

# The Complete Peanuts 1953-1954: Vol. 2 Hardcover Edition

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Our second volume is packed with intriguing developments, as Schulz continues to create his tender, comic universe. The majority of these strips are not available in any other in-print book. Introduction by Walter Cronkite.

The second volume of Fantagraphics Books' monumental Complete Peanuts series covers 1953-54, and the visual style and character development is closer to the kids we know and love, as they try to exist in a grown-up world. Charlie Brown is no longer the object of Patty and Violet's affection--derision, more like--and his pattern of losing continues. His misery at checkers hits 5000 (June 1953), 6000 (August), 7000 (November), 8000 (still November), and 10,000 (December) consecutive games, he gets shut out on Valentine's Day (February '53), he wears his first bad Halloween costume (October '54), and he gets a form rejection slip from Santa (December '54). On the baseball diamond, though, he actually has the lead in a game (April '53, but we don't see the final score) and briefly plays catcher. By now Lucy has become the main girl in the strip, and in addition to beating Charlie Brown at checkers, she begins her romantic pursuit of Schroeder (January '53), joins the baseball team (August '54), and wins her third consecutive Miss Fussbudget of the Year title (November '54). Her younger brother, Linus, starts what will become a longstanding feud with Snoopy in the first Sunday strip of '53, shows he's a prodigy in jump rope, blocks, houses of cards, and balloon blowing, and cuddles his security blanket (May '54). Schroeder continues his obsession with Beethoven and reveals the secret to playing great literature on a plastic piano with painted-on black keys (practice and "getting the breaks"). We meet two new characters, the perpetually dirty Pig-Pen (July '54) and the loudmouthed Charlotte Braun, whose funny name wasn't enough to keep her around for long.

Charles M. Schulz, whose own insecurity manifested itself in Charlie Brown (who not coincidentally draws his own cartoons), came up with his first multiple-strip storyline (starting with a four-Sunday series of Lucy joining a golf tournament coached by Charlie Brown, May '54) in this period, and provides us with a glimpse of the 1950s--deco furniture ("What in the world is a rocking chair"? asks CB), 3-D movies, H-bomb testing, and even what in hindsight looks like a prediction of the troubles in Vietnam (May '54). The second volume maintains the high quality of the first volume; even if it doesn't have the same extent of extra materials, it has an introduction by Walter Cronkite, a note on one strip that had to be partially reconstructed, and that handy index of characters and topics. --David Horiuchi

Charles M. Schulz was born November 25, 1922, in Minneapolis. His destiny was foreshadowed when an uncle gave him, at the age of two days, the nickname Sparky (after the racehorse Spark Plug in the newspaper strip Barney Google). In his senior year in high school, his mother noticed an ad in a local newspaper for a correspondence school, Federal Schools (later called Art Instruction Schools). Schulz passed the talent test, completed the course, and began trying, unsuccessfully, to sell gag cartoons to magazines. (His first published drawing was of his dog, Spike, and appeared in a 1937 Ripley's Believe It or Not! installment.) Between 1948 and 1950, he succeeded in selling 17 cartoons to the Saturday Evening Post--as well as, to the local St. Paul Pioneer Press, a weekly comic feature called Li'l Folks. It was run in the women's section and paid \$10 a week. After writing and drawing the feature for two years, Schulz asked for a better location in the paper or for daily exposure, as well as a raise. When he was turned down on all three counts, he quit. He started submitting strips to the newspaper syndicates. In the spring of 1950, he received a letter from the United Feature Syndicate, announcing their interest in his

submission, Li'l Folks. Schulz boarded a train in June for New York City; more interested in doing a strip than a panel, he also brought along the first installments of what would become Peanuts-and that was what sold. (The title, which Schulz loathed to his dying day, was imposed by the syndicate.) The first Peanuts daily appeared October 2, 1950; the first Sunday, January 6, 1952. Diagnosed with cancer, Schulz retired from Peanuts at the end of 1999. He died on February 13, 2000, the day before Valentine's Day-and the day before his last strip was published-having completed 17,897 daily and Sunday strips, each and every one fully written, drawn, and lettered entirely by his own hand-an unmatched achievement in comics.

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