The loser who never gave up

By Chaplain J. David Atwater

For "Sparky," school was all but impossible. He failed every subject in the eighth grade. He flunked physics in high school, getting a grade of zero. He also flunked Latin, algebra and English. And his record in sports wasn't any better. Though he did manage to make the school's golf team, he promptly lost the only important match of the season. Oh, there was a consolation match; he lost that too.

Throughout his youth, Sparky was awkward socially. It wasn't that the other students disliked him; it's just that no one really cared all that much. In fact, Sparky was astonished if a classmate ever said hello to him outside of school hours. There's no way to tell how he might have done at dating. He never once asked a girl out in high school. He was too afraid of being turned down... or perhaps laughed at. Sparky was a loser. He, his classmates... everyone knew it. So he learned to live with it. He made up his mind early that if things were meant to work out, they would. Otherwise he would content himself with what appeared to be his inevitable mediocrity.

One thing was important to Sparky, however - drawing. He was proud of his artwork. No one else appreciated it. But that didn't seem to matter to him. In his senior year of high school, he submitted some cartoons to the the yearbook. The editors rejected the concept. Despite this brush-off, Sparky was convinced of his ability. He even decided to become an artist.

So, after completing high school, Sparky wrote a letter to Walt Disney Studios. They asked for samples of his artwork. Despite careful preparation, it too was rejected. One more confirmation that he was a loser.

But Sparky still didn't give up. Instead, he decided to tell his own life's story in cartoons. The main character would be a little boy who symbolized the perpetual loser and chronic underachiever. You know him well. Because Sparky's cartoon character went on to become a cultural phenomenon of sorts. People readily identified with this "lovable loser." He reminded people of the painful and embarrassing moments from their own past, of their pain and their shared humanity. The character soon became famous worldwide: "Charlie Brown." And Sparky, the boy whose many failures never kept him from trying, whose work was rejected again and again,... is the highly successful cartoonist Charles Schultz. His cartoon strip, "*Peanuts*," continues to inspire books, T-shirts and Christmas specials, reminding us, as someone once commented, that life somehow finds a way for all of us, even the losers.

If you follow the comic strip for a while, you will begin to notice one other thing as well. It isn't anger, resentment or in-your-face sarcasm which fuels Schultz's creativity and resilience. It's his faith. In fact, one study of the comic strip, published several years ago, made precisely that point. It eventually became a popular book entitled, "*The Gospel According To Peanuts*."

Sparky's story reminds us of a very important principle in life. We all face difficulty and discouragement from time to time. We also have a choice in how we handle it. If we're persistent, if we hold fast to our faith, if we continue to develop the unique talents God has given us, who knows what can happen? We may end up with an insight and an ability to inspire that comes only through hardship.

"*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*" - Jeremiah 29:11, New King James version. "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to God's purpose.*" - Romans 8:28, New King James version.

In the end, there are no "losers" with God. Some winners just take a little longer to develop!

Pet of the Week

Mr. Speckles is this week's Pet of the Week. This dapper gentleman is named for the two spots of color where his whiskers grow, while most of his body is white. Mr. Speckles is a bit shy but full of love. He enjoys affection and treats. Though he was a stray, he is social and friendly, getting along fine with most of his visitors. If you have room for Mr. Speckles in your life, give us a call! To find out more about Mr. Speckles or any animal at Pets Are Worth Saving (P.A.W.S.), contact them at 243-9996, by e-mail to usskittytalk.yokosuka@gmail.com or visit the P.A.W.S. website at www.pawsyokosukajapan.com.

Photo courtesy of P.A.W.S.

Campaign supports families who departed Japan

By MC1 Elena Pence, Naval Surface Forces Public Affairs

SAN DIEGO, Calif. - Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (SURFPAC) ombudsman began a campaign March 26, to collect donations to support Navy families who departed from Japan after an earthquake and subsequent tsunami struck the country, March 11.

"I decided to send out an e-mail to the ombudsmen here in San Diego to inform them about the families here from Japan needing support," said SURFPAC Ombudsman Stephanie DuBose, who also runs a food locker for Navy families in San Diego. "I figured we could drop off donations and make meals for the families every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I thought I would have the same turn out as I did with my food locker. I get about a couple of bags a week. Well, the response I got was incredible, more than I could handle."

Sailors, retired military, spouses, civilians, military commands and local businesses began hosting food drives, preparing warm meals and volunteering their time to support the effort. DuBose has received more than $10,000 worth of food, hygiene products, baby supplies and children's books and toys to help the families who had to leave their homes in Japan on a moment's notice.

"The e-mail went viral," said DuBose. "The ombudsmen sent it to their commands; the Sailors then sent it to their families, friends, churches and business owners. Before I knew it, I was getting support from everywhere. Armed Forces YMCA held a collection for us, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society is offering the victims free clothing, even the local Girl Scouts are volunteering."

Sailors from Littoral Combat Ship Squadron (LCSRON) held a donation of their own. Sailors stood in front of the Naval Base San Diego commissary and Navy Exchange collecting items for the families.

"I was so surprised to see what, and how much people were donating," said Gunner's Mate 2nd Class (SW) Dallas Jackson, a LCSRON Sailor. "I was expecting to see store-brand names, but they were donating name brand, high-quality products."

"People would come to drop off food and I was overwhelmed with their generosity because instead of a few bags, they were giving us grocery carts full of food and supplies," said Fire Controlman 1st Class (SW) Justin Silva of LCSRON, an organizer of the donation drive.

As the boxes would fill at the commissary, the LCSRON Sailors would deliver them to the ombudsmen office where Sailors, ombudsmen and family members organized the donations.

"I couldn't tell you how many people brought donations, there were so many," said Stephanie Medina-Perez, assistant force ombudsmen. "By the time someone finished dropping off their donations, another person showed up with more stuff. Every person that showed up ended up staying for a while, helping the next person unload their car."

Several volunteers from commands in the area, including Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet (SURFPAC) and Naval Base San Diego, came in the evening to help deliver the donations to the families. They loaded boxes into their own vehicles, made numerous trips to the Navy Lodge, and organized donation tables for the families.

Spouses, ombudsmen, and local business also made hot meals for the families to be served at the event. The Navy Lodge staff helps organize these events with DuBose. They update DuBose with the number of families they are housing, and they keep families updated on the supplies and food that would be offered to them.

"It's amazing to see the support that these families have received from everyone in San Diego," said Operations Specialist 1st Class (SW/AW) Edison Faggett of SURFPAC. "I wasn't expecting to see this huge amount of donations and the amount of people supporting this event on a Friday night. It is so inspiring to see what a community can do for those in need."

At the most recent event, the Region School Liaison Office helped families find ways to continue their children's education while they are in San Diego.

"The tsunami was the disaster, but what some don't realize is that the families are now in a crisis," said DuBose. "The families left their life in Japan; the children were pulled out of school. This is the time that we need to support them, get them help, and make sure they feel comfortable."

DuBose plans on accepting donations and helping the families until they no longer need her services.

FC2 Michael Adkinson inputs information into a database at a processing station during an authorized voluntary departure of Navy family members and civilians from the island of Honshu, Japan March 21. Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet ombudsman began a campaign March 26, to collect donations to support Navy families who departed from Japan.

U.S. Navy photo by MCC Jonathan Kulp