

Detective Dawg and the Package

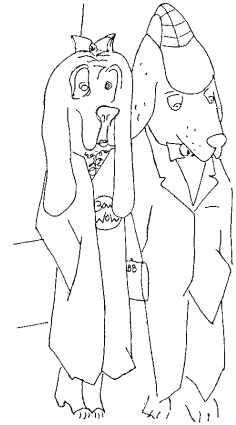


This is Chicago. It is a big city, with lots of big buildings, people, cars, and noise. It is also full of mystery. That is where Douglas Dawg comes in handy. He solves mysteries.

One evening, while leaving his office with his partner Bonnie Beagle, a man in a dark coat with his collar pulled up to hide his face, stepped into the alley, blocking their path.



“Here,” said the man. His voice was very gruff. “I want you to find the owner of this.” The man handed Douglas a package wrapped in plain brown paper.



“This is very mysterious,” said Douglas. “Who was that man? Who does this package belong to? And what is in the package?”

“Well, open it,” said Bonnie Beagle.

Inside was a book. On the cover were the letters ‘PKU Cookbook’.

“This is really mysterious,” said Douglas. “Who is PKU?”

“Maybe PKU isn’t a person. Maybe it is someone’s initials,” said Bonnie Beagle.

“What is an initial?” asked Douglas.

“Initials are letters that don’t spell words, but they stand for words. For example **BB** stands for me, Bonnie Beagle, and **DD** is you, Douglas Dawg.”

“That could be the clue we are looking for,” said Douglas, “and Penelope Katy Umbrella is the only person I know with the initials PKU.”

Bonnie and Douglas took the book down the street to where Penelope Katy Umbrella lived. They knocked on Penelope’s door.

“Here is your book,” they said when Penelope opened her door.

“That is not my book,” said Penelope.



“But it has your initials on it,” said Bonnie.

“PKU are my initials, for Penelope Katy Umbrella, but that is not my book. PKU must stand for something else.”

“We must look for more clues,” said Douglas.



Penelope, Douglas, and Bonnie sat on the porch and stared at the book, looking for clues.

“Well,” said Douglas, “we know it is a cookbook.”

“But a cookbook could belong to anyone in this city,” said Bonnie.

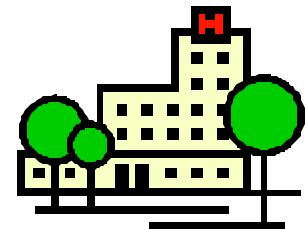
“But this is a special cookbook,” said Penelope. “This is a low protein cookbook for people on a low protein diet.”

“That is a good clue,” said Douglas. “What should we do now?”

“The person in this city who knows about special diets is the nutritionist. Maybe she can tell us who the book belongs to,” said Penelope.

“Good idea,” said Douglas and Bonnie. They hurried down the street to the hospital with the book. At the hospital, they asked for the nutritionist.

“Hello. I am Nell the nutritionist,” said Nell. “I see you have found one of our cookbooks.”



“Yes,” said Douglas, “and we need to find out who PKU is.” He showed Nell the book.

“PKU isn’t a person,” said Nell.

“Then what is PKU?” asked Bonnie and Douglas.

“PKU stands for a big long word, **Phenylketonuria.**”

“What is that?” said Bonnie.

“Will we catch it?” asked Douglas.

“PKU, or Phenylketonuria, is a medical word for people who are on a special diet. People with PKU are born with it, they don’t catch it!” said Nell.

“Well, what does it mean to have PKU?” asked Bonnie and Douglas.

“People with PKU use protein foods a little differently than people without PKU,” said Nell. “Do you know how you use protein foods?”

“I use protein to grow big and strong, and to stay healthy,” said Douglas.

“People with PKU also need protein to grow big and strong, but they need a special kind of protein. When you eat protein, it goes into your stomach. It gets broken into small pieces. Those small pieces are called amino acids. There are many different amino acids and they each have a name. These small pieces of protein, the amino acids, are then carried to the blood. The blood takes them throughout the body to be used to make new proteins—proteins that the heart, lungs, muscles, and the whole body needs.”

“And a person with PKU can’t do that?” asked Douglas.

“A person with PKU can do that, just like anyone else. But there is one amino acid that the person with PKU doesn’t use in the same way that you or Bonnie use it. That amino acid has a big long name—**Phenylalanine**. We call it **Phe** for short.”

“What happens to the Phe?” asked Bonnie.

“Phe stays in the blood. So whenever protein is eaten, there is more and more Phe in the blood.”

“And that’s not good?” asked Douglas.

“No,” said Nell, “that’s not healthy. Too much Phe in the blood can make a person not grow as well as he can. A person with too much Phe in their blood might not be able to concentrate on their work. They may feel irritable. Some people might even get a rash. There are different ways a person with PKU might react to too much Phe in the blood.”

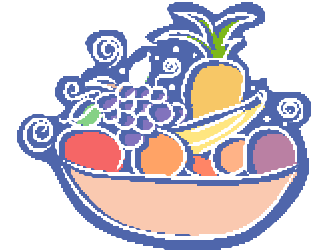
“Sounds like an allergy,” said Douglas.

“It is sort of like an allergy. People with allergies to certain foods can’t eat those foods or they will react to those foods. And people with allergies react in many different ways,” said Nell.

“I have a friend who is allergic to cats,” said Bonnie, “and she sneezes whenever she is near cats. Another friend gets red and itches whenever she eats strawberries.”

“Some allergies are easy to see,” said Nell, “like a rash or sneezing. Some people have allergies that are harder to see. Some people react on the inside. They may not feel well, or they don’t grow well, or they just plain don’t act the same when they are reacting to whatever they are allergic to.”

“So what does a person with PKU eat?” interrupted Douglas.



“A person with PKU is on a special kind of low protein diet. Like a vegetarian, they eat lots of fruits and vegetables,” said Nell.

“But you said even a person with PKU needs protein to grow,” said Douglas.

“That is right,” said Nell. “That is why it is a special kind of low protein diet. A person with PKU gets protein in a special way. They have a formula they drink which has lots of protein, but no phenylalanine. They drink this formula instead of milk. It is important that they drink this formula to get the protein they need to grow.”



“So a person with PKU drinks this special milk to get protein and the rest of the food must be low protein,” said Bonnie.

“That’s right,” said Nell.

“Will a person outgrow his PKU?” asked Douglas.

“No,” said Nell. “They always have PKU. Their diet might change a little as they grow older.”

“But they still eat low protein foods and drink a special milk?” asked Bonnie.

“Yes. That is the best diet for a person with PKU,” said Nell.

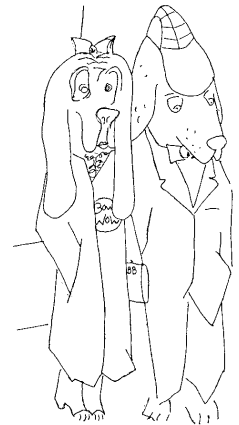
“Well, you sure answered all our questions,” said Bonnie and Douglas.

“So the mystery of the PKU Cookbook is solved,” said Nell.

“No,” said Douglas.

“But I thought I answered all your questions,” said Nell.

“All but one,” said Douglas. “Who was the mysterious man in the alley? And what was he doing with your cookbook?”



Story written by Joan Zerzan, MS, RD

University of Washington PKU Clinic
CHDD - Box 357920, Seattle, WA 98195

(206) 685-3015, Toll Free in Washington State 877-685-3015
<http://depts.washington.edu/pku>