

## Charles Monroe Schulz (born 1922) Comic-Strip Creator

**Created a Cartoon Classic.** Several years ago, Charles Schulz sold history's most successful comic strip, *Peanuts*. It has since been translated into many languages—including Latin, in which Charlie Brown translates to Carolius Niger and Snoopy to Snupius. Not only do the *Peanuts* characters run in newspapers, but they also appear in books, television specials, feature films, and the play, *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*.

**Family Life.** The only child of Carl Schulz and Dena Halverson, Charles was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Dena was a housewife and Carl owned and ran *The Family Barbershop*, although he dropped out of school after the third grade and paid his own way through barber school. "Carl somehow managed to keep on during the Great Depression," wrote Rheta Grimsley Johnson, author of *Good Grief: The Story of Charles M. Schulz*. "He overcame the dire times and his own lack of education with metronome work habits." Dena encouraged Charles's drawing but died from cancer when he was 20 years old before any of his work was published.

**Received Nickname.** Schulz's uncle nicknamed his nephew "Sparky" when he was two-days old after Barney Googles' racehorse: Spark Plug. "The nickname stuck, a gift to future reporters who inevitably would include that tidbit in endless profiles of a famous cartoonist," noted Johnson. Schulz's cousin was similarly called "Corky" after the baby in *Gasoline Alley*.

**Developed a Love for Comics.** Although none of Schulz's family members were artists or writers, they followed the comics closely. In fact, Schulz's father bought four Sunday newspapers on a weekly basis just for the comics—which is one of Schulz's fondest memories. "Sparky Schulz remembers peering through the windows of the St. Paul Pioneer Press Building as the Sunday comic pages rolled off the huge rotary presses into bins, destined eventually for the living-room floors of the upper Midwest," Johnson wrote. Schulz often wondered if he would ever see his own comics in those papers.

**An Early Aptitude for Drawing.** Schulz's drawing ability emerged in kindergarten when he drew a picture of a man shoveling snow in an unlikely environment with a palm tree and flowers, to which his teacher offered a rave review. According to Johnson, "The teacher took one look at the palm, its fronds free of accumulated ice, its incongruity glaring, and—to her everlasting credit—told him 'Someday Charles, you're going to be an artist.'" Schulz attended Richard Garden Elementary School where he excelled and skipped two half grades.

**An Awkward Teenager.** Schulz's academic aptitude plummeted at puberty, however, primarily because of his poor self image. In ninth grade, for instance, Schulz failed algebra, Latin, English, and physics. At nearly six feet tall and only 136 pounds, Schulz was a skinny kid with pimples and big ears. His insecurity and shyness prohibited him from extracurricular activities. However, with encouragement from his art teacher, Minette Paro, Schulz submitted cartoons for his high-school annual, *The Cehisean*. Much to Schulz's disappointment, they were not published. "I waited and waited for the annual to come out. When it did, my drawings were not in it," he explained to Johnson.

**An Unknown Millionaire.** At Schulz's 25th class reunion in 1965, none of the reunion organizers knew what had happened to their quiet classmate, which was unbelievable. "By 1965, Schulz had won two of the National Cartoonists Society's prestigious Reuben awards, an Emmy for the animated special, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, and *Peanuts* had been featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. He was a millionaire several times over," Johnson wrote.

**Took Correspondence Courses.** Also during his senior year, Schulz's mother saw a newspaper advertisement for a correspondence school for aspiring artists called, Draw Me. It read, "Do you like to draw?" For \$170 dollars Schulz learned lettering, perspective, and other cartooning basics, which paid off. "Nobody keeps statistics on this kind of thing, but Charles Schulz almost certainly has done more with a Draw-Me art education

than anyone else in history," Johnson wrote. After having completed the art course, Schulz attempted to sell gag cartoons to magazines with no avail.

**Drafted into the Army.** Shortly thereafter, the Army drafted Schulz and sent him to war, where he advanced from infantryman to staff sergeant. Eventually, he became the leader of a machine-gun squad, which kept him out of combat, although his art career was nonetheless restricted to doodling. "By V-J Day he was ready to pick up his peacetime life and pen where he had put them down," Johnson commented.

**Began Career as a Cartoonist.** After the war, Schulz freelanced for *Timeless Topix*, which was a religious magazine owned by the Roman Catholic Church. He also worked as an instructor for his alma mater, although it was renamed Art Instruction Schools. "It was a satisfactorily grueling pace for an ambitious young man, a blur of streetcar rides from one job to the next, a good, fundamental dose of daily drawing," Johnson wrote. Between 1948 and 1950, Schulz sold fifteen cartoons to the *Saturday Evening Post*, the sequence of which began with a cartoon of a child reading a book while perched on the very edge of an easy chair, which a fellow instructor said was "just precious." From that point on, Schulz sent batches of cartoons to the magazine's editor, John Bailey, who offered constructive criticism on each cartoon he rejected, which Schulz appreciated. "This was extremely considerate of him and, of course, was one more reason why he was so well appreciated by cartoonists," Schulz told Johnson.

**Teamed with United Feature Syndicate.** In 1950, Schulz sold *Li'l Folks* to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, which motivated him to continue sending his strip to syndicates. Editor Jim Freeman of United Feature Syndicate liked Schulz's submission, invited him to New York, and asked Schulz to make a few changes. "As I recall, I told him we liked the panel—its charm, its characters, its style of humor—but since the market was flooded with panels I asked him to convert it to strip form and try to retain the same attractiveness," he had said to Johnson. Schulz complied and the United Feature Syndicate's president offered Schulz a five-year contract with a fifty-fifty split of profits, which Schulz accepted, although neither party realized the implications of their agreement. "No way of knowing United Feature Syndicate had just snagged the most popular comic strip ever," Johnson wrote.

**Comic Strip Renamed.** Shortly thereafter, Schulz heard that United Feature Syndicate had renamed *Li'l Folks* as *Peanuts* because of *Li'l Folks*' resemblance to other comic strips such as, *Little Folks* and *Li'l Abner*. Aside from the name *Peanuts*, Schulz has only one regret regarding his comic strip—the content of his first publication on 2 October 1950. A boy named Shermmy professes to hate Charlie Brown. "The children in his gentle strip may get their socks knocked off, but he considers hate an inappropriate emotion," Johnson noted.

**The Origin of Charlie Brown.** Schulz named Charlie Brown after a friend and colleague at Art Instruction Schools, Charles Frances Brown, to show admiration for the coworker. "The christening had no significance beyond being the sort of compliment creative friends pay one another, and no one at the time suspected the immortality this bestowed," Johnson explained. When he died of cancer in 1983, Charles Brown's death received national attention. Schulz never modeled his ideas after "the real Charlie Brown." He borrowed the name because he liked the sound of it.

**Origins of Other Characters.** Schulz named both Linus and Frieda after employees at Art Instruction Schools as well—Linus Maurer and Frieda Rich, respectively. A Santa Rosa woman, Harriet Crossland, who makes angel-food cakes with Schulz's favorite seven-minute frosting is the namesake for Woodstock's friend Harriet. Snoopy's tennis partner, Molly Volley, is named after Schulz's real-life tennis partner. Ophthalmologist and golfing partner Dr. Ward Wick appears in the strip occasionally, as well as other golfers including Shirley Nelson, the wife of Schulz's business manager, and Betty Bartley, who is married to one of Schulz's friends. Schulz named Linus' teacher, Miss Othmar, for his friend Othmar Jarisch, who ran the local humane society and died in 1988. When Miss Othmar married, however, she took her husband's surname, Hagemeyer, which is also the last name of Schulz's Army buddy Elmer Hagemeyer. Peanuts' Mrs. Hagemeyer also gives organ lessons to Marcie, who is named after a family friend, Marcie Carlin. Last but not least, Snoopy was modeled after a dog

named Spike, who was slightly larger than Snoopy, that Schulz got when he was 13 years old.

**Marriage and Divorce.** At the age of 28, in April of 1951, Schulz married Joyce Halverson, the sister of a coworker at Art Instruction Schools, after a quick courtship. After 21 years of marriage, they divorced in 1972—disproving the notion that opposites attract. Schulz explained to Johnson that his ex-wife was "like a surgeon, while I was more like a doctor of internal medicine." With five children: Meredith, Monte, Craig, Jill, and Amy, their marriage was not a total disaster.

**Gets Remarried.** Schulz befriended Jeannie Forsyth at an ice arena and they married in 1974. According to Johnson, "her gregarious nature and energy soon engulfed him, and new friendships were less of a problem than they might have been otherwise." Jeannie plays tennis, jogs, hikes, kayaks, and rides a stationary bike, all of which maintain her figure. Just as Schulz has *Peanuts*, Jeannie writes poetry and produced a documentary, *What a Difference a Dog Makes*, which follows dogs through training to learn to flip light switches, push elevator buttons, and pull wheelchairs in preparation for a lifetime of helping the physically challenged. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences nominated the film for an Academy Award. These achievements keep Jeannie and Schulz in sync. "Friends say she is the ballast for the unsteady Schulz; the perfect complement, they rave," commented Johnson.

**Recipient of Many Awards.** The National Cartoonists' Society awarded Schulz with the Reuben Award for outstanding cartoonist of the year in 1955 and 1964, which Schulz said meant the most to him in 1955 because he had only drawn the strip for four or five years at that point. Schulz is the only cartoonist to win two Reuben awards. Schulz won the Yale award for outstanding humorist of the year in 1956 and the National Education Association's School Bell Award in 1960. Anderson College honored Schulz with an L.H.D. in 1963. Schulz won Emmy and Peabody awards for the CBS cartoon special, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, in 1966. In 1969, St. Mary's College of California honored Schulz with a D.H.L. The United Feature Syndicate awarded Schulz with the Charles M. Schulz Award in 1980 for his contribution to the field of cartooning. Finally, the hit musical, *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, was on NBC's Hallmark Hall of Fame on 9 February 1973.

**Wrote Many Teleplays and Screenplays.** When *Peanuts* made the cover of *Time* magazine in 1965, Lee Mendelson asked Schulz to animate a *Peanuts* Christmas show resulting in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, which proved to be a huge success. According to Johnson, "since 1965, when Mendelson first approached Schulz about possible animation for the *Peanuts* gang, the unlikely marriage of illusory Hollywood and purist Charles Schulz has prospered." Schulz has written many more teleplays, including the following: *Charlie Brown's All-Stars* (8 June 1966), *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* (27 October 1966), *You're in Love, Charlie Brown* (12 June 1967), *He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown* (14 February 1968), *It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown* (27 September 1969), *Play It Again, Charlie Brown* (28 March 1971), *It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown* (1972), *You're Elected, Charlie Brown* (29 October 1972), *There's No Time for Love, Charlie Brown* (11 March 1973), *Race for Your Life, Charlie Brown* (January, 1976), *It's Arbor Day, Charlie Brown* (16 March 1976), *It's Your First Kiss, Charlie Brown* (1978), *Life Is a Circus, Charlie Brown* (1981), and *She's a Good Skate, Charlie Brown* (1981). Not only has Schulz written these 15 teleplays, but he has also written screenplays for three feature-length animated films: *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* (National General Pictures, 1969), *Snoopy, Come Home* (National General Pictures, 1972), and *Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown, and Don't Come Back!* in 1980. These teleplays and movies also created a demand for *Peanuts* products—clothing, toys, stationary, cosmetics, furniture, lunch boxes, and Charlie Brown baseballs, which were manufactured by Schulz's Creative Associates, Inc.

**Honored with Piano Concerto.** The first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for music in 1983, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, dedicated a piano concerto to Schulz after he had mentioned her in his comic strip. The concerto that premiered at Carnegie Hall consists of six movements named after seven *Peanuts* characters: Schroeder's Beethoven Fantasy, Lullaby for Linus, Snoopy Does the Samba, Charlie Brown's Lament, Lucy Freaks Out, and Peppermint Patty and Marcie Lead the Parade.

**Tackled Issue of Sexual Harassment.** After an elementary school removed a North Carolina first grader from class for kissing a girl on the playground, Schulz drew a cartoon in response to the uproar, although he claimed he rarely tried to teach through *Peanuts*. The cartoon that ran the week of 15 January 1997 showed Lucy's five-year-old brother, Rerun, and Linus attempting to cheer up a female classmate by asking her to run away to Paris with them. This got them into trouble, although they were not suspended. Schulz explained why he took this stand on sexual harassment in an article written by Richard L. Eldredge, which appeared in *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, entitled "Harassment? Say It Ain't So, Charlie Brown!" He said, "It seems to me that people are being accused of harassment all the time now." Highly publicized charges of sexual harassment had begun to outrage Schulz so he made a statement through his comic strip.

**No Retirement in Sight.** Many people claim that Schulz will never retire. If he does, however, *Peanuts* will cease forever. At a 1979 meeting among Schulz's children and the syndicate lawyers, the children decided that no one but their father will ever draw *Peanuts*, which pleased Schulz. "Schulz, who took no active part in the discussions, was immensely pleased with their initiative," Johnson wrote. The United Feature Syndicate reserved the right to recycle old strips and license *Peanuts* products, but Schulz has total control over *Peanuts*' fate because he owns the strip, which is unusual. "A cartoonist and his family do not always have the luxury of dictating a feature's fate. In fact, it is the norm for syndicates to own a comic strip and its characters, lock, stock, and barrel—with the creator technically a hired hand," Johnson explained.

**Further Reading:**

Eldredge, Richard L.. "Harassment? Say It Ain't So, Charlie Brown!." *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, (15 January 1997).

Johnson, Rheta Grimsley. *Good Grief: the Story of Charles M. Schulz*. (New York: Pharos Books, 1989).