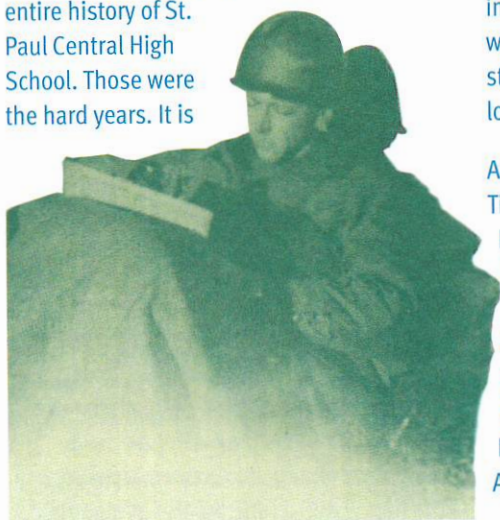


Meet Charles and the Gang

Charles M. Schulz was born in November 1922, in Minnesota. At a young age he was nicknamed “Sparky” by his uncle, after the horse Sparkplug from the comic strip “Barney Google.” Comics were a part of Schulz’s life from this point forward. In elementary school, Schulz spent his time copying the images of Buck Rogers, Popeye, Mickey Mouse, and the Three Little Pigs. He was bumped up a half grade in the third grade and then again in the fifth grade. In his own words, “By the time I was in the sixth grade, I was too far ahead of myself, and was the smallest and youngest in the class” (Schulz 15). This is when the Charlie Brown inspirations began.

Then came junior high school and the collapse of the academic roof. In the tenth grade I failed everything in sight. For a time, high school was not much better. I think I must have won the award for being the most miserable physics student in the entire history of St. Paul Central High School. Those were the hard years. It is



difficult to overcome the belief that you really don’t know anything and are truly stupid (Schulz 17). Regardless of his failing academics, Schulz continued drawing. One Sunday his parents took him to the St. Paul Public Library to see an exhibition of original cartoon strips. Schulz remembers, “I saw how beautifully they were rendered, the size they were drawn, and how nicely they all were done. I went home and tore up all of my drawings and started over again” (Schulz 18). Schulz’ father sacrificed \$170 to pay for him to participate in a correspondence course in cartooning through the Arts Instruction Schools, Inc. (which later offered him a job after the war).

Schulz entered the Army in 1943 at the age of twenty. His mother died of cancer only a few weeks after his enlistment. Charles Schulz “learned what it is to be lonely in the Army, and I know that much of that feeling has been inflicted on Charlie Brown. We were lonely, we were anxious, and the fact that war was still on meant that none of us ever knew how long we would be in service” (Schulz 22).

After the war Schulz began lettering for Timeless Topix, a Catholic comic magazine. He also introduced his gag cartoon, “Li’l Folks” to the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* that ran it for two years in the women’s section. Between the years of 1948 and 1950 Schulz published fifteen cartoons in the *Saturday Evening Post*. In 1950 Schulz brought “Li’l Folks” to the United Features Syndicate. As he was leaving the Syndicate, he added

to his submissions a new strip he had just come up with based on the same children in “Li’l Folks.” The Syndicate liked the strip and “Peanuts” (a name the Syndicate decided and Schulz did not like) first appeared in nine newspapers on October 2, 1950. At its peak, it ran in 2,600 newspapers in 75 countries. Charles Schulz bid farewell to his readers in January 2000. His final Sunday strip appeared February 13, 2000, the day after Schulz passed away.

Charlie Brown

“Some of my best ideas have come from a mood of sadness, rather than a feeling of well-being. Strangely enough, pleasant things are not really funny. You can’t create humor out of happiness. I’m astonished at the number of people who write to me saying, ‘Why can’t you create happy stories for us? Why does Charlie Brown always have to lose? Why can’t you let him kick the football?’ Well, there is nothing funny about the person who gets to kick the football. Drama and humor come from trouble and sadness, and mankind’s astounding ability to survive life’s unhappiness. It is a virtual miracle that we have existed over these millions of years against such deplorable odds, when everything is against us.”

“When I was little, I was so convinced that I had a very plain face that I was surprised when anyone recognized me. My idea was to give Charlie Brown a face with very little character. Despite all of my practice, he remains the most difficult to draw of all the

kids. I guess it’s the roundness of his head.”

“Charlie Brown’s face was the round simple one. For it I borrowed the name of a very close friend. I went over to the desk where we both worked at Art Instruction and I asked, ‘Charlie Brown, do you care if I use your name in a comic strip?’ He said ‘no.’ I was working on a strip when he came over to look at it. ‘Is that the character you’re going to put my name to?’ he said.”

Snoopy

“I have always thought that there were a lot of dogs that were smarter than their young masters, so I decided to let Snoopy ‘think.’ That made him superior to any other cartoon dog. Letting Snoopy think and walk around on his hind legs also made him superior to the kids in the strip, since he could go his own way and exhibit an imagination that was unmatched by the rest of the characters. It has been difficult to keep him from becoming the real hero of the strip. Maybe he has.”

“We got a dog named Spike, and he was the inspiration for Snoopy. He was the smartest and most uncontrollable dog that I have ever seen. Spike was black-and-white mixed breed. What breeds they were, we never figured out, although there was probably a little hound and a little pointer in him. He



had black ears and similar markings to Snoopy. One day I counted up and realized that Spike had a vocabulary of at least fifty words. You could say to him, ‘Spike, do you want a potato? Why

don’t you go downstairs and get a potato?’ and he would immediately go down to the basement and stick his head in the potato sack and bring up a potato.”

“People have asked me how Snoopy is able to sleep on top of his doghouse without falling off. The answer is simple. Birds can sleep standing on tree limbs because their brains send a message to their feet, activating a certain muscle that tightens their claws. Snoopy’s brain sends a message to his ear muscles, which lock him to the top of the doghouse.”

Lucy

“[Lucy] really can’t help herself. Perhaps she is annoyed that it is all too easy. Charlie Brown isn’t that much of a challenge. To be consistent, however, we have to let her triumph, for all the loves in the strip are unrequited; all the baseball games are lost; all the test scores are D-minuses; the Great Pumpkin never comes; and the football is always pulled away.”

“One of the big breakthroughs on the strip happened when Lucy got her psychiatric

booth. That got a lot of attention. It started off as a parody on lemonade stands. Lucy is a little different from the usual child: she went beyond lemonade stands and offered psychiatric help for five cents.”

Linus

“Linus didn’t come along for several years. He came because one day I was doodling on a piece of paper and I drew this little character with some wild hair straggling down from the top of his head and I showed it to a friend of mine who also was working at Art Instruction Schools and whose name was Linus Maurer. For no reason at all I had written his name under it. He looked at it and we both kind of chuckled. Then I thought, why not put this character in the strip and make him Lucy’s brother?”

“Of all the things in the strip, I think that I am most proud of Linus’s security blanket. I may not have invented the term, but I like to think that I helped make it a part of our language. I’m sure kids dragged around blankets before Linus appeared—I know mine did—but I’m sure he became the leading practitioner.”

Sally

“Lucy’s crabbiness has been important to the strip ever since it began, but I am glad that I gave Charlie Brown a little sister in 1959. I can switch from Lucy’s being a fussbudget to Sally’s school days and all the dumb reports that she gives. Sally stands for all the frustration and confusion that little kids experience at school. She is a favorite of many people because she is so uninhibited.”

Schroeder

"I was looking through this book on music, and it showed a portion of Beethoven's Ninth in it, so I drew a cartoon of Charlie Brown singing this. Now this was a long time ago, and the humor was much different from what it is now. I thought it looked kind of neat, showing these complicated notes coming out of the mouth of this comic strip character, and I thought about it some more, and then I thought, why not have one of the little kids play a toy piano."

"Schroeder first appeared in the strip in 1951. When he first appeared, he was a baby, but I soon realized that there was nothing I could do with a baby in the strip so I very quickly had him grow up a bit and be able to walk around."

"I like to work in the little relationship between Schroeder and Lucy that shows another side of her character. Lucy bosses Charlie Brown and Linus around, but she is putty in the hands of Schroeder. On the other hand, without his piano, Schroeder is not all that impressive."

What Is Art?

How do we define art? This is a question that has often been debated and may never have a definite answer. In speaking of art, Charles Schulz said, "The true test of art—my own definition, right or wrong—is how well it speaks to other, future generations" (Inge 117). Where then, does his comic strip fit? "Peanuts" is still very popular today and his characters have become icons in American culture.

And yet, his work isn't hanging in any art galleries. It is however being staged for audiences all over the nation. *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* is based directly off of Schulz's comic strip, almost literally taking it from page to stage. It premiered off Broadway in 1967 and ran for more than five years. Its creation led to the forming of thirteen national and fifteen international companies and a Hallmark Hall of Fame television production. It was later revived in 1999 on Broadway in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of "Peanuts." If theatre is considered an art form, then perhaps Schulz's beloved characters have found a place in the art world after all.

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From Sacramento, California. A senior in the theatre studies program, her most recent dramaturgy credits include **Guys and Dolls** at Center Street Music Theatre and **The Zoo Story** at BYU.

Marel A. Stock
Dramaturg

From West Linn, Oregon. Graduated in August with a BA in theatre arts studies with a dramaturgy emphasis. She was also the dramaturg for BYU's production of **The Taming of the Shrew**. This past summer, she studied theatre in Cambodia and will enter TMA's graduate program this fall.

It's OK to talk about Charlie Brown

Charlie Brown Blog tmaseason.cfac.byu.edu

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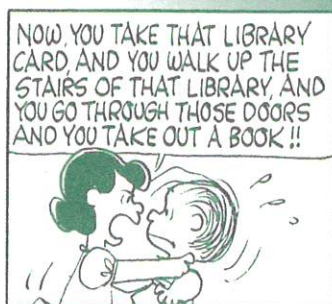
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