

To: Friends of Old Apples
 From: Tom Brown

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Apple Search---2016

During the past year I found a few apples: Polly, Maloxs, Green Wolf River, Rusty Gabe, Horsehead, & Bates much less than I would like due to a hernia operation complication, our old home place burning, and several other factors. My resolution for 2016 is spend much more time in the field apple searching; to preserve our agriculture heritage and because it is fun.

At a Tennessee festival where I had an apple exhibit, I met Johnny Judd who told me a short story his father had told him about a man named Hodge from White Co., TN. In the 1800s he went out west with his dog and a mule-pulled wagon. Then about a year and a half later he came back on the train, but had to leave his dog because it could not travel with him. Over a year later, the family was awakened at 1:00 AM by the dog who had returned to Tennessee.

I would like to share with you the story of the most amazing being I have ever met in my life-time---our dog Charlie Brown. In his short life, Charlie greatly enriched my life and brought my wife, Merrikay, and myself immense joy. As you will see, dogs are truly amazing.

I first met Charlie and his brother Andy when I was volunteering for an animal rescue group. Every Saturday we went to the Forsyth County Animal Shelter to get dogs to take to a strip mall for a sidewalk adoption fair. We always had more dogs than volunteers, so I was given two Springer Spaniel mix dogs to show. They were magnificent looking brothers, young but almost full size, dogs that eventually would grow to about 50 pounds. The larger dog, Andy, looked very close to a true Springer Spaniel in color, bright white with very large black spots. His brother, Charlie, was about 15% smaller and was all brown including his eyes. Charlie had a very small tuft of longer fur on top of his head; also he had short drooping thick ears, covered with long hanging fur. Both had back legs which looked like knickers due to the long back fur, and finally long hanging fur on their tails making them look like triangular flags. These were energetic, friendly and very eye-catching dogs; I thought that they would surely be adopted that day. To my surprise they were not adopted, perhaps because I encouraged people to adopt them together; actually a two-dog adoption almost never happens.

Then Thursday of the following week I went into the Shelter to wash dogs to help their appearance for the next adoption fair. I was perplexed when I did not see Charlie and Andy in any of the kennels. A staff member told me that the dogs were out back in an isolation kennel because they had kennel cough. When I saw Andy and Charlie, they wildly greeted me with great enthusiasm. Kennel cough is not serious, but it still takes weeks to get well and I was concerned that with the Shelter only having a 15% adoption rate, that they would put the dogs down rather than hold them for full recovery. I immediately started a campaign to be allowed to take the dogs out for fostering to assure that there would be a good outcome for them.

We already had three dogs, so the plan was to eventually find them a good adoption home. One of my first steps in this effort was to take pictures of them with me when I went to a nearby county where an animal welfare group was going to make a presentation to their County Commissioners. Several local citizens got up and spoke about strange issues, including one man who refused to pay his taxes because he said that he had no valid currency with which to pay since the USA was no longer on the gold standard. I did not show my dog pictures because I told myself, "No one in that county is going to adopt Andy and Charlie."

An early medical examination revealed that Charlie had heart worms. Before we could treat the worms, Charlie developed the dreaded, often fatal, disease Parvo. He became extremely ill and the local vet treatments were not sufficient. So I took him to the Emergency

Vet Clinic. While driving there, I told him, "Charlie, if you survive, you and Andy have found a permanent home with us." After three days of continuous IV fluid injections, Charlie walked out of the Clinic. Yeah, we had just added two more wonderful dogs, bringing our total to five.

Andy and Charlie were nice additions to our family but they were more lively and assertive than our three existing dogs that were all black or mostly black. They were extremely devoted to each other. Charlie was frequently out in our five acre fenced area looking for "critters", something I regretted, but he was doing a dog-thing. When I fed the dogs, Charlie was often not right at the house. His devoted brother, Andy, would not start eating until Charlie had arrived and then started eating. Every day I loaded all five of them (later six) into the "doggie wagon" ('95 Subaru) and took them into Clemmons for a morning treat. When we returned, Andy and Charlie immediately got out of the car and ran up through the apple orchard, with the pure joy of running as fast as they possibly could, with their flag-like tails waving behind them.

In addition to the dogs we had four cats. The dogs were allowed in the house at their desire and slept inside at night. Thus with each new dog addition, we needed to get the dog accustomed to the cats. This was done by keeping them on a leash until they no longer showed excitement about the cats---something that usually took five or six weeks. With the very enthusiastic Charlie, the cat acclimation took seven months, a period in which I had to sleep in a separate bedroom with Andy and Charlie, with the door closed to keep them from the cats.

There was a degree of water repellency to the other dogs' fur but with rain, Andy and Charlie immediately became soaking wet. There was something about their fur that seemed like a scientific miracle, especially noticeable on Andy's bright white fur. Since they were outside most of the day, at wet times, Andy could get very dirty. Then a day or two later he was spotlessly clean, bright white again, a valuable technology awaiting commercialization.

Andy was the more serious of the brothers. He would come up to my recliner and sit motionless with those deep penetrating eyes saying, "A pat would be appreciated." Charlie was highly animated, moving closer to my chair and then with a moving nose, even closer, saying, "How about a pat, a pat right now; please lots of pats" and many pats they did get. Everyone likes a puppy because they are so lively, cute, and filled with joy. Charlie never stopped being a puppy in all of his thirteen plus years. His enthusiasm and joy were limitless.

Charlie had a different way of sleeping when compared to the other dogs. He usually slept curled in a tight ball. Less frequently he slept stretched out and when he dreamed his legs moved as if he was running. There was another "only Charlie" unique thing, during the day he slept under the back of the station wagon requiring a "look under" before starting the car. Each of our dogs had something unique they liked to eat, Charlie's was ice. He loved to chomp on large clusters of ice. Charlie and Andy were my alarm clock; a paw on the edge of the bed at about 5:30 AM told me that it was time to get up and walk with the dogs to get the newspaper.

In interacting with the dogs, none of them are trained and deliberately so. They are another species and I want to learn from them. I have no desire to be their master. Instead I want them to cooperate because I am their best friend.

Dogs are truly a gift from God. The only problem is that they do not live long enough. Andy's life was cut short by a neuromuscular disease, myasthenia gravis. It is a rare disease against which extensive medical treatment was not successful. We had hoped for an occasional outcome of going into remission, but we were not fortunate in this respect. Sadly we went forward with three dogs: Charlie, Lucky, and Tina.

Charlie's devotion was beyond belief. When I was gone apple searching for seven hours, Charlie would be waiting for me at our entrance gate. If it was raining, he would still be waiting. Upon my arrival, he would greet me by touching his nose to the back of my hand

(usually) or by touching me with a paw. If I went down into the field to work on apple trees for three hours, Charlie would go with me, wait the entire time and walk back with me. If I went

out the front door of our house, Charlie would immediately have to go out with me, every single time. When I walked Charlie on a leash, he walked in perfect harmony with me, not pulling like the other dogs. With Charlie, I constantly felt highly honored and deeply loved. He was my best personal friend and companion of immeasurable value.

After watching television for a while, I would get up and walk to the kitchen to get a snack. Charlie reasoned that, "Daddy is going to get a treat; Charlie is a family member, so I also deserve a treat." Thus every time I got up from my chair Charlie immediately headed for the kitchen and received a treat. Instead of grabbing the treat like the other dogs, Charlie would first carefully evaluate it with his nose as you would with a fine glass of wine, then he would take the treat and run to one of the dog blankets. There he would hold the treat in his two front paws, open his mouth very wide and glance around to see who was looking, then slowly eat the treat with great big chomps. Everything in life was very special to him.

In the morning I would take Charlie, Lucky, and Tina to Burger King to get a treat---a senior coffee for me and a biscuit to split among the dogs. The trip always started the same way with the station wagon back seat being down, making a solid deck. Charlie would have his head protruding forward near my head and he would lavishly lick my cheek (on every trip). I told my wife, "Since Charlie also licks many unmentionable places; surely his cheek licks inoculate me against every known disease." Once in a restaurant, my wife inspected her silverware and handed one to me saying, "Let's swap, here take this slightly dirty one since you have the Charlie Protection". [Actually, I have been very healthy.] When we arrived at Burger King it was important to see that Charlie got in the back because he would not bark if in the passenger seat. Then when I pulled up to the pick-up window Charlie would bark extremely loudly, with a friendly & happy voice. All the employees knew him and greeted him by name. I would often encounter the Burger King employees at other locations and they said that Charlie coming by and barking was the happy, high point of their day. While at the restaurant, I also tossed out some bird seed for the birds that frequently gathered near the last trash can.

Charlie was always so happy, joyous, upbeat, and highly devoted that his incredible spirit enriched the entire household. When Charlie was around, everything was all right with the world. It was impossible to feel the slightest gloom with Charlie constantly cheering up everyone. Charlie was a bundle of joy, bringing hourly smiles to our faces. He always greeted visitors with great enthusiasm, regarding everyone as a welcomed and valuable friend.

Once I was near the highway with Charlie and Tina, when way off in the distance I could barely hear a vehicle. The dogs started barking loudly. As it got closer the dogs barked in a frenzy. It sounded like a truck with its view blocked by dense forest. I did not see the old truck full of branches until it got to the end of the driveway and started to turn in. Then I saw the two men with their hardened faces who quickly drove off. I am sure that the dog's sensitive ears had recognized the same truck which had previously dumped debris on our property.

Charlie loved when it was time to rake leaves in the fall. He would run and jump right in the middle of the gathered pile of leaves and turn over with his feet sticking up. He was such a "little child." Also when Charlie found an animal and ran him up a tree he would bark as though he was calling all the whole family---the 5 dogs, 4 cats and Mom and Dad too--to come look at what he had treed. He could be way off in the middle of the woods, but you would always know when Charlie had treed an animal. He was so proud that he wanted everyone to come. He would look with anticipation to see who was coming to witness his accomplishment.

One day Merrikay said, Charlie is thirteen today. In reply I said, "That could be a problem", knowing that only one of our dogs had lived longer. Later that year we noticed that Charlie was not quite as exuberant and had started to cough. We took him to our vet who found a growth in his chest cavity. For a more complete examination, we quickly took him to the Virginia Tech

Veterinary School in Blacksburg, Virginia. Unfortunately they found that he had cancer and it was too advanced to consider operating. After that we had two and a half months with Charlie, with the illness somewhat minimized with medication.

We still went to Burger King every day but Charlies' barks were not as frequent. I regretted that I might never see his wondrous, happy facial expression again. One day I looked down at Charlie in the car seat next to me. I was overjoyed to see that he had a facial expression of total peace with the world. I love you Charlie, my best friend!

We cherished every final moment with Charlie. At the very end, two days before his death, I could not find Charlie anywhere. He was not under the station wagon or in the woods. Finally I looked under a utility trailer and saw him. I joined him under the trailer lying quietly with him, whispering a few soft words for two and a half hours. Our other dog, Tina, also joined us. I finally had to go to the tree nursery and water potted trees which absolutely had to be watered that day. Half way through the watering, I looked up and Charlie walked up and touched his nose to my hand and then walked back to the house. The wondrous Charlie is no longer with us but his spirit still strongly lives and continues to bring joy every day. In the future, every November 2 (Charlies and Andy's designated birthday), we will go to Burger King for a meal.

You can also experience great joy by actively including a dog in your life.

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Charlie Brown

