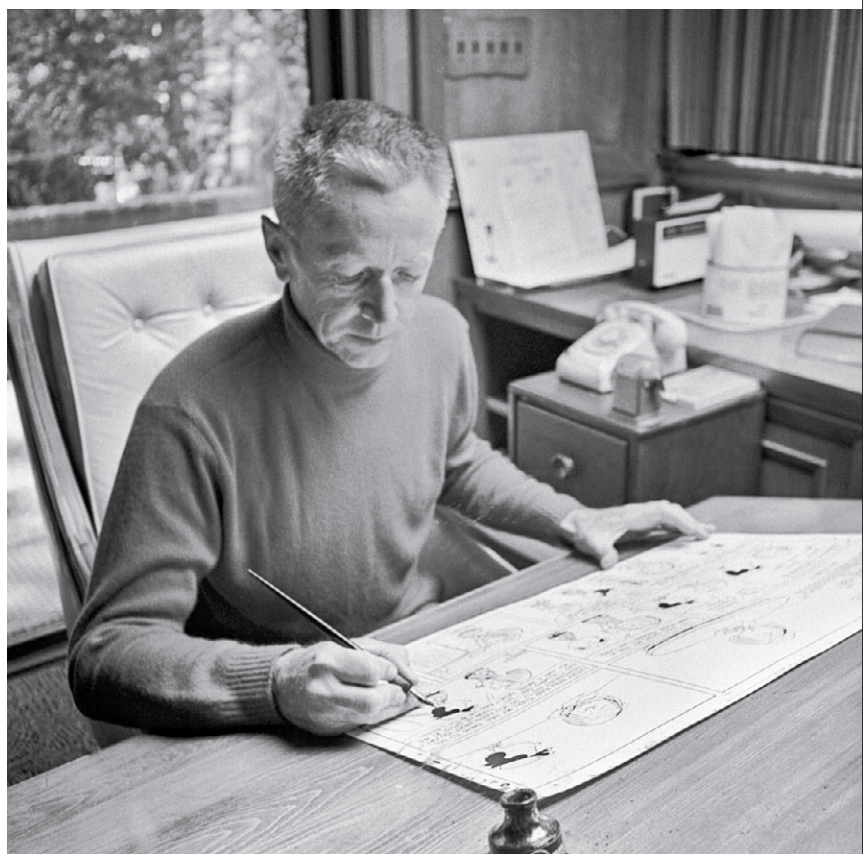


# THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF CHARLES SCHULZ, CREATOR OF PEANUTS

Caroline Harris



Charles Schulz once said of *Peanuts*, “If you read the strip, you would know me. Everything I am goes into the strip.” Schulz’s life was his greatest source material. Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Lucy, Linus, and the rest of the *Peanuts* cast were not plucked from thin air; they were directly influenced by Schulz’s experiences and by the people he knew. He created “mental drawings” of those around him, closely studying their mannerisms and expressions to incorporate into his cartoons.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Minneapolis in 1922, Schulz was nicknamed “Sparky” after the racehorse Spark Plug from the popular *Barney Google* comic strip. It was a fitting nickname for the young artist, who knew he wanted to be a cartoonist at age six and practiced by copying comic characters like Mickey Mouse and Popeye. Even as a child, Schulz had an original and inventive way of seeing the world. In elemen-

tary school, he drew a man shoveling snow off the sidewalk, then added a towering palm tree to the snowbank. His teacher declared with admiration, “Someday, Charles, you’re going to be an artist!”<sup>2</sup>

Schulz created drawings on the backs of his mother’s shopping lists, carried a pencil in his pocket, and bought every comic book he could. Each Sunday, he read the funny papers with his father, Carl, who owned and operated The Family Barbershop in St. Paul, cutting people’s hair from early in the morning to late at night. Like his father, Schulz had a strong work ethic. Committed to developing his craft, he bought himself a book called *How to Draw Cartoons*, by Clare Briggs, for his eleventh birthday and began drawing mysteries inspired by Sherlock Holmes novels. At age 14, Schulz and his parents attended an exhibition on comic art at the Saint Paul Public Library. After returning from the exhibi-

*Charles Schulz at his drafting table in his studio in California, August 1969*  
(PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM VANO.)

tion, Schulz tore up all his drawings, resolving to make them better.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond drawing, Schulz was athletic and enjoyed baseball, golf, and ice hockey. He was on the St. Paul Central High School’s golf team and dreamed of being a renowned amateur golfer, an aspiration he later channeled into Snoopy’s alter ego as the World-Famous Golf Pro. During long, snowy winters in Minnesota, Schulz played hockey on local ponds and frozen yards, and snuck onto private-school ice rinks throughout the Twin Cities. Sometimes Schulz’s father hosed down their yard and the water froze into a skating rink where Schulz and his neighborhood friends would skate for hours.<sup>4</sup>

An only child, Schulz grew up spending Saturday afternoons at the

movies with his friend Sherman Plepler. Schulz's lifelong love of cinema would influence how he thought of comic strip panels as "camera angles" and used cinematic language to describe his work. He often stated that one reason adults are never depicted in *Peanuts* is that they wouldn't fit in the frame. The strip was only an inch and a half tall, and Schulz had no interest in zooming out to give adults enough space to stand. His vision was of a world populated by children, without the intrusion of adults, and that vision was largely informed by his own childhood in St. Paul.<sup>5</sup>

Schulz "collected insults" in school and was temperamentally timid. Although he had friends (like Plepler, whom he would later name a *Peanuts* character after), he didn't feel attractive or cool, and he was the youngest in his high school class. Struggling with popularity, getting good grades, and fitting in at school—all fixtures in Schulz's early years—would become recurring themes in *Peanuts*. Because Schulz thought he had a forgettable face, he made Charlie Brown a lovable loser, giving him a round, blank face that's intentionally ordinary. Despite the tremendous success Schulz would go on to receive as a cartoonist, he maintained an underdog mentality throughout his life. When *A Charlie Brown Christmas* won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Children's Program in 1966, Schulz said in his acceptance speech, "Charlie Brown is not used to winning, so we thank you."<sup>6</sup>

School wasn't easy, but at least Schulz had a four-legged friend: his rambunctious black-and-white dog, Spike. Spike rang the doorbell, understood more than 50 words, and ate bizarre objects. He was Schulz's constant companion, and when the weather was warm enough the duo ran outside together until dinner-time. Spike's personality inspired



*Peanuts character cutouts from Camp Snoopy in the Mall of America, Bloomington, Minnesota, 1992–2006*

the character of Snoopy, and Schulz would name Snoopy's brother Spike after his beloved childhood dog. (In *Peanuts*, Spike lives in the desert in Needles, California, and has a cowboy hat and a mustache.)<sup>7</sup>

Schulz enjoyed drawing his dog's entertaining adventures. When Schulz was in high school, one of his illustrations of Spike ran in *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* and was published in hundreds of newspapers. The caption read, "a hunting dog that eats pins, tacks, and razor blades is owned by C. F. [sic] Schulz, St. Paul, Minn."<sup>8</sup>

Even though Schulz was a nationally published artist thanks to *Ripley's*, he still felt rejected at school. At the encouragement of his art teacher, he submitted a series of drawings to his high school yearbook, only to discover none of them had been published. (Forty years later, Schulz still described this incident as "a crushing blow.") Nevertheless, he persisted, just like Charlie Brown trying to kick the football over and over, despite



*Camp Snoopy canvas tote bag*

knowing that Lucy will pull it away each time. No matter how renowned Schulz became, his Minnesota roots continued to shape him, from his lifelong interest in ice hockey to his down-to-earth attitude and wholesome midwestern values.



## A CAREER IN COMICS

In February 1940, at the age of 17, Schulz started taking art classes at the Federal School of Applied Cartooning (which later became Art Instruction, Inc.). Based in Minneapolis, this correspondence school offered home-study instruction nationwide. As a local resident, Schulz had the option to attend art classes in person, but he was too self-conscious. He feared being publicly humiliated by his teachers criticizing his work in front of his classmates. To avoid risking embarrassment, Schulz mailed in his assignments and received his teachers' feedback through return mail.<sup>9</sup>

At age 19, Schulz graduated from the applied cartooning program; at age 20, he was drafted into the US Army to fight in World War II. Shortly before he began his military service, Schulz's mother, Dena, died of cancer. Schulz was devastated. He was extremely close to his mother, and her tragic death at the age of 50 meant that she would never get to see his success as a cartoonist.<sup>10</sup>

During Schulz's military service from 1942 to 1945, he spent many weekends and evenings by himself. This experience, he later wrote, taught him everything he needed to know about loneliness. He channeled the isolation and anxiety he endured during his army years into Charlie Brown. "My sympathy for the loneliness that all of us experience has dropped heavily upon poor Charlie Brown," Schulz explained in *Peanuts: A Golden Celebration*. "I worry about almost all there is in life to worry about, and because I worry, Charlie Brown has to worry."<sup>11</sup>

After the war, Schulz returned to St. Paul, where he lived with his father above the barbershop and continued to work toward becoming

a professional cartoonist. Schulz had a big year in 1946: He landed two jobs that would prove invaluable to his artistic development.<sup>12</sup>

The first job was as a letterer for a Catholic organization in St. Paul that published religious comic books to provide teaching materials for Catholic schools, churches, and youth groups. Through this work, Schulz became a fast, adept letterer—a skill he would call upon later as he created the iconic speech bubbles in *Peanuts*. While many comic artists at

the time viewed lettering as drudgery to delegate to assistants, Schulz completed all his lettering himself. His signature lettering, which he cultivated during this period, enhanced the expressiveness of his strips. Rather than outsourcing his lettering, Schulz viewed it as an opportunity to elevate his storytelling. He varied his lettering to convey Charlie Brown's worries, Linus's meltdowns, Snoopy's fantasies, and other heightened emotional states for his characters.<sup>13</sup>



Happy Campers statue

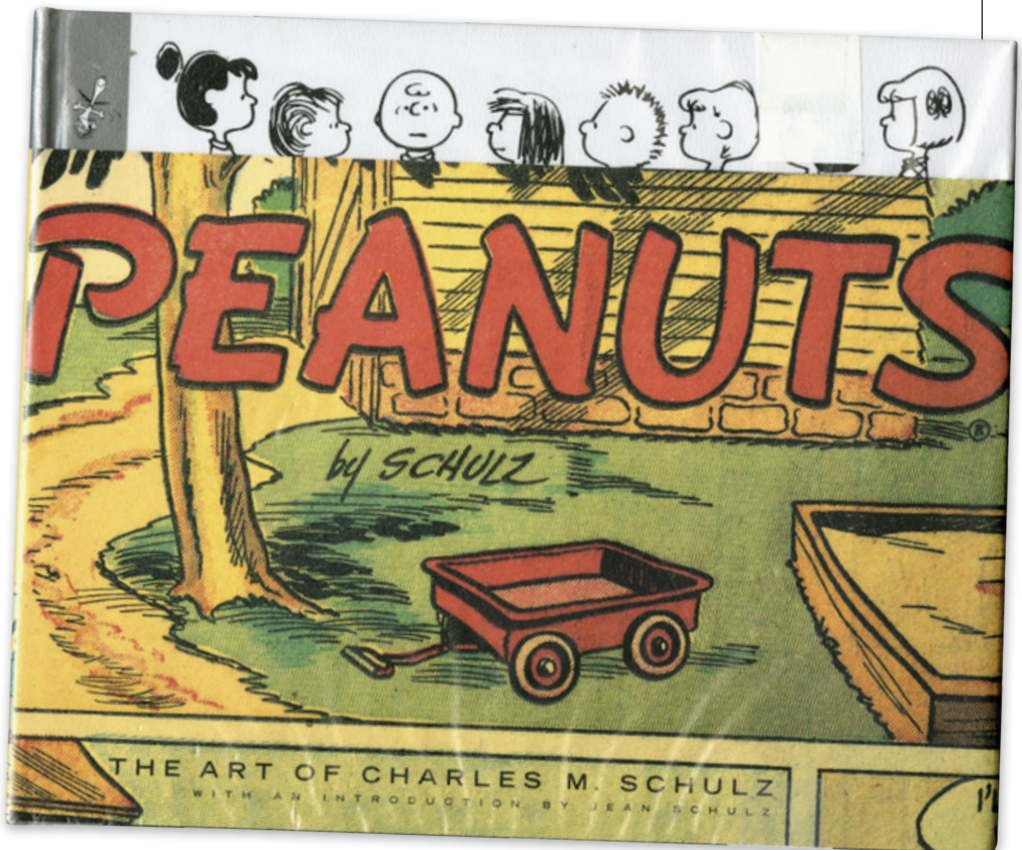
(PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN OLSON, 2001.)



The second job was teaching at Art Instruction, Inc., where Schulz had taken classes in his late teens. His fellow instructors included Charlie Brown, Linus Maurer, and Frieda Rich. They became his close confidantes and critics, and he immortalized them forever by naming *Peanuts* characters after them. Schulz worked at the school for five years, evaluating students' artwork as he continued to develop his own comic art style. The room where his mother had died became his studio, complete with a professional drafting table and drawings by his colleagues. Ever the hard worker, Schulz had many late nights in his studio balancing his two jobs and his personal ambitions as a cartoonist.<sup>14</sup>

While teaching at Art Instruction, Inc., Schulz dated a woman named Donna Mae Johnson, who worked in the school's accounting office. Every morning, Schulz drew cartoons on her appointment books so she would think of him for the rest of the day. Donna was dating another man, Al, at the same time, and she broke Schulz's heart when she accepted Al's marriage proposal rather than his.<sup>15</sup>

With her blue eyes and red hair, Donna would become Schulz's Little Red-Haired Girl, portrayed repeatedly in *Peanuts*. Charlie Brown's unrequited crush on the Little Red-Haired Girl and fruitless attempts to win her over are related painfully to Schulz's relationship with Donna. Even though Schulz would marry twice (wedding Joyce Halverson in 1951 and Jean Clyde in 1973), his thoughts and storylines involving the Little Red-Haired Girl persisted. Schulz declared that Charlie Brown's personality was born the moment Donna rejected him. As with so many of the challenges and rejections in his life, Schulz used his heartbreak as fodder for his cartoons.



Cover detail from the 2001 book, *Peanuts: The Art of Charles M. Schulz*, by Charles M. Schulz (COPYRIGHT © PANTHEON GRAPHIC NOVELS SERIES)

In 1947, a forerunner of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* published two of Schulz's comics called *Li'l Folks*, a precursor to *Peanuts*. And from 1947 to 1950, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* ran his weekly cartoon *Li'l Folks by Sparky*. Schulz was unsatisfied with these small victories. He wanted his work to reach a larger audience by being syndicated and sold to many markets.<sup>16</sup>

In 1949, when Schulz was 27 years old, he got his big break: a five-year contract publishing a daily comic strip called *Peanuts* with United Feature Syndicate. Schulz was finally achieving his childhood dream of becoming a nationally distributed cartoonist. The only problem was the comic strip's name, *Peanuts*, which Schulz called "undignified, inappropriate, and confusing." Schulz didn't want his work to be associated with the "peanut gallery"—to him,

creating cartoons was an important and meaningful pursuit. Exploring universal themes like unrequited love, friendship, sibling rivalries, insecurity, and loneliness, Schulz was doing much more than providing a few laughs.<sup>17</sup>

Although Schulz detested the name *Peanuts*, he had to give in because *Li'l Folks* was too similar to another comic strip named *Tack Knight's Little Folks*. So, on October 2, 1950, *Peanuts* debuted in seven newspapers across the country. *Peanuts* was no instant hit—sales were poor at first and readers had trouble keeping track of the many characters. But over time, Schulz developed his characters into how they're known today, introducing Lucy as a bossy know-it-all, turning Charlie Brown into a worrywart, and giving Schroeder his signature toy piano and Linus his security blanket.<sup>18</sup>



In the 1960s, *Peanuts* experienced its golden era. Schulz's book *Happiness Is a Warm Puppy* was published in 1962 and spent 45 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In 1965, the television special *A Charlie Brown Christmas* debuted and the *Peanuts* characters appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. In 1967, the off-Broadway show *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* debuted. Nearly half of all TV watchers in the United States viewed *A Charlie Brown Christmas* the

night it premiered, and the film became the longest-running TV cartoon special in history. *Peanuts* blossomed and became known around the world.<sup>19</sup>

A key reason for the surge in *Peanuts*' popularity during the 1960s was Snoopy's evolution from a four-legged beagle to the vivacious two-legged creature we know today. Those were the years when Snoopy started dreaming big, writing fantastical stories on the typewriter, and sleep-

ing on top of his doghouse, much to readers' delight. In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Snoopy even decorates his doghouse and enters it into a neighborhood light and display contest.<sup>20</sup>

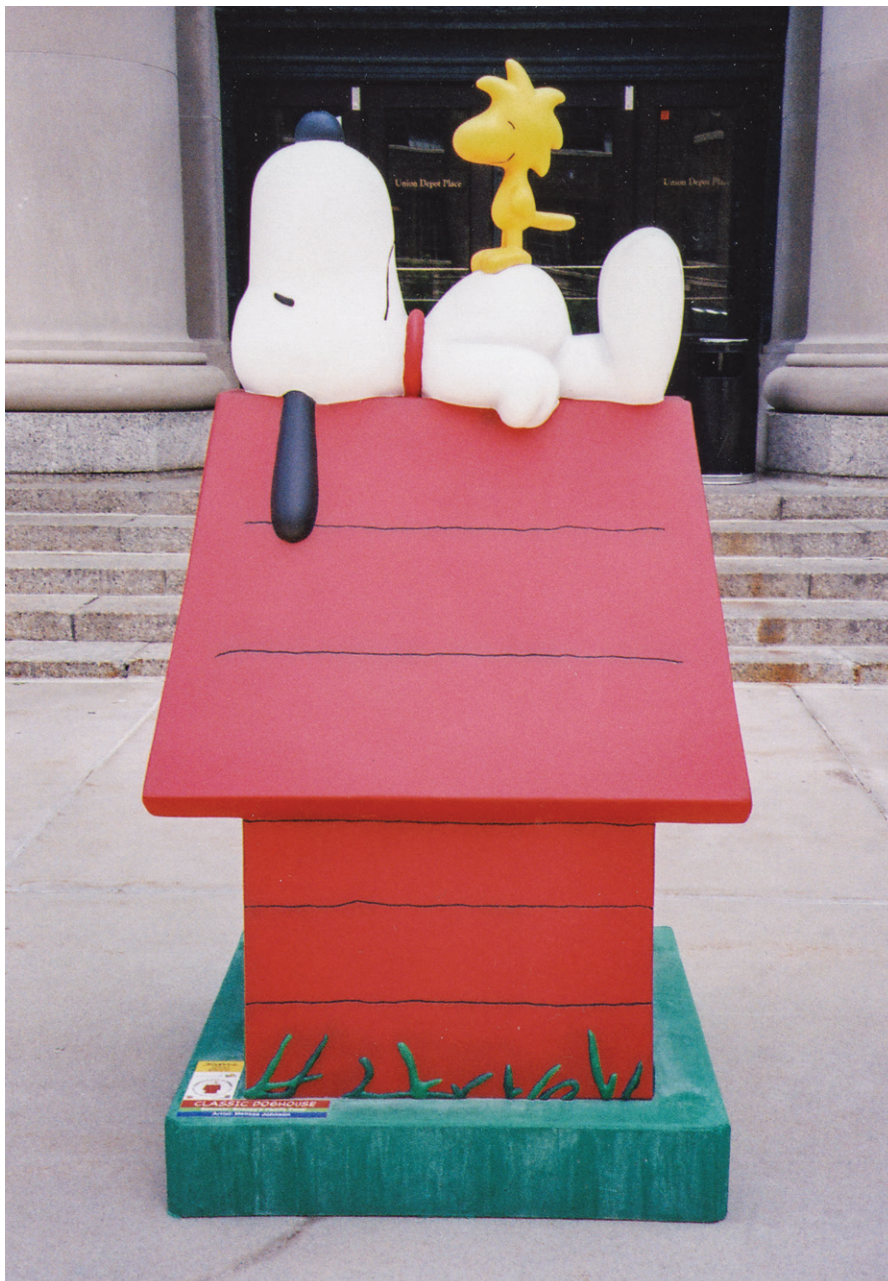
Snoopy was the daredevil Schulz wished he could be. While Snoopy's character became increasingly outlandish and adventurous, Schulz remained set on his safe, comfortable routines. He worked in his studio from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and ate familiar foods. Traveling made him nervous, and he preferred to stay close to home. Meanwhile, Snoopy underwent many exciting expeditions (at least in his head), from going on treacherous hikes through the wilderness to being the first beagle on Mars.

Since the adventuresome beagle was such a dynamic character, Schulz had to make sure that Snoopy wouldn't overrun the entire strip and that other characters would get enough airtime. *Peanuts* wouldn't be *Peanuts* if it focused solely on Snoopy; the rest of the crew was necessary too.<sup>21</sup>

### THE BRILLIANCE OF PEANUTS

Zander Cannon, a cartoonist who lives and works in Minneapolis, remarked, "The brilliance of *Peanuts* is how simple and iconic Charles Schulz made all these characters. Every character represents a point of view: Charlie Brown is depressed, Lucy is bossy, Pigpen is dirty, Linus is hopeful." The *Peanuts* children are wise beyond their years, mulling over some of life's biggest questions. Schulz doesn't condescend to them or dumb down their language; if anything, *Peanuts* is a world where the children might know more than the adults do.<sup>22</sup>

Classic Doghouse Snoopy statue  
(PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN OLSON, 2004.)







The Doctor Is In statue  
(PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN OLSON, 2002.)

guage of children,” said Ben Penrod, president of Nerd Street, a national e-sports network, and the founder of the Awesome Con annual pop-culture convention. Penrod has been organizing comic book conventions (from Awesome Con to Twin Cities Con) full-time since 2011.

Children liked the cute drawings, adults appreciated the sophisticated humor and psychology, and readers of all ages and cultures fell in love with the world of *Peanuts*. By 2000, *Peanuts* had 355 million daily readers, was published in more than 2,600 newspapers, was translated into more than 30 languages, and was available in 75 countries. The ramifications for the cartooning world were huge: “*Peanuts* opened the door for comic strips and comic books—which were seen as a somewhat childish art form—to be taken more seriously,” explained Penrod.<sup>25</sup>

From 1950 until his death in 2000 at the age of 77, Schulz completed 17,897 strips, becoming America’s favorite twentieth-century cartoonist. To this day, *Peanuts* is so popular, it’s become a cultural shorthand, with phrases like “security blanket,” “you’re a Charlie Brown type,” and “a Charlie Brown Christmas tree” being integrated into the English language.<sup>26</sup>

The *Peanuts* phenomenon extends far beyond newspapers into animated television specials, theme parks, books, musicals, and parades. Every year since 1968, a gigantic *Peanuts* character has appeared in New York City’s Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. Countless families have come together on Sunday mornings to read *Peanuts* or have made watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas* an annual holiday tradition.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout *Peanuts*, Schulz sprinkled both implicit and explicit

“Religion, psychiatry, education—indeed all the complexities of the modern world—seem more amusing than menacing when they are seen through the clear, uncompromising eyes of the comic-strip kids from *Peanuts*,” the 1965 *Time* magazine cover story “Good Grief” read. Decades later, critics still agree with the sentiment—a 2019 essay in *The Atlantic* called Charles Schulz’s kid characters “precocious, cruel, and nihilistic,” as well as “among the most compelling in children’s literature.”<sup>23</sup>

Schulz’s astute insights into children stemmed from his own parenting. He was a devoted father who doted on his five children, spending time with them in his studio, driving them to ice-skating practices, and creating a home life that his daughter Amy compared to living at Disneyland. Schulz knew what children were like, and his own children’s interests and concerns made their way into the strip.<sup>24</sup>

“Charles Schulz’s gift was being able to speak to grown-ups in the lan-

references to Minnesota, never forgetting his modest midwestern roots even as he was honored at the Louvre Museum in Paris and on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles. Inside, some part of him would always feel like the humble barber's son growing up in the baseball fields, backyards, classrooms, and ice rinks of the Twin Cities.

## THE MINNESOTA INFLUENCE

Charles Schulz lived in the Twin Cities for more than three decades before moving his family to Santa Rosa, California, in 1958. The move was Joyce's idea: She found it challenging to raise young children in Minnesota's harsh winters. Their five children (Craig, Meredith, Jill, Amy, and Monte) were all born in the Twin Cities.

Schulz's Minnesota years strongly influenced the characters, storylines, and settings of *Peanuts*. The cold winters, pickup baseball games, ice-skating, and hockey of Schulz's childhood appear throughout the strips.

"The Minnesota influence is felt in how the kids in *Peanuts* interact with the outside world, especially with snow, with fall, and with baseball," said Sarah Breaux, archivist at the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center. "The *Peanuts* kids can't play baseball until the snow melts. We certainly don't have to worry about that in Northern California."<sup>28</sup>

*Peanuts* would be a very different comic strip if Schulz had grown up in Northern California, Texas, or Florida. It's no coincidence that in a 1957 strip, Lucy wins the Outstanding Fussbudget of Minnesota's Hennepin County; in a 1975 strip, Lucy declares that she wants to learn about St. Paul and Minneapolis; and in a 1999 strip, Lucy declares her new philosophy is "We'll always have Minneapolis." Without Schulz's Minnesota upbringing,

Woodstock might not ice-skate on Snoopy's frozen water dish, and Snoopy might not exclaim "stop this stupid snowing!" and "let's hear it for the snow!"<sup>29</sup>

*Peanuts* has been described as "the paragon of American wholesome-ness" and "Midwestern at heart." Characters never swear, instead using phrases like "good grief" and "rats" to convey their frustration. Charlie Brown is a lovable, down-to-earth Everyman modeled after Schulz's own personality. Schulz placed Charlie Brown in many of the same scenarios he experienced growing up in Minnesota, from visiting his father at his barbershop when he was lonely as a child to pining after the Little Red-Haired Girl in his twenties.<sup>30</sup>

"Charles Schulz was able to create these characters because he was all the characters," said Benjamin Clark, curator at the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center. "Every drawing, every drop of ink that is in *Peanuts* is from the hand of Charles Schulz. So much of his life he poured into the strip, which is why even though Schulz lived in Sonoma County, California, for about 40 years, it still snows every winter in *Peanuts*."<sup>31</sup>

Schroeder's single-minded dedication to playing piano reflects Schulz's passion for comics, as well as his fondness for classical music. Lucy has Schulz's sarcastic, at times snarky, sense of humor. Woodstock shares Schulz's lifelong love of ice-skating, and Snoopy is a booklover and writer. (Schulz regretted not going to college and read voraciously to make up for it, making his way through classics, history books, biographies, novels, and the Bible.)

Even the emotional content of *Peanuts*—with its deadpan humor, rejection of fairy-tale endings, and occasional pinings: "Is this all there is to my life?"—can be described as distinctly Minnesotan. "There's a big

thread of melancholy in *Peanuts*, and all the winters and snow in Minnesota can lead to a lot of melancholy, so that seems very Minnesotan," said Minneapolis-based artist Steve Stwally, who grew up reading *Peanuts* and being a Charles Schulz fan. Sparky himself struggled with anxiety and melancholy, emotions he channeled into Charlie Brown's emotional tussles.<sup>32</sup>

Although many of the panels (especially those involving winter scenes) look like they could take place in St. Paul, *Peanuts* is set in an abstract fantasyland that can't be pegged to one location. Most likely, the setting is an idealized blend of the Twin Cities and Santa Rosa, displaying many of the traits and landmarks of small-town America. Still, Schulz looms large in his home state of Minnesota, inspiring the next generation of comics, cartoonists, illustrators, and animators seeking to learn from the best.<sup>33</sup>

## SCHULZ'S IMPACT ON THE MINNESOTA ART SCENE

The history of *Peanuts* is intertwined with the history of Minnesota. For five summers after Schulz's death in 2000, artists created more than 100 statues of Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and friends, which were exhibited all over St. Paul. The *Peanuts* statues were auctioned off at the end of each summer, and the proceeds funded scholarships at St. Paul's now-defunct College of Visual Arts. Several statues are still displayed today in the Twin Cities.<sup>34</sup>

Tributes to Charles Schulz can be found all over Ramsey and Hennepin Counties, from the Snoopy bunker at Highland National Golf Course to the plaque celebrating Schulz in the St. Paul Central High School Hall of Fame. A statue of Snoopy dressed



## **"PEANUTS WAS THE GOLD STANDARD OF HOW GOOD A COMIC STRIP CAN BE, AND CHARLES SCHULZ WAS PROOF THAT SOMEONE FROM MY NECK OF THE WOODS COULD SOMEHOW GET A JOB DRAWING CARTOONS FOR A LIVING."**

up as a pilot greets passengers at the Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport, reminding passersby that they're in Charles Schulz's hometown. Camp Snoopy was a much-loved theme park at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, for 16 years, until the licensing agreement expired in 2006 and Nickelodeon Universe replaced it.<sup>35</sup>

Surrounded by *Peanuts* references, numerous Minnesota cartoonists look to Charles Schulz as their hero. Take Jim Keefe, for instance. Growing up in Golden Valley, Minnesota, in the 1970s, Keefe had no idea how to become a cartoonist. He was the little boy drawing dinosaurs on his math tests (much to his teachers' chagrin), unsure how to turn his passion into a career. He reminisced, "*Peanuts* was the gold standard of how good a comic strip can be, and Charles Schulz was proof that someone from my neck of the woods could somehow get a job drawing cartoons for a living."<sup>36</sup>

Encouraged by Schulz's example, Keefe studied at the Kubert School (formerly the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art) in New Jersey, got a job at King Features Syndicate as a staff colorist, and has worked as a professional cartoonist ever since. Today, he is mostly known for his work on *Flash Gordon*, which has been reprinted worldwide, and *Sally Forth*.

In 1996, Keefe met Charles Schulz at the fiftieth annual National Cartoonists Society Reuben Awards (the Oscars of the cartooning world). Keefe told Schulz that they were both Minnesota natives, and that he had recently started working on *Flash Gordon*, but it wasn't appearing in many

papers. "[Schulz] responded by saying that when he first started *Peanuts*, it wasn't in too many papers either," Keefe recalled. "That was huge for me. That a man of Schulz's stature, at the top of his field, could be so generous with his words meant a lot."<sup>37</sup>

Even Minnesota cartoonists who never met Schulz describe his influence as pervasive and often on their minds. "When you talk to other cartoonists in Minnesota, Charles Schulz frequently comes up," said Stwalley, a professional digital artist and a founding member of a cartooning community known as the International Cartoonist Conspiracy. "He's probably the most beloved cartoonist of all time, and maybe even the most beloved artist of all time."<sup>38</sup>

The availability and accessibility of *Peanuts* make it an easy introduction to cartooning for many artistically inclined Minnesotans. "There are Snoopy statues all over the place," said Zander Cannon, who since 1993 has been making comics, including *Replacement God*, *Heck*, and *Kaijumax*. "I would always read *Peanuts* as a kid because it was everywhere. You go to your grandparents' house and that's the one kind of comics they have lying around."<sup>39</sup>

Kevin Cannon (no relation to Zander), who coauthored the humorous graphic novel *The Cartoon Introduction to Philosophy*, learned how to draw by reading *Peanuts*. From ages five to eleven, he pored over the cartoon section of the *Star Tribune* every morning, copying the *Peanuts* characters. In a full-circle moment for the artist, he now creates detailed cartoon maps for the *Star Tribune*, his work appearing in the exact publication he

read attentively as a young boy. "Charles Schulz is an inspiration to Minnesota cartoonists to keep on keeping on," Cannon said. "Here is this absolute legend, the creator of *Peanuts*, in and amongst us, growing up right in our backyard. We certainly feel the presence of Charles Schulz in what we do."<sup>40</sup>

Keefe echoed this sentiment among Minnesotans, commenting, "I think Schulz's impact goes way beyond the art scene here, in much the same way Prince's impact goes way beyond the music scene. He's in the ether, his work standing the test of time and resonating with so many different audiences."<sup>41</sup>

### **A LASTING LEGACY, FOR MINNESOTA AND THE WORLD**

Since its opening in 2002, the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center in Santa Rosa, California, has welcomed more than one million visitors from around the world. *Peanuts* fans can visit the museum to learn about Charles Schulz's life through rotating galleries complete with *Peanuts* comic strips and witty quotes from the artist. The museum includes a replica of Schulz's studio, an outdoor garden featuring *Peanuts* statues and a Snoopy-shaped labyrinth, a 100-seat theater, and a gift shop. The Warm Puppy Café—a favorite of Schulz himself—serves Peppermint Patty hot chocolate, Good Grief grilled cheese, and a Charlie "Brownie," among other tasty treats. And Snoopy's Home Ice—owned and built by Schulz to serve the Santa Rosa community—offers public skating,



private lessons, and an annual Snoopy's Senior World Hockey Tournament.<sup>42</sup>

"Because the comic strip was worldwide and so popular, almost every cartoonist who walks through these doors tells me how inspired they were by Charles Schulz," said Jessica Ruskin, the longtime education director at the Charles M. Schulz Museum. "Some of the best cartoonists and animators today tell us that they started by tracing *Peanuts* comic strips, or by drawing Snoopy. *Peanuts* wasn't a 300-page book; it was a four-panel comic strip, and everybody can read it, understand it, and feel it."<sup>43</sup>

It's hard to overstate the influence of *Peanuts* on animation and comics. Among the renowned artists who consider Charles Schulz a key influence on their work are Matt Groening (creator of *The Simpsons*), Art Spiegelman (creator of *Maus*), and Bill Watterson (creator of *Calvin and Hobbes*). The spare, expressive art and the hyperarticulate children of *Peanuts* set it apart from other popular comics at the time, establishing a new precedent in the world of cartooning.<sup>44</sup>

"You wouldn't have the concept of how *Calvin and Hobbes* would exist without *Peanuts* coming before it," said Stwalley. In fact, when Bill Watterson was in fourth grade, he wrote Charles Schulz a letter saying that the adventures of Charlie Brown and Snoopy made him want to be a cartoonist. Schulz's kind response helped motivate Watterson to embark upon a career in comics, and years later, *Calvin and Hobbes* was born.<sup>45</sup>

Schulz penciled, inked, lettered, and wrote every one of his comics himself, still somehow finding time to mentor and support aspiring cartoonists. He answered fan mail and phone calls from dedicated readers—and for cartoonists who were just starting out, like Jim Keefe and Bill Watterson,



*Peanuts* get-well postcard with Swedish text (Dear friends are never sick for long), 1969

Schulz's encouragement meant the world.

"Charles Schulz was a remarkable person, and he was just like the rest of us," said Lucy Caswell, who met Schulz several times and curated the 2022 exhibition *Celebrating Sparky: Charles M. Schulz and Peanuts* at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at The Ohio State University. "He put his socks on one at a time. He enjoyed eating his breakfast at the Warm Puppy Café, being with his friends, and playing golf with one of

the priests in Santa Rosa every Thursday. That is the kind of person he was. His humanity infused *Peanuts* and has made it such a lasting creation."<sup>46</sup>

Populated with nuanced characters and clever dialogue, *Peanuts* teems with compassion for the underdog, largely based on Schulz's own worldview and lived experiences. Schulz lost his mother when he was 20, was rejected by a woman he adored, and felt like a failure after his 1972 divorce. Deeply shy and self-critical, Schulz created characters

that lose more than they win. Peppermint Patty receives a D- on every test no matter how hard she studies, Schroeder ignores Lucy's repeated advances, and poor Charlie Brown has the worst luck. The charming, relatable characters and engaging storylines of *Peanuts* have earned Charles Schulz millions of fans worldwide.<sup>47</sup>

In the seven decades since its release, *Peanuts* has become especially popular in Japan and China. Shuntaro Tanikawa, one of Japan's foremost poets, began translating *Peanuts* for Japanese newspapers in the 1970s. To this day, Japan has Snoopy-themed hotels, teahouses, theme-park attractions, stores, and cafés, along with Tokyo's Snoopy Museum, the only official satellite of Santa Rosa's Charles M. Schulz Museum. Snoopy's World in Hong Kong boasts entertainment zones such as a Peanuts Academy and a 4.5-meter tall Snoopy House, as well as a community hall where couples can get married in front of *Peanuts* characters. China has dozens of Charlie Brown cafés, where fans can enjoy *Peanuts*-inspired latte art. In addition, Snoopy and Charlie Brown are the frequent subjects of street art in Mexico City, Paris, London, Rome, and Seoul.<sup>48</sup>

At the wishes of Charles Schulz and his family, *Peanuts* will never be continued by another artist. The last original *Peanuts* strip appeared in the Sunday papers on February 13, 2000, a day after Schulz's death. In the strip, Schulz thanked his fans for their love and support, and declared that he would never forget Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, and Lucy. *Peanuts* continues to be reprinted in newspapers and to win over new readers while keeping loyal fans coming back for more.

Charles Schulz often said he was "born to be a cartoonist," and in his final comic strip he described drawing Charlie Brown and his friends

as "the fulfillment of my childhood ambition." Before he was the legendary Charles Schulz—who became a household name for revolutionizing the cartooning world—he was simply Sparky, a young Minnesota boy doodling and daydreaming his way through class. He put everything he had into *Peanuts*—his worries, his fears, his desires, and his memories of growing up in St. Paul, feeling as ordinary as good ol' Charlie Brown. □

## Notes

1. Beverly Gherman, *Sparky: The Life and Art of Charles Schulz* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010), 11.
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