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A Dogged Pursuit: In search of Chile's "Hero Dog"



User Rating: ●●●●● / 9

Poor Best

Written by Charles Finn
Friday, 06 February 2009

The video, to put it mildly, is incredible, and when belatedly posted on YouTube in December of 2008 it became an overnight sensation. In it a dog in Santiago, Chile, is hit by a car on the freeway at rush hour and another dog comes to its rescue, weaving between speeding cars, looking left and right with uncanny awareness, and dragging – with its paws – its fallen friend to safety. Road workers arrive shortly and the injured dog, unfortunately, dies, while "Hero Dog" as he or she quickly becomes known, disappears into the city, and has yet to be found. The video is a grainy black and white from a surveillance camera, and a link is listed below. The link between Santiago, "The Hero Dog" and Bend, however, is happily more clear, and can be found in the handsome visage of Vanessa Schulz.



Vanessa Schulz is a documentary filmmaker. Her company, 21st Paradigm, out of Bend, a 501(c)(3) since February, 2001, that positions itself as, "A way of thinking for the 21st Century that respects the intrinsic value of all life – that is, the right of other life forms to exist regardless of their instrumental value to humans." That said, Schulz's next project, (her next calling), is taking her – you guessed it – to Santiago.

Schulz was born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa. She began in the film industry while attending Cape Town Film & Television School, after which she emigrated to the United States, gaining further film experience working for NBC, Fox, National Geographic and the Discovery Channel. Frustrated, Schulz struck out on her own in 1998 with the expressed purpose of tackling controversial subjects the major networks didn't want to cover.

Schulz can fairly be described as a sensitive soul, and the first time she saw the clip of, "The Hero Dog," she, "felt fractured," she says. "I couldn't watch it twice." Over the next few days the video continued to haunt her, and further investigation began turning up all sorts of atrocities befalling, "quiltros" the stray dog population in Chile. With her filmmaker's credentials and life-long affinity to animals, it wasn't long before Schulz knew what she had to do.

"Lost Dogs" is the name of the film Schulz is making. Like many of her other films, she zooms-in on the less fortunate of the animal kingdom, in the process giving them a voice.

"I think my core reason for empathizing with animals is that they don't have a voice," Schulz says. "And I know that there are human communities that don't have a voice, but it's always easier to make outcasts of those who you don't recognize as yourself... But slowly we're learning that everyone belongs within the moral universe. And that seems to be my calling, to bring animals into our moral universe."

Jeffery Masson, is the author of *When Elephants Weep* and aware of Schulz and her project. In an e-mail to this writer, he pointed out "Lost Dogs" is important because dogs are in a special position due to their domestication.

"Dogs," Masson wrote, "need us the way no other animal does. They cannot really survive on their own. So to leave them to their own devices is to condemn them to slow death. Cats manage (barely) when they become ferals; dogs really do not. They look to us for help and when we don't provide it we can only imagine the psychological horror they experience."

Schulz is about to dive into that psychological horror. And despite what some might call the quixotic nature of her quest, she remains optimistic. Schulz's goal, it needs to be stated, is not to find a single dog, but to shine an honest, critical and possibly dangerous light on the systematic killings, the mistreatment, and plight of Chile's "quiltros". If she finds "Hero Dog" along the way, all the better.

A local film event fundraiser to help fund Schulz's project has been set for Sat. Feb 14 at the Poet House, 856 NW Bond St. Ste. 2. Doors open at 7 p.m. Free with donation.

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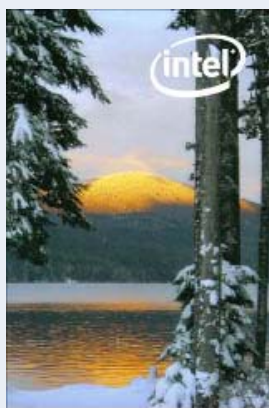
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Steve said:

Thank you Vanessa!

February 12, 2009

Ginger said:

Vanessa thank you for taking action! So many people are so deeply moved by the Hero Dog video; for months we've followed the story hoping for positive news and your documentary is a great development. It is amazing how the brave actions of one little dog have inspired so many people! Our little four-legged Hero has already made the world a better place. Humans need dogs and animals to bring out our humanity and compassion and make us better people. I hope we/you find our Hero Dog of Santiago and hope that at least your documentary will help some of these poor dogs. I will be donating on your website and, as always, checking frequently for updates. Vanessa, thank you for doing what we've all been desperately wishing we could do. Ginger

February 13, 2009

ElizabethS said:

I was not aware of the "Hero Dog" video, and I don't think I'll watch it because I don't want to see the first dog get hit. But I just spent some time in Chile, and the population of "random dogs," as we dubbed them, was quite large. It seemed like a rare occurrence to see a dog with a human "owner." Most dogs are on their own or with a small pack, quite traffic-savvy, and wise to things going on around them in ways that most dogs in the US are not for lack of a need to be.

February 20, 2009

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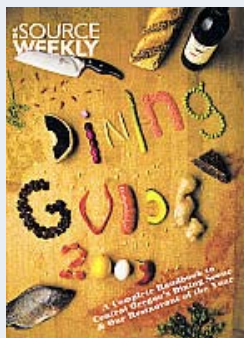
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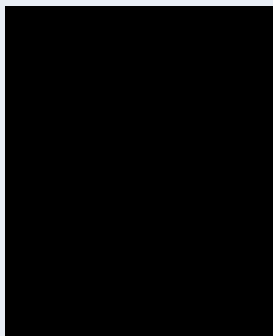
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