

Truffles, the invisible dog

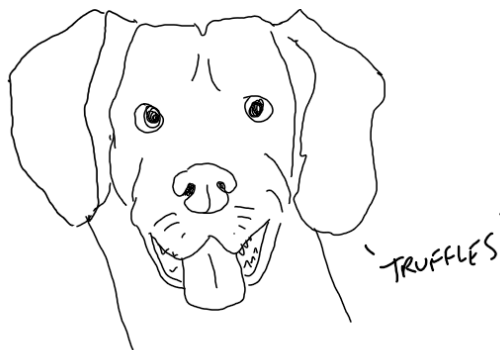
“You just can’t see it!” she said pulling a frustrated face that is strictly reserved for children to pull at adults when they don’t seem to understand the patently obvious.

Lily is a little girl that lives with the family upstairs. I got talking to them when her Dad and I crossed paths picking up the post in the morning and we were both wearing the same geeky t-shirt (Miracleman, one of the few superhero comics not looted for streaming...). I was having a clean out and gave him a few graphic novels that I was going to give to charity and some nature books that I thought Lilly might like. They were nature books, Frozen planet that sort of thing (one of those things that you’ve picked up over the years and don’t really remember how.)

So from then on I became, ‘Paul my animal friend’, as Lily had named me. During lockdown, with little choice, she would play in the corridor outside my door and occasionally knock on it as she had important questions that she needed answering. Questions such as ‘Are there more than a million leaves on a tree?’ or ‘Why aren’t forks noisy?’ Since I could do with the break from all matters agile, I’d sit on the stairs with Lily and try to get to the bottom of these important questions, normally making up stories or doing silly drawings to explain stuff.

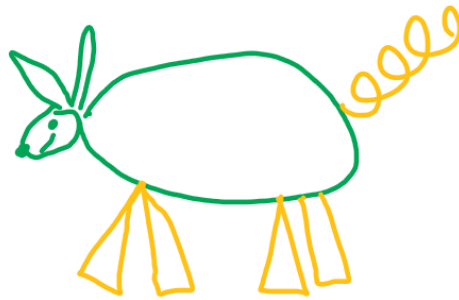
Which leads us to Truffles.

Lily, through logic only understandable by people of her height, was convinced I had a dog in the flat. In a vain attempt to tell her that I had no such pet, Lily pulled her frustrated face, and explained that Truffles (the dog had a name now) was invisible. And then asked me to draw a picture of it. There was a devilish temptation to pretend for a couple of minutes and then hand her a blank sheet of paper. But I had learned that Lily could be somewhat particular when it came to unsatisfactory answers. For instance I now know there are not a million leaves on a tree but a child doesn’t get bored with counting until you’ve reached over three hundred. So, I drew the invisible dog:



It took me somewhere around five minutes, maybe a bit more as I was a bit fussy about the nose. I was pretty pleased with it especially as I wasn’t an artist (understatement). Of course Lily had become more interested in hair twirling than my scribbling, so it took some goading to get her to look at the picture.

“That’s not Truffles,” she said and promptly snatched the pens from me and worked on her own masterpiece, which she completed in less than thirty seconds:



Lily, in a no doubt unmeant passive aggressive action, put her drawing on top of mine so I could look at it and then went back to training for the hair twirling Olympics.

It was tempting to enter into an artistic debate on the relative merits of the two pictures with Lily, but I knew I was on a hiding to nothing. Technically my dog looked more like, well, a dog. I suppose it could be argued that my effort did not contain legs, a body or a tail and hence triangle legs pig tail Truffles had one up on me there.

But it did not really matter. In the girl's mind, the invisible dog was green and yellow and had a body like a king Edward potato. The head was simpler. I had taken longer to draw my dog's face, to get it right. At least what I thought was right. I even tried to make it look like it was smiling. She had trumped me there too, doing it in less than a second and with a single line.

There's a certain amount of shame in retrospective, especially being a self-proclaimed Agilist, that I didn't interact better in the creation of Truffles. For a start I created a component of the desired product rather than a simple holistic whole. I did not consult the client on what they wanted and I suspected if I did then I would have talked to them in a way I understood a dog to work not the way they understood it. I took time to add a level of detail to the nose that the customer did not care about at all (in fact Lily said it looked stupid. Lily can be harsh).

I wonder if I could take my picture apart, find the elements that I could simplify, maybe the entire design was flawed. Maybe I didn't understand the brief at all.

But would I have learned something from this deconstruction? Or was I too set in my ways and cynical to change the process in order to see things from someone else's point of view. Would my own ego of knowing what was right stop me from producing what was needed?

Could 'I' get out of the way so that I 'could just see it' as someone else does.

I hope so. I hope we all can.