

A DOG'S TALE  
Saturday  
January 28, 2017

Let me start off by being crystal clear: I love animals, especially dogs. The love they demonstrate towards their human companions is nothing short of magical, based on an unconditional love of their master, warts and all. When things are going great, when there's money in your pocket to fee them and care for them the way they deserve, you can find them at the door, looking hopeless and miserable as they await your return. The moment they hear you approaching the door, their eyes clear, their ears perk up and their tail starts to wagging back in forth in eager anticipation. The moment you step through the door, they're all over you, showering you with their version of hugs and kisses, sometimes so excited they can't even control their bladders, as they tinkle all over you and the floor. And when things are at their worst, when you don't have the money you need to give them a meal, let alone the medical care they so desperately need, you'd never know it, as their reaction at seeing their returning hero doesn't change a bit.

I've seen dogs willing to try any trick to bring pleasure to their master and dogs willing to take on the world to protect him (or her), even when they knew they were fighting a losing battle. The thing that gets me is just how unconditional this love and acceptance was. With humans, we claim that our love and acceptance is unconditional, but even when it comes to our spouses, many often find themselves questioning just how far they're willing to go when the chips are really down and the odds are stacked against them, especially when personal relationship is already suffering. With a god, however, there is no such dilemma. He can be laying there, having just been beaten to a bloody pulp by its master, and if someone comes up and tries to hurt their master, that dog will die trying to get up and defend him. And as far as forgiveness is concerned, all is forgiven the moment his master shows him the least bit of attention, let alone affection. With all of this, it's no wonder people love their dogs so much, and the qualities we all aspire to possess when it comes to our loved ones.

I still remember my first dog. When I was a small child, my neighbor's bitch had just given birth to a litter of the most adorable puppies, and his children were trying to give them away, desperate to do so before he took more drastic measures, such as fulfilling his threat to drown them. There was this one little puppy, the runt of the litter, and it was as if he knew what his mother's master had planned for him. As he looked at me, his eyes seemed to beg and plead, and I knew I couldn't leave him to his fate, so I begged and pleaded with my mother, frantic for the opportunity, not just to get a dog, but to save this particular dog from certain death. In a rare example of human decency, she gave in, possibly because I had him in my arms as I made my plea, both of our eyes filled with tears, and from that moment on, there was only one time, literally, we were ever apart.

It was summer, so I didn't have any school, and for the next week, or so, we spent every day at Shady Side Park, right across the street. After about a week of rough-housing all over every inch of that park, he started exhibiting signs of sickness. At first, my mother wasn't overly concerned, but when he started bleeding out of his rectum, even she started getting worried, and she finally agreed to take him to the vet. Sadly, there wasn't much which could be done for him. The vet offered to put him down, but I stubbornly refused, so at the end of the day, he sent us home with a bottle of medicine and instructions on how to dispense it. For the next several days, I refused to leave his side. At night, I'd take him inside, and make him a spot at the foot of the bed, in the daytime, I'd sit in the driveway with him, and we'd look across the street at the park, where we spent so much time playing. Every few hours or so, I'd use the eye-dropper to give him his medicine, holding him in my arms as I waited for him to get better. Deep in my heart, though, I think I already knew it wasn't going to happen, and I was just prolonging the inevitable, trying to make him feel as loved as he made me feel since entering my life.

As a sick pup on death's door (even if I was in denial), he didn't always have the energy needed to get up and handle his business. More often than not, he looked at me, whimpered, and then allowed himself to release when I put something between him and my lap. It was messy, but I didn't want to leave his side for anything, terrified that I'd come back to find him gone, but as a little boy, I didn't exactly have the luxury of going anywhere, least of all in public. When I did need to go, I took him with me, using this as an opportunity to not only relieve myself, but also to give him a proper cleansing. It also helped keep the two of us together, but this last time, my mother refused to allow me to bring him into the house. She hadn't expected him to last as long as he had, and her patience had worn thin, so I was instructed to leave him outside while I used the bathroom, assured that he'd still be there when I returned. Uncertain, I chose to wait instead, but little boys have little bladders, and in this, I was no exception, and after awhile, I simply couldn't wait any longer. After promising my pup that I'd return, I went to the bathroom, setting the world's record for emptying so much from my bladder in so little time, and when I returned, I knew something wasn't right.

As I picked him up and put him back in my lap, I heard him whimper, and something in my heart told me this was it, that he was finally about to leave this world. I started crying and bent down to give him a kiss. As I did so, he lifted his head, licked the tears from my face, and died in my arms. I must have laid there for hours, crying and struggling to understand how God could have taken such a beautiful life, and so early. I sensed my mother coming the window to check on me a few times, but she left us in peace.

When I was sure, absolutely sure, that he wasn't going to magically come back from the dead, like Jesus rising from the grave, I wrapped him up in his favorite blanket and took him into the backyard to bury him. A few weeks ago, before getting him, I'd dug a small pit and filled it with water, turning it into an underwater base for my Millennium Falcon, and right next to it was a relatively high, compared to a small child, pile of sand which I'd carved all sorts of tunnels into for my Matchbox cars. We'd spent almost as many hours there as the park, so I decided to bury him next to it, so he'd always be with me when I played. I got a shovel out of the garage, dug his grave as deep as possible, and then filled it with his favorite toys and rawhide bones before laying him into it and filling the hole. After I was done, I sat there, for hours, before my mother finally came out to get me, insisting that I go inside and take a shower before going to bed. Over time, the pain gradually faded, but never the memories of the love he showed for me, of how eager he was to take on the neighborhood bullies who were so quick to antagonize anyone in "their" park. While the hole in my heart eventually grew smaller, it never truly disappeared.

As an animal lover, I was just as horrified by anyone when TMZ showed the footage from "A Dog's Tale." Here was a dog, Hercules, whose trainer was, by all appearances, trying to force him into a raging current of water, one that I would have given second thoughts to getting in. This was, however, a spontaneous judgement, and after thinking about it, I started to have serious misgivings. After all, I'd just passed judgement without hearing both sides of the story, without bothering to verify the facts given to me, without even bothering to see if, or how, the footage had been edited. Sure enough, over the next couple of days, the whole story started coming to light. The footage had not only been edited for maximum effect, it had been intentionally withheld until the moment designed to inflict the most pain imaginable on the people who'd been involved in the movie's production. As the story continued to unfold, it became clear that, while it certainly might have looked bad, things were by no means as bad as they seemed. Hercules had been properly, and thoroughly, trained for this very stunt, and, despite his initial misgivings, he ended up performing it admirably. At no point-in-time was he ever in any serious danger whatsoever, and had plenty of safety personnel standing by, and immediately underneath of him as his trainers attempted to get him to perform. Simply put, the health and safety of Hercules was provided in ways my own never was, either as a child, or as an adult watched over by prison guards, medical and mental health staff.

PETA continues to protest, claiming all sorts of misconduct on the part of his handlers, but I'm not buying it. This is, after all, an organization who's never going to be content until all animals are treated better than people, with none of them ever being used in any way, either in a movie, or to perform any sort of manual labor. One of the arguments they recently made was that, the moment they realized Hercules didn't want to perform, then they should have stopped trying to make him perform, and while this sounds good, it fails to take into consideration some basic, and simple, facts of life.

First, everyone, and everything, has to work to provide for themselves in this world. If Hercules was living in the wild, he'd be forced to do things a lot worse than jumping into a current of rapidly moving water. In the wild, he wouldn't have had anyone in the water looking out for his well being, no one would have been there to properly train him, and no one would have been there to bandage any wounds he received. There's a reason people say it's a "dog eat dog" world, and in the wild, this statement would have been put to the test.

PETA makes this argument that Hercules shouldn't have been forced to do anything he didn't want to, but tell me, why doesn't PETA make that same argument for his handlers? How many times has a handler been forced to get up in the middle of the night to take care of one of his animals who's sick and in need of help? How many hours in a row has a handler had to work to come up with the money needed to feed his animals, work that the handler didn't want to do, but did anyway because he loved his animals and wanted to give them the best care possible? For that matter, how often have any of us forced ourselves to get up and go to a job we detested, only to receive a fraction of the pay we wanted to pay some idiot rent for something you could barely call a house, or for something you couldn't even classify as food? Where's the PETA protests when inmates are forced, literally, to work as slaves in prison settings? Where's the PETA protests over children in third world countries being forced to work their little fingers to the bone for one moldy piece of bread per day?

Another fact PETA overlooks is that these very animals they complain about are often treated much better than their human owners. This isn't to say that all animals are treated good by their masters, because they aren't, but the vast majority of them are. Recently, the P.T. Barnum Brothers Circus was forced to announce its impending closure because of the toll taken on their ticket sales by PETA protests, and while there were certainly some instances of animals being treated poorly, rather than showing people a better way, PETA simply insists on the use of animals being banned altogether. It simply doesn't work this way. If mankind and animals are to survive together in this world, then we've got to learn to work together as one to survive, which means each of us pulling our own weight, even when we don't necessarily want to. Admittedly, people need to treat animals as well as the animals are treating us, but PETA takes their self appointed roles of dispensing justice a bit too harshly, but that's just my opinion. As if this wasn't bad enough, they have a tendency to play fast and loose with the facts.

As always, I welcome any comments, either by leaving them here, or by sending them to me at the address listed below.

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