

SPARKY WAS A LOSER When he was a little boy the other children called him "Sparky," after a comic-strip horse named Sparkplug. Sparky never did shake that nickname.

School was all but impossible for Sparky. He failed every subject in the eighth grade. Every subject! He flunked physics in high school. Receiving a flat zero in the course, he distinguished himself as the worst physics student in his school's history.

He also flunked Latin. And Algebra. And English. He didn't do much better in sports. Although he managed to make the school golf team, he promptly lost the only important match of the year. There was a consolation match. Sparky lost that too.

Throughout his youth Sparky was awkward socially. He was not actually disliked by the other youngsters. No one cared that much. He was astonished if a classmate ever said hello to him outside school hours. No way to tell how he might have done at dating. In high school Sparky never once asked a girl out. He was too afraid of being turned down.

Sparky was a loser. He, his classmates, everyone knew it. So he rolled with it. Sparky made up his mind early in life that if things were meant to work out, they would. Otherwise, he would content himself with what appeared to be inevitable mediocrity.

But this is THE REST OF THE STORY.

One something was important to Sparky: drawing. He was proud of his own artwork. Of course, no one else appreciated it. In his senior year of high school, he submitted some cartoons to the editors of his class yearbook. Almost predictably Sparky's drawings were rejected.

While the young man had stoically rationalized virtually all of his failures theretofore, he was rather hurt by the general ignorance of what he believed was his one natural talent. In fact, he was so convinced of his artistic ability that he decided to be a professional artist.

Upon graduating high school, he wrote a letter to Walt Disney Studios, a letter indicating his qualifications to become a cartoonist for Disney. Shortly he received an answer, a form letter requesting that he send some examples of his artwork. Subject matter was suggested. For instance, a Disney cartoon character "repairing" a clock by shoveling the springs and gears back inside.

Sparky drew the proposed cartoon scene. He spent a great deal of time on that and the other drawings. A job with Disney would be impressive, and there were many doubters to impress.

Sparky mailed the form and his drawings to Disney Studios. Sparky waited. And one day the reply came . . . he did not get the job.

I think deep down Sparky expected to be rejected. He had always been a loser, and this was simply one more loss.

So do you know what Sparky did? He wrote his autobiography in cartoons. He described his childhood self, the littleboy loser, the chronic underachiever, in a cartoon character the whole world now knows.

For the boy who failed the entire eighth grade, the young artist whose work was rejected not only by Walt Disney Studios but his own high school yearbook, that young man was "Sparky" Charles Monroe Schulz.

He created the "Peanuts" comic strip and the little cartoon boy whose kite would never fly -- Charlie Brown.