



# Sparky: The Life and Art of Charles Schulz

*Beverly Gherman*

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## **Sparky: The Life and Art of Charles Schulz** Beverly Gherman

As the artist behind the beloved *Peanuts* comic strip for more than 50 years, Charles Schulz—arguably the most famous cartoonist in the world—created a colorful cast of characters that continues to bring humor and comfort to millions of readers.

In this distinctively designed yet highly accessible book, renowned children's biographer Beverly Gherman traces both the life events that shaped Schulz's art and the various ways in which art influenced his life in return. Acclaimed by artists ranging from Andrew Wyeth to Mo Willems, the artistic elements of Schulz's work are brought to life in a colorful layout and thoroughly explored in an enchanting text that will draw in even the most reluctant readers.

## **Sparky: The Life and Art of Charles Schulz Details**

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Author : Beverly Gherman

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## From Reader Review Sparky: The Life and Art of Charles Schulz for online ebook

### Betsy says

Sitting in the biography section of my children's room are crisp, new, clean, pristine biographies of all sorts of people. Saints and sailors, presidents and queens, you name it. We got `em. But roundabout the "sch" side of things lies an old autobiography circa 1980. It's called *Charlie Brown Snoopy and Me And All the Other Peanuts Characters*. by Charles M. Schulz with R. Smith Kiliper. I think that back in the day my library had tons of copies of this title in all the library branches, but due to the sheer amount of use that number has dwindled down to a measly two copies. The worst part is that no matter how beat up, ragged, and torn they become we can't get rid of them either! This is the only Charles Schulz biography for kids out there and by gum we're going to keep it until it falls apart . . . or until we see something better. Enter *Sparky: The Life and Art of Charles Schulz*. Author Beverly Gherman has, probably unbeknownst to her, answered my prayers. A biography that is not only necessary and desirable but also beautifully designed and fun to read, kids who have never even heard of *Peanuts* (and they exist) will be inclined to read about this shy Minnesota boy who went on to become a war hero and America's most successful comic strip artist.

Born November 26, 1922, Charles Monroe Schulz grew up a shy, bespectacled boy when a penchant for drawing. His nickname "Sparky" turned out to be almost portentous, coming as it did from a horse in the comic strip *Barney Google*. After graduating from art school he served in the army with distinction. After that he started drawing cartoons and one in particular, a comic strip with a title he never really liked, took off. *Sparky* is the story of the man behind *Peanuts* and not the story of the strip alone. Still, by looking at Mr. Schulz's life, kids can see how art is influenced by experience, even when the person doing the drawing can't see how much of their life escapes through their pen.

Kids read biographies for a variety of different reasons. They're given a biographical assignment or they have to research a certain person at a certain time. The kids I like are the ones who have an interest in reading up on famous figures that touch them in some way just for fun. And Charles Schulz, like it or lump it, is one such fella. We have biographies of Walt Disney and Jim Henson in our children's rooms. Why not Charles Schulz? The thing is, *Sparky* is heads and tails better than any of those Disney/Henson bios (at least for now). It knows how to make its subject palatable, and it's complemented by a well designed text that gives you enough *Peanuts* comic strips and photographs to keep you interested, but not so many that they distract from the story of Sparky's life.

A couple years ago a very different Charles Schulz biography came out. Called *Schulz and Peanuts A Biography*, author David Michaelis was writing for adults and so made no bones about some of the unhappier episodes on Sparky's life. Readers of that book might be baffled as to how such a man could be honestly portrayed in a children's biography. Gherman doesn't shrink from the prospect, and neither does she paint Schulz's existence as a never-ending series of puffy pink clouds and rainbows. We live in an age when a children's biography can show the complexity of its subject without dwelling on the gory details of adulthood. So it is that we learn about the "Little Redheaded Girl" who jilted Sparky, his divorce from his first wife, and his childhood shyness and unhappiness at times. On the flip side, no mention is made of Michaelis's contention that Sparky's mother was domineering. The loss is not keenly felt. Indeed, you get the feeling that there is little speculation going on in this book. Gherman has chosen to pull from a variety of sources, including Michaelis, and rounds out her research with the archives of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center, as well as interviews with Jeannie Schulz (second wife), Monte Schulz (son), Amy Schulz Johnson (daughter), and Jill Schulz Transki (daughter). The result is a biography compelling in its openness and honesty.

Insofar as I can tell, the publication page seems to be saying that one Jennifer Bostic of Paper Plane Studio did the design of this book. If this is true, can someone go on out and buy Jennifer Bostic some kind of big shiny award or something? Designers come and designers go but coming up with a design for a children's biography that pleases the adult gatekeepers and is enjoyable enough to be read by the small fry voluntarily is no walk in the park. On top of that, it does an excellent job with the large font. Though it comes in at 128 pages, the book really isn't that long. And with the visual elements and colors constantly shifting, it's anything but a dry read. A page of white text on blue paper can turn to yellow text on green paper with the flip of a page and for some reason it doesn't jar the reader's senses. Add in all the photographs, Peanuts strips, and old drawings and you've a book any kid would be mighty pleased to read. The design fits the subject matter.

I'm reminded of the power of *Peanuts* any time I try to read the very first one and not laugh out loud. "Good ol' Charlie Brown . . . How I hate him." Hate Charlie Brown if you must, but hating Charles Schulz would take some doing. Kids looking for a book about the *Peanuts* comic strips won't find a book that's all about Snoopy or anything like that. This is just the story of a cartoonist. An artist that all kids can appreciate and maybe hope to become. Good writing, good images, good design, good deal. A bio too long in coming. Let's hope that there are more of its ilk coming down the pike.

For ages 8 and up.

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### **Ms. Yingling says**

This book is beautifully formatted, with bright colors on the pages and plentiful illustrations and photographs. It also gives a great overview of Schulz's life and work, and talks about his childhood influences. If you need to replace outdated biographies, this would be the one to get. It's a bit heavy, dues to the good quality paper, and I hope it holds up well, because it was a delightful read.

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### **J.V. Seem says**

I've been having a really rough time lately, struggling with sleep problems. I suffer from insomnia, frequent awakenings, but most of all nightmares. This has gone on for almost two months now, rendering me so exhausted and generally messed up and unfocused that I've been unfit to do my job, attend rehearsal, or do much of anything, really. I've been in and out of the doctor's office (still am, though the last week has been a little bit easier on me), trying a few different sleeping pills (none of which have worked much) and getting slips for sick leave.

While telling my better half about my most recent, fresh-in-memory nightmare, about discussing dowry with an undead, still freaked out and crying, I confessed to having read *The Walking Dead* before falling asleep. Judging it bad sleep hygiene, my love said: "Read your *Peanuts*." "But I ran out!" (Note to self: *Never* run out of *Peanuts*.)

So, following his advice to read less horrifying comics, I started this children's biography (which does have a few strips thrown in) of Sparky Schulz, creator of Charlie Brown, Lucy, Linus, Snoopy, Schroeder, Sally, Peppermint Patty, Marcie and the rest of the *Peanuts* gang.

This is really nice. First of all, I like the design and layout, which is fun and colorful and bright, and makes for a fun read, even for us (supposed) adults. I love all the strips and all the wonderful photographs.

The only thing I wish was different, is some of the turns of phrase in the text. Knowing Charles Schulz' life story quite well, I at several moments became aware of sugar-coating the truth (the truth, which almost always makes for a more interesting read anyway), or, even worse, extrapolation. You don't add the musings of a novelist where it suits you in a biography. It's like the author's sat down and thought to herself: "Hey, this is a bio for kids, I can do what I want," or "I need to tone *this* down, and maybe I need to do some fairytelling *here*". It's just wrong. And this isn't the life story of Al Capone or anything, it's Charles Schulz; trust me, the kids can handle it.

Although the aforementioned adaptations annoyed me a bit, that's not to say that I didn't enjoy it. Did I learn something I didn't already know? Perhaps not so much, but it was still a quite nice, light, enjoyable read.

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### **Trololoshka says**

This book was written by Beverly Gherman. It is called It is biography so it's non-fiction. I read this book because Ms. Spencer said it is good.

The book is bibliography about a person who wrote comics. He had hard life while living in america. He was soldier, his mother died because of cancer like him.

I love this book it easy to read and I would recommend it 12+ because it can be not interesting for little kids.

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### **Jenn says**

I see all the higher rated reviews but I was disappointed in the lack of depth. A decent overview but just that.

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### **Celia says**

What a great little biography of Charles Schultz! This attractive book is complete with Peanuts comic strips and photos of Schultz's family and youth. It is a quick read, with short chapters filled with images. I'm glad I ordered this for the Maxson Library! Now i have to convince the students to check it out!

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### **Shaeley Santiago says**

This chapter book incorporates pictures and Peanuts cartoons as it tells about award-winning cartoonist Charles Schulz. Interesting exploration of how people and events in Schulz's life influenced the content of his comic strips.

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### **Jamy says**

Although this is biography of the life of the creator of Charlie Brown and the rest of the Peanuts gang is aimed towards a juvenile audience, there was enough to make me keep reading. Reprints of classic strips

were some of the highlights

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### **Karen Ball says**

A colorful biography of one of the most successful and best-known American cartoonists! Charles Schulz was born in 1922 and grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota during the Great Depression. He was always doodling and drawing, and ended up taking art school correspondence courses (he got his assignments in the mail and then mailed in his finished work). He graduated from art school six days before Pearl Harbor was bombed, and he was drafted into the Army months later. Before he shipped out to Europe, he saw his very ill mother for the last time before she passed away. One of her last requests was that he name their next dog... Snoopy. He was a good soldier, and earned promotions and a medal for excellence in combat. When he arrived home, he found a variety of jobs that kept him busy until he was able to sell his first comic strip to the United Features Syndicate in New York. It was called "Lil' Folks" -- but the editors renamed it "Peanuts." That was the beginning of more than 50 years of comic strips! Not all of his life was as successful, though, and this book doesn't skip those parts of his story. Charles Schulz knew heartbreak and sadness, and was worried that people wouldn't like his work... even after he had won awards. The lessons he learned became the lines for his Peanuts characters, and newspaper readers all over discovered their own problems and laughs in the world he created. I especially liked the larger size font and colored pages, and how the designer alternated pages of text with pictures and cartoons. 4th-8th grade.

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### **Book Lady says**

I normally don't like biographies and ones for a young audience are normally even worse. However I love this one. My daughter and I have taken a love to all things Charlie Brown and reading Sparky was fun. One thing I didn't know is Charles Schultz spent his childhood traveling to the area I grew up in. That's some small world considering the town is so tiny!!! It's a small world after all.

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### **Christina says**

I heard about this biography of Charles Schulz when I was attending a summer workshop for teachers and librarians. I decided to buy this book for my school library. I loved this book! The pages were colorful, and the words were big, but not too big. The author didn't use hard words to describe Charles's life. Beverly also was honest about what happened in Charles's life, but described his life on simple terms that children can understand. I also loved the pictures and the cartoons in the book.

The last chapter in the biography concludes with the last comic strip that Charles Schulz created and published in newspapers. The day before this comic strip was put in newspapers, Charles died. Even though I knew this before reading the biography, I still got the goosebumps as I read the book's last paragraph and comic strip.

There were two minor things that I noticed about the book: 1) If you wanted to find out who was in a picture, you have look for the caption on the page that the picture is on, and the opposite page. Also, the caption is so tiny that if you don't search for it, you will miss it. 2) The last sentence on page 79 goes onto page 80. The

last word on page 79 (Sparky) is the first word on page 80. Being a librarian, I notice these grammatical errors!

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### **Amy says**

I wanted to like this book more...I love reading biographies...especially the new type of biographies being written for children & young adults. I loved the layout and look of this book but I thought the writing and information provided was really random and disjointed. It was interesting learning about this man and his work. I grew up on a very healthy "diet" of Peanuts but realized I knew nothing about its creator. This is a decent (albeit incomplete) introduction to this man.

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### **Ann says**

A lovely, well-designed book that tells Charles Schulz's life story in a conversational and inspiring way, with plenty of photos and cartoons to keep young readers laughing.

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### **bamlinden says**

I knew what I was getting myself into when I picked this book up from the library. It's not your typical biography....at least for adults.

Yes, this Charles Schulz biography leans way more towards a children's read. But that doesn't mean it can't be fun or informative or inspiring.

I think cartoonists must be incredibly reclusive. Bill Watterson (Calvin & Hobbes), Gary Larson (The Far Side) and Charles Schulz (Peanuts) all have very little out there in terms of biographical material. Which sucks because I would love to learn about what makes them tick and how they came to create some of the best cartoons of all time.

Sparky was a quick read...very quick, but like I said - I was happy to get something as opposed to nothing. But while it's an easy afternoon read, I came away knowing a bit more about this iconic artist.

The writing is very simple, to the point, and at times very quick to change subjects...but that's what you get when you read a kids book.

Ultimately, this book has left me wanting more. Where is the definitive Schulz bio? That's what I want to read.

A fun, speedy read and a trip down memory lane....about all I could've asked for out of this book.

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### **Jamie says**

Beautifully designed and very accessible to children. It really made me want to read the David Michaelis

adult version.

I really wish goodreads would let us give half stars! This is totally 3.5, really!

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