

## **Kelly's Favorite Dog**

Kelly loves dogs and cats. She rescues yellow cats, black cats, striped cats, furry cats, fat cats, skinny cats, sick cats, hungry cats, big cats, little cats, feral cats, and, even wild cats.

And she adores dogs even more. She's been owned by fewer dogs than cats, but her commitment runs deeper. Her first dog was an Austrian shepherd named, Snoopy, big and brown, happy-go-lucky, dumb and full of fun, even when chasing cars from the front. Kelly was next owned, along with the entire family, by a small, black dachshund/terrier mix selected from a cardboard box in front of Raleys grocery store at Christmas, named Jingles. And, Kelly's main dog for over 98 dog years has been, Mae, a Charpais/Mastiff mix. And, a final brace of dogs, completes her most recent set of needy canines--a seriously ill pug named Sandy, and an extremely active beagle pup, named Lulu. And, to add to Kelly's current collection, she recently got married and her husband, Jeremy, added his two cats to the pack.

The menagerie of cats and dogs who've adopted Kelly may seem like more than enough pets for anybody. But, Kelly's life-long commitment to one special dog reigns supreme to all others. He expresses the essence of her entire view of life. He is a thinking-woman's dog, one who is devoted, philosophical, loving, soft and cuddly, imaginative, and slightly crazy. He is the original Snoopy, the creation of Charles Shultz, the syndicated cartoonist.

Kelly first fell in love with this inanimate version of a mythical beagle when she was four. I don't recall her first Snoopy, but I think he probably arrived in a Christmas stocking. He was a smaller, plush version of the wonder dog that Kelly saw in, "A Charlie Brown Christmas." He went wherever Kelly went. He sat beside her at mealtime, participated in all her games, dressed up for her at tea time in frilly dresses, and was generally present wherever Kelly was. Of course, he always spent the night in bed with Kelly and was frequently propped up on her pillow during the day.

Kelly's other main playmates at home, in addition to Snoopy, were Curtis, her imaginary older brother, who lived under the house and, Daniel, her younger, real

brother, who lived in the house. Daniel frequently got to play dress-up with the other three, so there were always four available for tea around her small, toy table.

The original Snoopy played so often with Kelly that he slowly aged to gray. The next Christmas when a new twin Snoopy appeared in Kelly's Christmas stocking, he was immediately adopted into the Kelly clan. However, the original Snoopy had mysteriously disappeared on Christmas Eve. Kelly searched so diligently high and low for him that he was, of necessity, retrieved from a trash bin. When located, Old Snoopy greeted New Snoopy as a new family member and they played happily together for a good six months before a frightening incident separated them.

The twin Snoopys often traveled together when the family took drives to the mountains of Colorado. The first summer after New Snoopy arrived, Grandma Santen accompanied the family to South Park, a beautiful meadowland in the mountains of central Colorado west of Evergreen. We frequently stopped for bathroom breaks and Kelly took both Snoopys to an outhouse with her. Unfortunately, New Snoopy fell to an untidy demise through one of the holes in the toilet. Why couldn't it have been, Old Snoopy? At any rate, Kelly came running and screaming through the campground, traumatized by the sight of her beloved Snoopy slowly sinking into the "goo, " out of reach below her, through the hole in the toilet seat.

I immediately responded, but there was nothing I could do. New Snoopy was nearly gone, almost up to his neck in muck, ten feet below any possible retrieval, and clearly wanting to just be left to his ignominious departure. We urged Kelly to tell New Snoopy goodbye and guided her back to the car where she rolled into a ball and whimpered all the way home as Grandma tried to comfort her. Grandma Santen was so impacted by Kelly's loss of New Snoopy that she insisted on purchasing a New, New Snoopy for her the next day. Unfortunately, there were no New Snoopys available of the same size, so she brought home a New, New Snoopy twice the size of Old Snoopy. But, at least New, New Snoopy was clean, white, and cuddly, and not smelly.

Kelly continues to collect multiple Snoopys even today as an adult. She probably has a half dozen or so, of various sizes, colors, and conditions. However, she didn't collect all of them herself. The interesting experience a serious collector of any artifact often finds, is that friends who know someone likes certain collectibles, will often add to their collection by donating gifts of that same item for birthdays, illnesses, and celebrations. I have a friend who is known as the "frog lady," because her house is filled with everything, "frog," simply because one person after another, kept giving her frogs. They thought she liked them.

My favorite memory of Kelly and Snoopy, however, was when we drove her to the San Diego airport to send her away for a two-year assignment with the Air Force in Germany. She had completed basic training at Lackland AFB in Texas and specialty training as a security guard at McGuire AFB in New Jersey. At McGuire she had trained with the Air Force, Army, and Marine trainees under live fire, run obstacle courses with full packs, and become proficient in small and medium weapon use.

Now she was going to be gone from home for an extended time. We were already missing her as she hugged us goodbye and started down the ramp to the plane. We waited in the terminal anxiously looking out at her Alaska Airlines plane parked on the tarmac. We could barely see the forms of people moving around in the plane through the round windows as they were getting seated. But, we couldn't make out where Kelly was seated on the plane. We had neglected to ask if she had a window seat, and if she was on the near side of the plane or the far side.

We desperately wanted to wave to her one last time as she was about to leave for such a long time, so far away. The plane was about to back away from the terminal and, we still had no sign of where she was, on the plane. It appeared that we would have to be content with getting a letter or a postcard in a few weeks, informing us of her safe arrival, when Snoopy suddenly appeared in a window about half way along the row of windows. We couldn't make out Kelly or any other faces of the passengers, but Snoopy was waving goodbye to us!