

11-19-94

Snoopy

The afternoon was beautiful, the weather was perfect, and we decided that a walk was what we all needed. Paul and I were in Gaithersburg, Maryland, visiting Dwight and Mary Brock. When we started out, Dwight warned me that he wouldn't carry me home the way he had carried Snoopy years ago.

The Brocks had preceded us to this part of the country some twenty-odd years ago. Ours is a friendship that goes back some thirty years to Dallas at a time when Dwight was a graduate student in the Department of Statistics, of which Paul was chairman. The Brocks were frequent guests in our home at that time and were well acquainted with our young sons George and Roland, as well as with our miniature dachshund Snoopy. When Paul had professional meetings in New York, Dwight and Mary offered to son/dog/house sit so that I could go with him. It was late August, with pre-school activities such as band practice beginning for the boys. Dwight's joking remark about carrying Snoopy stirred memories of that week, particularly of Snoopy's role in it.

George and Roland had earlier campaigned for a dog, with all the classic promises of feeding, walking, and generally taking care of it. To tell the truth, I wanted one, too. The only other pet the boys had had was a mixed breed dog they had named Inky. Inky proved to be un-trainable and generally unmanageable, climaxing his tempestuous life with us by tearing Roland's pajamas off him early one morning when Roland went out to feed him in the back yard.

I heard about a ten-month-old dachshund a couple wanted to find a home for because they both worked and the dog was lonely. Paul was out of town, but the boys and I drove out to see the dog and promptly fell in love with him. He was well trained and clearly liked nine- and twelve-year-old boys. He was a red twelve-pound miniature with an impressive AKC registration, but unimpressively named Snoopy. A small kink in the end of his tail precluded any success as a show dog, something we were hardly interested in. We negotiated his purchase subject to the approval of our veterinarian friend, Al Hopkins, and to Paul's allergies. Al found him healthy and was, in fact, rather enthusiastic about him. Now the boys had to await Paul's return and the acid test of his allergies.

The ecstatic boys and I stopped on our way home to get a leash and some food for him. The day was balmy, so we left him in the car with two windows lowered an inch or two for ventilation. When we returned, we found a happy Snoopy on the sidewalk guarding the car. He was small but we didn't see how he could have wriggled out of that high window and landed on the concrete without hurting himself and, more remarkably, not running away. He was clearly destined to be *our* dog.

George and Roland spent the next two days playing with Snoopy, taking meticulous care of him, trying to enforce some of the rash rules we had made ("Don't get on the sofa," for instance soon bit the dust because it was such fun to have Snoopy curl up in one of our laps), and anxiously awaiting Paul's return.

After Paul had been home two days and was obviously as smitten with Snoopy as the rest of us were, our relationship settled down into a long, happy life with a pet whose residence outlasted that of the sons of the house. The boys continued Snoopy's obedience training and added a few tricks, including his tolerating having his ears folded back while he stood on his back legs and one of the boys told Red Baron stories pilfered from the Charley Brown comic strip. (Yes, they knew *that* Snoopy was a beagle!) It turned out that Snoopy was a perfect name for him -- he did all of the body-language talking and "Here's the world-famous" whatever things that Snoopy of the funny papers did.



One of our favorite memories includes Snoopy's frantic efforts to reach the gerbils we kept for some vacationing friends. We put the gerbils' cage in our family room in our rather unique raised, three-sided fireplace, which was without ashes for the summer. The fireplace was too high for Snoopy to get into it from a standing jump, so he tried going far down the hall and running to get momentum for a big jump. The trouble with his reasoning was that he had to make a forty-five-degree turn before he reached the fireplace, canceling the momentum he had gained in the hall. After many unsuccessful tries, he became reconciled to the alien life in the house. But he clearly did not like their presence.

Snoopy loved to go out with anyone in the car. This was before there were head restraints on the back of front seats, and Snoopy quickly established his favorite position at the back of the driver, facing the door window, elevated so that he could monitor the outside. He reacted with great pleasure whenever he saw a horse, even though horses weren't prevalent inside the city limits of Dallas. We decided that he considered them to be big dogs.

If it wasn't possible to take him in the car with us, we started spelling G O, so that he wouldn't be disappointed when he was left. Although he learned that ploy and we had to change it, he never did penetrate our numerous lengthy circumlocutions to plan an outing; however, those exercises were good for expanding the vocabularies of our two growing boys.

One pleasant day while the boys were in school, I invited Snoopy to go along with me for a walk. He was having a happy time at the end of his leash when suddenly a snarling, furry fury landed on his back. Unknowingly, I had approached a bush housing a mother cat and her new kittens. She

attacked him with dedicated teeth and claws, riding his back and underside and chewing on his ears. I finally got the two animals separated with only minor damage to my hands and ankles and took the bleeding dog home. I called Al who said to bring him in immediately for treatment, including a tetanus shot. Al declared Snoopy a lucky dog, for his judgment was that any cat could beat up any dog at any given time; fortunately, he declared, cats generally aren't aware of that fact.

One of the early rules that was broken soon after Snoopy's arrival was the one about Snoopy not sleeping in the bed with either boy. George argued successfully against the rule and persuaded Snoopy to sleep with him. Roland was not pleased but couldn't lure Snoopy into his bed. That is, not until Snoopy turned into a bed hog and "ootched" George out of bed onto the floor several nights in succession. George began to close his bedroom door, after which Snoopy gravitated to the bed of a triumphant Roland. Again, however, the dog kept claiming the boy's warm spot until the boy landed on the floor. Then Roland began firmly closing his door, too. Not to worry. There was one bedroom left. But Paul and I had learned by listening to the boys' travails and began shutting our door. Snoopy objected for several nights until we compromised by getting him a basket with his own mattress and blanket in the family room, and all was tranquil again.

One of Snoopy's "tricks" happened only once while Roland was playing with him. Snoopy flicked his long tongue at Roland's face, connected with his eye, and ate Roland's contact lens. When we called the ophthalmologist to report the loss, he was so amused that he replaced the lens free.

The following August was the occasion of Paul's statistics meetings in New York and Dwight and Mary's staying with the boys, now fifteen and twelve. By that time, circumstances had, of course, conspired that both boys were busy in the afternoons when Snoopy needed to be walked. That chore fell to the Brocks, who discovered that we had indeed told the truth when we warned them that, on a very hot day, Snoopy's enthusiasm for his walk usually waned a block or two from home. His solution was to roll over on the hot sidewalk with his four short legs sticking up in the air. He could not be persuaded to walk another step; the unhappy walker then carried him home, all twelve pounds of him. As soon as he saw the shade of the house, he returned to his life as a dog.



But Snoopy's antics didn't stop there. Four years later we moved to Richmond. George stayed in Dallas, so Paul, Roland, Snoopy, and I started out for Virginia in two cars. We had plotted our journey so that we could spend nights in motels that allowed dogs. The first night, our Holiday Inn

had an open stairway to our second-floor room. Snoopy was terrified of the steps with open backs. As a matter of fact, he had never encountered *any* stairs before. He had to be carried up those steps, but he did consent to walk down them. Because we arrived in Richmond before our furniture did, we stayed at the Downtown Holiday Inn on the ninth floor. Snoopy had never been on an elevator, either. Being in our arms didn't entirely calm him, but it did get us all up to the room. And the next day we entered our new home with its second floor. Snoopy soon conquered those stairs in the process of getting acquainted with his new home.

Within a couple of years, after Roland had gone away to college, Snoopy took over the supervision of the "old folks" left at home. Every night promptly at ten thirty he would go to the bottom step of the stairs to our bedroom. If one of us didn't immediately follow him, he would bark sharply to get our attention. Then up he went to his basket next to our bed. With several tosses of his head, he would cover himself completely in the blanket which he had claimed from Roland's bed. The first fall in Richmond, I started a crocheted afghan for Paul. Snoopy found that he could snuggle under the afghan-in-progress as he sat in my lap. When I finished it, he repeatedly tugged it from Paul's lap and tried to get it upstairs to his own bed. Finally, Paul gave it to him and installed it in his basket.

Once when Snoopy was leashed outside, he slipped away and disappeared for a full day. We got a call about nine o'clock that night inquiring about a lost dachshund with our phone number on his I.D. tag. The people who found him lived two miles away, across a heavily traveled divided highway. Since Snoopy never learned that cars were not big dogs, we still wonder how he managed to dodge the traffic. We found a weary dog when we had a joyous reunion with him. We might not have reclaimed him so readily a few days later when, left alone in the house, he investigated a "care" package we were making ready for George. The package he opened was a pound of Hershey kisses which he had devoured by the time we returned. A small dog can't handle such a large treat, and he had busily regurgitated it in neat little piles spread about the living room carpet. After we made sure the dog was okay and had cleaned up the messes, we began to wonder how he had gotten the kisses out of their foil wrappings, for he clearly had not ingested any foil. A few days later, we tested him with a few more kisses; Snoopy eagerly attacked them, carefully placing a front paw on the pull string and nosing the candy out of its wrapper before he ate it.

Long after the boys left home, Snoopy began having all the woes that traditionally plague wienie dogs. His back bothered him so that he was no longer active. Then he began having trouble getting up to his bed. Again, we carried him. At nineteen, Snoopy's kidney problems could only get worse and he was really no longer our Snoopy dog. After long distance consultations with both boys and much anguished discussion between us, Paul and I reluctantly agreed to let the vet put him to sleep. That was twelve years ago, and we still miss him, but we did discover that a couple is not necessarily liberated when the children leave home. That liberation comes only after the dog dies. We could then plan our days after work without coming home to walk and feed the dog. And we could have weekend trips on a whim. And so, we happily refused any offers of a replacement for our Snoopy.

