

Conversations with Coal Dawg #7: His Last Summer

I told our dog, Coal, about the movie ‘Seabiscuit’. What a magnificent movie! Excellent film craft and superb acting complement a ‘*Hoosiers/Rudy-esque*’ story that can’t be beat. Even the blatant plugs for Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal were right on target.

“Huh?” said Coal as he sat in wet grass that needs to be cut. “FDR was a Democrat. You’re a rock-ribbed Republican.” Coalie stretched out for a tummy rub.

“Yes, and I’m a student of American history. FDR did what he had to do, just like Lincoln, to save the Nation. Too bad the socialism he experimented with was cancerous. I don’t think he knew it was so malignant.”

Coal pawed me every time I stop rubbing for a second. The katydids drummed. “He is a Democrat Deity. That’s what I was told when I was a Democrat.”

“Yes, but I admire his leadership, determination, and vision – especially on the necessity of war with the Nazis. He embodied hope and optimism like Pres. Ronald Reagan. My mother told me how she cried and cried when he died.”

“Your mother was a Democrat too?” Coal sniffed the air.

“Of course, she was a Southern Lady. The only Republican ever was Granddaddy Bowden. And there’s quite a story about him during the Depression that I’ll tell you about later. But, she voted for Eisenhower in the ‘50s and straight Republican by the ‘70s.”

Coal just looked at me. His eyes are alert even though they’re bit cloudy. He is thirteen and half and living beyond his time as a half black lab – half golden retriever. This should be his last summer unless his incredible health holds. He is losing muscle mass in his hind legs, but still walks without a limp. He can’t jump anymore.

“Coal, the movie was more than FDR and the New Deal. It was about how noble and social a horse could be. Hey, you’re way smarter than any horse.”

“Then, they should make a movie about me,” said Coal.

“Sweet boy, it’d just make people cry too much,” I replied. Coal gave a thump thump with his big tail. “A movie about you wouldn’t be about heroism. It’d be about boundless energy, irrepressible enthusiasm, crisp intelligence – even though you once were a Democrat – and unconditional love.”

“So?”

“Who would play you, buddy? Who could be the dog who gave one family dog stories that will last a full generation. Besides, you’re too beautiful a dog. No other dog could be you.”

“Thanks,” Coal nuzzled my hand.

“The movie *Seabiscuit* was about the 1920s and 30s when my parents were young. The film showed rising above circumstances. Never quitting. Always trying. Believing. Helping one another. Courage. Kindness amidst cruelty. She’d have loved as much as she did *Places in the Heart* back in the 80s.

“You miss her, huh?” asked Coal. He looked at me with that steady gaze that seems to have a shadow of its own. He’s only a dog, but I sense an enveloping shade of animal love, gentleness, and noble bravery of a stout heart in this living creature.

“Yeah, but with a joy in knowing that I will see her again.” I looked up at the

blue summer sky. The movie made me think of my parents and my dog and, again, what matters in life. And life as a citizen includes politics.

“*Seabiscuit* spoke about what we can be. Despite our failures. Despite our lack of perfection or even with handicaps we can be better if we try. It’s all Western Enlightenment optimism. It’s about hope. And dignity. Justice.”

Coal stretched out. Every inch of his beautiful black coat was resting dead weight. I kept the tummy rub going.

“Coal, that’s why I am a Republican. I don’t belong to a country club. Never will. I’ve worked since I was 15 and been on my own since I was 17. Always had love from family though, thank you Lord. So, being a Conservative Republican to me is like sharing the American values of *Seabiscuit*. Conservative Republicans like to talk about Freedom, Family and Faith. I call it Dignity, Justice and Hope.” Coal rubbed his ear in the grass.

If this, indeed, is Coal’s last summer, it is a sweet time. He has the family trained to his routines for care and attention. We gladly fuss over an old dog doing them.

“Coal, you’re our Seabiscuit. You’re the best dog ever.” I kissed the white fur on his muzzle.

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