

Snoopy and the Chicken

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Best Speaker Award

Mr. Toastmaster, ladies and gentlemen, The traditional Mexican holiday, *Dia de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead, is almost upon us. My mother passed away on November 4 of last year, just in time to miss the holiday, so I thought that I would honor her first Day of the Dead with a story about her.

I grew up in Dallas in the fifties. You probably know that Dallas is the home of the State Fair of Texas. Every year the children of Dallas go to the fair. Some even get a day off from school for this. They head directly for the midway where they terrify themselves on the rides and try to win prizes by tossing a variety of missiles at a variety of targets: pennies into plates, baseballs at fuzzy dolls, rings at Coke bottles. Many of the prizes are alive: baby ducks, chickens, even chameleons, and occasionally one of these animals would find its way back to the house of some unlucky parent in our neighborhood.

Unlucky, that is, unless you were my mother. She loved them all. She even cried when our chameleons escaped their cage and starved to death in the barren wastes of our house.

But this is not a story about one of our prizes. It's about a baby chicken brought home by our next door neighbor, Rhodes Bobbit. Rhodes would wander the neighborhood showing off his chicken to all the kids on the block. As it turns out, this was not a wise practice. I'll tell you why.

At the time, we had a dog named Snoopy. Snoopy was a pedigree Springer Spaniel. Springer Spaniels are retrievers. They like to retrieve things. They like to retrieve birds. Chickens are birds. So Snoopy wasted no time in retrieving Rhodes' chicken. Now this was back in the days when the dogs roamed free, and the people watched where they stepped. Snoopy roamed the neighborhood with the chicken, totally contained in his large mouth and with all of the neighborhood kids in hot pursuit.

Alas, dogs can run faster than kids, so the chicken remained lodged in Snoopy's mouth until one of us had the good sense to inform my mother of the situation. Snoopy had a great deal of respect for my mother, so when she yelled, "Snoopy, come here!" he came. And when she said, "Snoopy, give me the chicken," Snoopy dropped the chicken at her feet.

Had you been there, you would have noticed that the chicken's ride in Snoopy's mouth had not been good for its health. It lay motionless on the ground. Still, my mother, who had been a nurse, picked the critter up, carried into the kitchen, and tried her best to revive it with an eyedropper and a little water. But seeing that her best was not good enough, she turned to Rhodes, who was already near tears, and said, "Rhodes, I'm afraid that your chicken is gone."

The little boy's face contorted in grief, and just when it seemed that he could hold back his tears no longer, my mother heard a loud "PEEP" from the kitchen counter behind her. Turning, she saw Rhodes' chicken standing up, walking about, and suffering from nothing more than a little outrage.

The moral of this story is obvious, friends. It ain't over till it's over.

Goodnight, Mom!