

News from the Sanctuary



The Canine Work Ethic

In Memoriam:
Victor, the
Dogfather
1980 - 1996

By Tom Kirshbaum, Dogtown Diarist

Here's a quotation from Faith Maloney, Director of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and Dogtown's chief guardian:

"I become more convinced every day that dogs must have a job to be happy. If you don't give them one, they'll invent their own."

Ain't it the truth? Sheep dogs minus a flock, hounds with no scents to track, watchdogs deprived of responsibility – all will try to invent their own workplace. Enforced idlers become bored chewers of slippers, soilers of carpets, destroyers of the peace. The so-called Puritan work ethic? Our canine friends invented it!

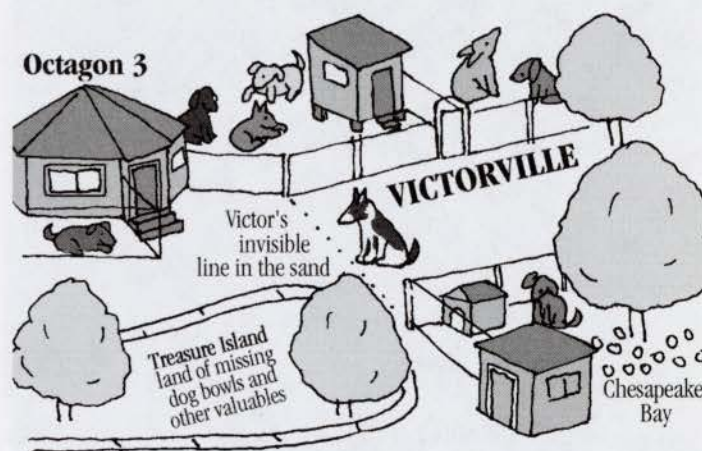
When I first met Victor, he had already been at Best Friends seemingly forever. His former "life" had been one of suffering, tethered with a chain at an old trailer park where he had no job, no purpose, no joy. Best Friends changed all that.

Once at the sanctuary, "the Dogfather," as he soon came to be known, busied himself with useful work. Aided by his younger "enforcers," the gnarled veteran fiercely policed the intersection in front of the Octagon Three housing project. Inhabitants of Dogtown's south side would approach the corner and then freeze as Victor, a formidable Australian shepherd mix, stared them down with steely gaze. Then they would avert their eyes and turn away. Even the rowdy family of Chesapeakes, who guard their famous tennis ball collection under a nearby tree, respected Victor's power. Any of them could have knocked him over with ease, so old and feeble was he. But he was, well, the Dogfather. In the words of another famous enthusiast of tennis balls, "Image is everything."

A capo among dogs, to be sure, Victor readily accepted humans as his gods. The first time I wandered through his zone, Victor rolled over to show his vulnerable, venerable tummy. "My home is your home," he said. "How about a scratch behind the ears?" he said. He groaned with pleasure as I massaged his bony neck.

As he lay there, dogs who wouldn't ordinarily have come within thirty feet of him approached and assertively sniffed the fallen warrior. To my surprise, he responded benignly to the presumption, because he had relinquished authority to me. I was a total stranger, but I was a human, and to his loyal canine heart, that was reason enough to yield.

Victor guarded his corner all day, every day. I soon noticed that he would snap to attention whenever I traversed the intersection carrying official-looking tools or provisions. No submissive rollover then! Clambering awkwardly to his feet, Victor would limp to intercept me at the border, then pivot politely to escort me through to the other side. He would provide this safe passage once, twice, or 20 times a day. To spare the old fellow pain, I used to plan alternate routes. Eventually, I realized that providing this convoy service, and keeping his corner safe and orderly, was what Victor lived for. In his last days I took to slowing my pace a bit to accommodate his. His pride was always my reward.



Old Victor remained content to the end in his valorous work. He died with his boots on, thanks to a beneficent Providence. He did his job eagerly and faithfully as long as he could lift his creaky frame off the sand, and then, dignity intact, he departed.

For all of us who loved and admired him, walking past Victor's corner will never be the same again. Let us console ourselves by imagining him now, in his glory, directing traffic at the Rainbow Bridge where his authority is unquestioned as always, and the number of doggies bowing to his iron will are legion. 🐾