



The Sonoma Index Tribune

Pet Tales

04/16/2010

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In the spirit of the Film Festival I attended a film at the Sonoma Cineplex. I chose "How to Train Your Dragon" and I am glad I did. In modern 3D animation I was reminded that dangerous stereotypes come in all shapes and sizes. When they are overcome they can bring powerful transformation to a community, forever changing the lives of its residents; four-, two-, or even three-legged.

Reminiscent of sentimental animal movies from my childhood the protagonist of the film develops a binding friendship with his dragon and in the process brings light to the truth – good and bad is not always as it appears. Your 'best friend' might be the 'someone' you least expect. With an open-mindedness found in children, the hero puts an end to the primary myth in his culture surrounding dragons. He changes the perception forever through his willingness to see the true character of his winged friend.

I began my career in animal welfare with PLL less than two short years ago. There was much to learn but as a professional with a background in corporate diversity training and human rights I am still stunned at how vehemently people will speak against certain dog breeds and marginalize those who love them. I had never given the issue of 'breed' stereotyping and myth much attention. I didn't own a dog and I wasn't afraid of dogs. Yet the way hate is created is identical, no matter the species. It starts with a small vocal group or popular leader, gains attention in the media due to a dramatic, often tragic, incident and then magically becomes mythical 'fact,' flying in the face of scientific fact. Science doesn't *sell* magazines.

I recently heard a story from our shelter manager about her grandmother, who lived in the Bronx as a young woman. She had never had a dog or been bitten by one yet she was terrified of dogs. One day a man walking his dog approached her from the opposite direction. Seeing the dog she quickly crossed the street but as she did she noticed the man's crumpled expression. It was the 1960's and the man was African American. Worried she had offended him she gathered her will and reapproached, explaining it was the dog she feared and not him. The dog stood patiently, wagging his tail innocently, unaware of the fear he had provoked.

The messages of "How To Train Your Dragon" were basic -- the value of pushing past one's own fears and standing up for what is right even if it makes you unpopular – yet incredibly relevant to our unique community.

While dragons may not be misunderstood cats or dogs, there are cultural battles taking place every day and each of us must choose which ones to fight. I choose to fight any myth, stereotype or out-dated notion impeding us from doing our best for the animals and citizens of Sonoma Valley. Dare to walk in the path of the black cat or the neighbor walking their broad faced dog -- you might be glad you did.