

Historic Comics

Pal Dog to the rescue

We have the fierce competition between press barons Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst to thank for the existence of newspaper comics in this country. It all started with Richard Outcault's legendary "Yellow Kid," which originally appeared in a Pulitzer paper in 1895, but was soon snatched away by Hearst. This led to the labeling of such shenanigans—with their screaming-headline school of publishing—as "yellow journalism," based on the yellow shirt worn by the strip's lead character.

Beginning in 1918, the first comedic soap opera, "Gasoline Alley," was published by the Chicago Tribune–New York News Syndicate. Created by Frank King, this strip was set apart from the others by King's story arc, which showed the

characters aging. On February 14, 1921, "Gasoline Alley" caught the interest of a wider audience when baby Skeezi (cow-boys for a motherless calf) was found on the doorstep of its central character, bachelor Walt Wallet. This plot twist was the brainchild of editor Captain Joseph Medill Patterson, who wanted to increase the paper's female readership. The baby was an instant hit.

The strip introduced another new arrival on December 23, 1922—when Skeezi was almost two years old, Grandma Wallet presented him with a pup, Pal. This cartoon dog was actually based on an Airedale owned by King's son, Robert. Pal and Skeezi grew up together, and their relationship mirrored those typical of a boy and his dog. As a little boy, Skeezi could be rather rough with Pal, treating him the way he was treated. So when Walt had Skeezi blow his nose, Skeezi made Pal blow his. As he got older, the boy grew closer to the dog—when he got home from school, Pal would be waiting for



Robert King, the cartoonist's son, and his Airedale.

Courtesy of Drawn & Quarterly

him; when he went camping, Pal would come along. Of course, as happens in real life, Pal aged and eventually died, but King didn't show this in the strip. Rather, in the mid-1930s, Pal just slowly faded away.

Lucky for us, two new books collect King's series from its beginnings: the multi-volume *Walt and Skeezi* from Drawn and Quarterly, which reprints the daily strips, and the coffee-table-sized *Sundays with Walt and Skeezi* from Sunday Press Books.

drawnandquarterly.com
sundaypressbooks.com