So, he called his friend Dan who is Principal and club advisor. They agreed on a field trip the following afternoon and Charlie immediately set to straightening out his orderly stacks of small boxes of parts and QSL cards. A final vacuuming left the shack fairly clean.

About 2:30 the following day, two vans from the school arrived. Dan drove one and Charlie didn't know the other driver but he opened the door and stepped out onto the front step. It was a beautiful sunny but a little cool afternoon. The vans emptied out as he walked toward them. "Hi everyone. Welcome to DX Hill," Charlie called out. Dan was first to answer, "Hi. I want you to meet Pete Wilkins. He's a new science teacher and he thinks he wants to become a ham. I told him I knew exactly how I could help him make his decision." Charlie shook hands with Dan and Pete with a big smile. Even old Rufus came out to greet the guests with a few woofs and wags. One by one, Charlie was introduced to the club members, a dozen in all. Dan quickly added, "Oh, Brian couldn't come with us but he said he's join us as soon as he could. Seems he got some computer time on the MIT computer and he can't afford to not use it. He knows his way here, doesn't he?" Of course, Dan knew quite well how close Charlie was to Brian and his family. Charlie just chuckled and invited everyone to the tower.

Charlie described his antenna system to the group. His monobander on 40 meters above the 5 elements on 20 gleaming in the afternoon sun captured the attention of the young hams and hams to be completely except for two. They were much more interested in the interconnections and control circuitry. Charlie answered questions and on queue, Mary called out from the back door, "Anytime you're ready. Some fresh hot muffins just came out of the oven." Young students still in their growing years don't need to be asked twice. They moved promptly to the house and toward the aroma of blueberry, apple and cinnamon, and strawberry. Mary welcomed them all into her kitchen and poured out Cokes and juices for the gang. She noticed that only one girl was in the group and asked, "Hi, do you want a ham license..." "Sue. My name is Sue and I think I do but I don't know for sure. Maybe this visit will help", she replied with a purposeful voice. Mary sat next to her and said softly only for her to hear, "Sue, I love Charlie very much but I never want to know him as a fellow ham. I have my hobbies and he has his. He supports mine and I support his. Do you understand?" Sue nodded but looked confused. Mary continued, "The truth is that I just never became interested in this scientific side. My strength is on the other side of my brain. But, if I had showed the slightest interest along the way, there is absolutely no doubt that Charlie would have coached me and helped me reach any level in ham radio I wanted. My happiness is in seeing him helping others like this." Sue smiled and said, "Thanks, I understand."

The ham shack proved to be the highlight of the visit. Charlie tuned through 20 meters and heard some VKs long path. He made a few quick contacts and asked the group, "Does anyone know what just happened?" Other than making some CW contacts, no one could answer. One fellow said, "I think one of the stations was a VK but that was too fast for me." "Good!" Charlie remarked. "That's great! Actually, I worked three Australians on the long path over Africa."

One student asked, "Can you talk with them anytime you want? Can you talk to other countries anytime you want?" Charlie sensed a deeper question but answered, "Well radio propagation directs our signals to different parts of the world depending on a number of issues like time of day, season, solar effects, F layer absorption, etc. So, the answer is no." Dan jumped in and said, "Patrick is a big Internet user and wants to get into digital communications." Patrick then added, "Well, I can contact someone in Australia any time I want. I don't even need a radio or a big antenna."

Charlie picked up the April, 1999 issue of CQ magazine and opened it to page 4. "Here, Patrick. Read this editorial by K2EEK and then tell me if you understand why we love ham radio." Patrick sat in one of the chairs in the next room and started reading. Charlie told the others, "The point is that if all I wanted to do is talk to another country, I'd pick up the telephone, dial a country code and a dozen or more random numbers. Then I could use my telephone bill to confirm that I contacted that country." Charlie looked at the blank faces, "Sounds like a bad idea, huh?" They all nodded. "The thrill of sending your own signal through space and by using your own equipment to contact someone who might be listening is the thrill. The uncertainty, the audacity, the special communications skill you have to distinguish you from 99% of the world's population is what keeps the thrill in the hobby."

Patrick had finished the reading assignment and returned. "Thanks, Mr. ....Mr." "Charlie, just call me Charlie." Charlie helped him. "OK Charlie. I understand but I can see you have a fast computer. How do you use it with the radio? Of course, that gave Charlie the segway into showing the group his computer and his favorite DX related sites. The interest level really picked up then and quickly; they all saw how Charlie had built a partnership between his ham needs and the Internet.

They work well together and are much more one-dimensional alone. Together, they form a reasonable example of synergy where the result is greater than what could be expecting from either component alone.

Just then, there was a loud knock at the front door. Mary greeted Brian, "Hello, dear. They're all in the radio shack. Here, take this with you. You look hungry." Mary gave him his favorite, a blueberry muffin and a 7-Up. "Thanks, I am starved. Sorry to be late." He joined into the conversation and added some DX stories of his own. At that time, Charlie learned that Brian was elected President of the club. I guess it's true that to be sure a job gets done, you give it to the busiest person.

About 5, Dan and Pete shooed the group out. "We'll come back but your parents will be expecting you for dinner." After some final questions and answers to them, they headed out and down the hill. Charlie stood in the door waving and said, "They're great kids, aren't they Mary?" Mary threaded her arm through his and leaned her head on his shoulder, "Yes, dear. They surely are. They surely are."

Leave your mark. Make a difference. You have opportunities every day. Don't miss them because your effort can change the world.