

Victor the Dogfather

> By Michael Mountain

Our work for the animals is a work of the soul.

Victor the Dogfather had no high-tech weapons - no nukes, cruise missiles, star wars satellites, or cluster bombs; and no chemical weapons, dirty bombs, or other cheap WMDs.

He didn't even have an army - just a couple of slightly overweight, old black Lab/spaniel mixes who considered themselves his chiefs of staff.

Victor couldn't even have defended his territory, Victorville, if other dogs had crossed his line in the sand and challenged him. But the point was, they never did.

This was all 15 years ago, and Victorville was just across the way from Octagon Three, where breakfast was prepared every morning for 600 or more dogs. Dozens of street-smart dogs, abandoned pets, and old mutts would mill around, watching for tasty morsels to drop as volunteers loaded the bowls onto pickup trucks for delivery all over Dogtown.

But however excited the dogs might be, none of them ever ventured across Victor's line in the sand just a few yards away. Instead, they would take a detour around his tree, and only then race off to the dog compounds along the delivery route.

It wasn't that other dogs couldn't have taken him on. Victor was old and creaky with arthritis. He'd lived on a heavy iron chain in a trailer park for years before coming to Best Friends. He walked stiffly. But no young upstart ever challenged him.

And while handsome "Sheriff" Amra the Malamute strutted around, greeting people like he was lord of the manor, Victor remained the true alpha dog.

What was his secret?

It wasn't that the other dogs were afraid of him. They knew there was nothing he



could have done to stop them. But he didn't need force. There was something about him that simply commanded respect.

There have been occasional people in the human world who have commanded the kind of respect and honor that was natural to Victor. But I can't think of any today.

Instead, we live in a world that grows ever more dangerously polarized - where violence is the order of the day, and self-righteous men worship gods of hatred and intolerance that reflect just how uncertain and insecure they truly are.

It's a world divided against itself, and mirrored right here at home in a country that's split angrily down the middle in what's set to become the longest, nastiest knock-down, drag-out election campaign ever.

It's a world of aggression. And the simple truth is that all aggression is born of fear.

Any of us can be scared by things we have no control over. But the fear that's endemic in the world today comes not from outside threats but from deep within ourselves. This kind of fear is born of a sense of disconnection - from ourselves, from each other, and from nature.

It's the kind of fear that Victor the Dogfather never felt. He knew who he was, and he knew his place in the scheme of things. And he projected an inner confidence that made other dogs feel secure rather than afraid. So they honored his line in the sand - not because they feared reprisals, but because he was truly the Dogfather of Dogtown.

True power doesn't depend on the ability to destroy, but on the ability to offer life and love.

Our would-be world leaders today could learn a lot from Victor. 🐾

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