

Shave and a Haircut...

Mike Dinelli, N9BOR



Larry spotted the old J-38 straight key sitting on a shelf in his basement. It was behind a large box of vintage parts he had accumulated in the 25 years he had been licensed. The sight of the key took Larry by surprise and gave pause to remember his good friend, Rick, an SK. Larry and Rick met at Sullivan High School in Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood. They joined the school's Ham Radio club and it didn't take

long before the two became inseparable.

The old key was dusty, and hesitantly, Larry reached for it. While he might have forgotten about the old key, he had not forgotten his good friend. He missed Rick and thought of him often, even though it had been over ten years since he passed.

Larry took a soft cloth and gently wiped away the dust. June, Rick's XYL, asked Larry if he would like to have any of Rick's Ham gear—before it was sold or discarded. Larry felt it was an honor to have Rick's key and gladly accepted the kind gift.

He took Rick's death hard—they talked to each other almost every day. Often, they would run into each other on the Ham bands. Both were ardent CW operators, who ended their conversations with the standard, "shave and a haircut—dit dit." Sometimes, when they spoke on the telephone, they would end their conversation with a "dit dit" and a chuckle.

Even though ten years had passed, the sight of Rick's key brought on an unexpected melancholy. It was getting late, so Larry took the key to his shack and placed it on his operating desk. He turned out the lights and went upstairs to bed.

The next day, Larry thought about his friend and the dusty old key. It was difficult for him to concentrate at work. He decided he was going to clean it and use it on the air that night.

After dinner, Larry rushed down into the shack and studied his old friend's key. The brass had developed a greenish patina from sitting unused in the damp basement. He decided to clean the key with a little soap and water, but not polish it. There was something more to this than Larry was willing to admit. An old key should never look brand new, he thought; the years add character and tell a story.

After the cleaning and a thorough drying, it was time to plug the J-38 into Larry's vintage station. Larry has a modern, high-tech station for DXing and contesting. However, this key deserved to be connected to a seasoned station—one that understood the history and significance of this special instrument.

The rig fired up with the unmistakable thud associated with big, old iron. The tubes glowed and there was a faint smell of vintage electronics. He breathed it all in. The receiver came to life with a cacophony of signals—must be some-

thing rare, he thought. However, tonight was not a night for hunting DX.

Larry's mind raced with thoughts of his departed friend. It had been months since he used his vintage station and years since he saw Rick's J-38. He reached for the VFO knob and slowly tuned to the bottom of the band listening to every station. The old rubber tuning belt skipped a bit—not to worry. The band was alive with signals—not at all like he was used to hearing at the bottom of the solar cycle. Larry remembered the first time he heard signals coming from the speaker of his then new rig. I guess this old Heathkit still has some life in it, he thought.

*"...this old
Heathkit still
has some life
in it..."*

Illustration by:
Dick Sylvan, W9CBT



Robert F. Heytow
Memorial Radio Club

www.k9ya.org
telegraph@k9ya.org

K9YA Telegraph

CONTINUED - DIT DIT FROM PAGE 4

He was anxious to make a contact—a real connection, using his friend's key. He tuned slowly looking for a CQ and stopped at 7.040 to take a swig of coffee. It was the only clear spot he heard on the band. The thought of Rick, the old key and the memories of times past, choked him up. He took another sip from his MFJ coffee mug and sat back in his chair.

Deep in the background he heard a weak station tuning up. The signal's strength increased a little, but its note fluttered like DX making its way over the pole. The station called CQ, 3 x 3, so Larry jumped up and carefully adjusted the old green rig. The fist sounded familiar, but he couldn't make out the callsign.

Larry grabbed the J-38 and carefully sent, "QRZ DE W9XXX?" It had been awhile since he used a straight key and he knew his sending was rusty. After a pause, the station answered, "VY NICE TO CU AGN LARRY – UR 449 ES NAME HR IS RICK – HW? BK"

It hit Larry like a jolt from a HV plate cap. His heart pounded, even though he knew his mind or someone was playing tricks on him. He recognized the fist as that of his old pal Rick, gone SK ten years earlier. Could it be? Hands shaking, he sent, "TNX RICK UR ALSO 449 WID QSB – QTH CHICAGO CHICAGO – OP IS LARRY LARRY – QSB MISSED YOUR CALL? DE W9XXX K."

The station answered back, "NICE TO HR MY OLD J38 AGN - SRI LARRY MUST QRT – HPE CU AGN SN – U DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH I MISSED U - 73 ES GB SK W9XXX DE W9YYY DIT DIT."

Larry couldn't believe what he was copying. Was someone playing a trick on him? Did he say it was nice to hear HIS J-38 again? Larry grabbed the key and sent, "RICK DON'T QRT – IS THAT U? PSE AGN? DE W9XXX K." But, there was no answer. Larry tuned up and down the band a little, but heard nothing. In fact, the entire band now appeared to be dead—all those strong signals had vanished and there were only a few weak ones remaining.

With a shaking hand Larry wiped a tear from his cheek. He always thought of himself as a man of science—not someone who believed in the paranormal or ghosts. He tried to process what had just occurred. He entered the contact in his paper logbook and after about twenty minutes, turned off the old rig and silently mouthed "dit dit." He stood up, wobbled a bit, and went upstairs.

Helen, Larry's XYL, was putting away the dinner dishes and noticed something was wrong. "You all right?" she asked. "Yes, but please sit down. I have something to tell you." ■

CONTINUED - PARTY TRAIN FROM PAGE 2

I am very active in Ham Radio—12,560 contacts and growing. I enjoy DX and have confirmed contacts with China, Russia, Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, all of South America and most of Africa with the exception of Chad, Sudan, Zaire and Tunisia.

I spend a lot of time helping fellow Hams with antenna installations and with the quality of their audio. I have made many great friends and should have gotten my license years earlier than I did.

My rig is an Icom IC-718 with dipoles for 17-, 20- and 40-meters and an A-99 vertical on 10-meters. It makes me feel good when ops ask me what type of beam I'm running—they can't believe it's only a dipole at 45 feet. ■

Ham Quips

AMERICAN GOTHIC VERTICAL



NO MORE ANTENNAS ON THE ROOF, DICK!
IT'S STILL LEAKING FROM THE LAST ONE.



Inside the KG4AXH
Party Train



Robert F. Heytow
Memorial Radio Club

www.k9ya.org
telegraph@k9ya.org

K9YA Telegraph