



When the doors of opportunity keep shutting, persevere

By Nancy McAllister

In 1919, a young man tried to get a job at the *Kansas City Star* as an illustrator but was rejected. His brother helped him get a job with a commercial studio drawing horses, cows, and bags of feed for farm-equipment catalogues, but the work dried up just before Christmas and the young illustrator got laid off. He decided to create his own commercial business—experimenting in the new field of animation—and after a number of ups and downs, he signed on a big client. Before he could finish the first project, the big client declared bankruptcy, and the artist was left with no choice but to file bankruptcy for his business as well. He scraped together what little money he had and bought a train ticket to California.

Upon arrival the young man got a job as an extra in a Western. But it clouded up and rained on the day of his shoot; the studio ended up replacing him.

So once again the illustrator tried his hand at setting up his own studio with his brother as his business partner. He created a cartoon character named Oswald the Lucky Rabbit for a film studio—and Oswald became one of the first Hollywood animated stars. As Oswald's fame increased and the contract

for him with the studio was coming to a close, the illustrator believed he could get a better contract elsewhere. So he traveled to New York City where he learned the truth about his Lucky Rabbit and his employees: While he was on the road, the film studio had offered his staff more money and freedom and they jumped ship; also, through a legal loophole, the film studio actually owned the Lucky Rabbit. Once again, the illustrator's business was on the verge of folding.

Before leaving New York City for the West Coast, the young illustrator sent a telegram to his brother saying that everything was okay and he'd explain the details once he got home. But he didn't want his brother to know the truth of the matter, so he started brainstorming how he could turn their fortunes around. He doodled and noodled all the way across America on that train until he came up with a new animated character. Its name? Mickey Mouse. Its creator? The young illustrator who never gave up—Walt Disney.