

from STORIE DI LIBERTA' DI RAGAZZE E RAGAZZI CHE INSEGUONO I LORO SOGNI

DARLA K. ANDERSON, the story

This is the story of Darla, the girl who showed the world that who believes in dreams and listens to his heart can achieve great results and make his and others' happiness.

Since always, Darla loves the rainbow. As a baby girl, after the storm, she enjoys looking at the sky nose in the air, waiting for that colorful bow to show and introducing the return of the Sun. And yet she's every time a bit disappointed. "Why does the rainbow content himself with just a piece of the sky?" she asks her parents that don't have an answer. Maybe the rainbow doesn't know to be so special? Or the problem is in the eyes of the onlookers?

Little by little Darla notices that people's gaze often reflects their habits. Many of them can't see the wonders in front of them, because they are too focused on their own thoughts and on the images in their head. The world to her is a continuous discovery made of nuances and surprises. She loves to explore it, starting from her house in Glendale, California: she runs on foot or by bike among the houses, the streets and courtyards, she is surprised at a flower growing through the cracks in the concrete of a sidewalk, or at a bird, on a branch close to her, sing towards her his bright chirping. Even the place she sees everyday look special and always different to her, full of stories and details that strike her imagination.

And she also loves books, cartoons and movies that make her fly with her imagination and live the most amazing adventures without leaving home. Sometimes she lies down on the bed, hands interlocked behind her head. She stares at the white ceiling and sees it filling with characters, actions, scenes. There are pirates and their galleons, young explorer girls climbing on the mountain's tops and going down in the depths of the earth; astronauts traveling into the space, objects coming to life, exotics animals and dragons and other curious creatures that seem living only in her imagination. Alone, in her bedroom, she invents funny or moving or full of suspense and mystery stories: they come out from her mind and for a moment they materialize in front of her eyes, then disappear. Therefore, she starts dreaming to catch the visions and project them on a screen bigger than her bedroom's ceiling: maybe even in the sky, like giant rainbows.

There's just one thing that scares her. When she looks around her, Darla notices that those who succeeds are always and only men. Politicians, sportsmen, actors, businessmen, journalists, writers, ... no women among them and if there are some, they can't be seen. It looks like for girls the place to be is another: at home, in the kitchen, with kids; or even at work, but always a few steps behind the men. "Is that true?" she asks her mother.

"No" the mother answers, "if you always do your best, you can be whatever you want. But you must always believe it and never let yourself be cast down by difficulties. Do you promise me that you'll do it?"

"I promise!" little Darla says, before she jumps hugging her mother tight.

At University, Darla studies environmental design, a very innovative branch of knowledge that aims to harmonize every human building (houses, skyscrapers, streets and so on) with the surrounding environment for the appearance as well as the materials. She tries, in the end, to find a way to create something beautiful, that everyone can see, to enhance the reality already amazing to her but that many seem to ignore.

In the meanwhile, still in California, in middle 80s, something happens apparently with no importance at the beginning, but destined to change our imagination. Steve Jobs, the iPhone and Mac computers inventor, is fired from Apple, the company he works for and he himself founded just

a few years before, with his friend Steve Wozniak. Jobs is a genius, with a bright mind, and he's not easily disheartened. Since he's unemployed, he decides to invest all his savings buying a production company, very small back then and almost unknown: Pixar, recently born and specialized in animation movies. It's 1986: just two years later, the new company led by Steve Jobs wins an Oscar (the most important movie award in the world!) for a short movie called Tin Toy. It's a small footage, only three minutes of length and computer animated, with a tin toy as protagonist who tries to run away from his owner, a boy called Billy.

Today we are used to watch animated cartoons, movies and videogames made with amazing graphics: it feels like you're inside it! Back in 1988, though, things were quite different, internet did not yet exist, at least as we know it today. The short Tin Toy appearance was a real revolution back then: a daydream becoming real for many kids and adults. Among them, there's Darla too, amazed by this new company, Pixar, that seems able to transform the imagination in reality and give fantasy all that power she always desired. Steve Jobs production company works on colors, feelings, people, nuances: all things that Darla loves very much. She starts to dream that, maybe, one day, the doors of this colorful universe will open also for her...

... and so, it was: in 1993, Darla is hired by Pixar. Her joy is infinite as well as her doubts. "I will actually have something to give to such an extraordinary world?" she asks herself, humbly. "And if everyone is better than me and I'm no good for anything?" she thinks. She feels she has something beautiful to give but still she doesn't know how to bring it out. Despite the insecurities, Darla doesn't give up: working in that amazing place fills her with joy, and she's ready to do whatever she's asked.

Indeed, at the beginning, she doesn't make movies, but small commercials made by Pixar to fund itself. That was a big time for the production house. After Tin Toy success, Pixar wants to show to be able to go bigger: a full-length movie, more or less one hour and a half, all computer animated. It's a very ambitious goal in those days and everyone works to make something amazing, jaw-dropping.

That's not easy, sure. Characters, plot, technique: nothing has to be left to chance. Even Steve Jobs can't think to anything else: he watches over and over again every single minute of the movie, asks friends for advices, tries small changes, then bigger, then starts over again.

He's looking for something almost impossible to find: perfection.

An African saying says that it takes a village to raise a child, not only his parents. And this teaching is adopted in Pixar in that moment: all the people working there, no matter what they do, are involved in the new movie project.

"Hey, what if we make this character blue instead of red?" asks someone.

"And if we set the movie in a jungle instead of a house?" says someone else.

"And if we called the protagonist Frank instead of Andy?" adds another one.

These are months of great excitement in the production house: all the employees talk for hours, watching movies, thinking new solutions. Among them, of course, there's also Darla, that for a while has the chance to leave the commercials for a more grand and creative job. And she does it with passion and joy, putting all her imagination at the service of this idea and makes her contribution to its realization. She shows her great creativity, besides a meticulous attention to pragmatic matters.

"Bravo" says to her the boss, at the end of the job. "Your contribution, as well as your colleagues', has been precious. Keep it up and you'll go far." In that moment, Darla is so happy that she feels she can touch the sky!

And then, finally, in 1995 the movie hits the theaters: Toy Story, this is the title, tells the story of a cowboy puppet jealous of the others toy of his owner, the kid Andy, and above all jealous of brand-

new Buzz Lightyear, a modern and fully equipped astronaut. It's an unprecedented success: in less than a month, Toy Story is the most watched movie of the year. The public goes crazy, reviewers call it a masterpiece, and they put it in the list of the most beautiful films ever.

For Pixar, this success is a revolution: from now on, the company won't stop growing and being successful. For Darla too is a revolution: in this moment she realizes that her imagination is precious and, as long as she'll listen to her heart, she'll go far. Little by little, she leaves behind her fears: she tries to make herself heard, to give her best ideas, to make the stories bloom like flowers in spring. Her supervisors notice her value and start giving her increasing responsibilities, that she carries out with precision and freshness.

Darla works hard and seriously, but always finding a way to have fun: so, every day she arrives at the office with a smile, ready to handle the day at her best. Thanks to her, the next movies are enriched with amazing characters, destined to remain forever in the audience hearts: like Flik, the A Bug's Life ant; or James Sullivan, called Sulley, the big blue and purple monster with a golden heart in Monsters&Co; or like Saetta McQueen, the red car in Cars. Now Darla is happy: her childhood dreams became true. And besides all her professional success, something happens that make her heart going even faster...

One day Darla is at her desk and is watching something on her computer. A colleague never seen before approaches to her. "Hi, I'm Kori. And you?"

"Darla" she answers and, when they shake their hands, she feels like a shiver. "What is going on?" she asks herself.

"Lovely to meet you, Darla! I wanted to ask you: are you perhaps up to a softball match sometimes?"

Softball is a sport similar to baseball and mostly played by women, very famous in the USA but not very much in the rest of the world. Darla loves it since she's a little girl therefore she's like "Sure, of course! It's my favorite sport!"

"Great then!" says Kori. "I manage a team. We meet one night per week for training and then there are the matches. Are you in?"

"Gladly!"

Kori bends on the desk and writes down something on the first sheet she can find. "Here's the address of the field. We'll see you tomorrow at 19, alright?"

Darla nods. Kori smiles and then, as she appeared, she vanishes. And for the rest of the day Darla can't think of anything else: the girl, her smile, that she'll meet her again tomorrow. "I fell in love with her!" she realizes suddenly. "But how is that possible?" Since then, nothing will be the same anymore.

If she would have been told about that, Darla as first wouldn't ever believe it! She's been taught that love is a different thing. Love can be between a boy and a girl, between blue and pink, but not between two women or two men. This what everybody always told her. But when Darla met Kori, she understood that even pink and pink can love each other and dream to be together forever: there's nothing wrong in this, if it's the heart speaking.

Playing softball, the two girls can know each other better: they talk, laugh and have fun playing and running on the field. Then they start seeing each other more often, also at the office, having coffee break and lunches together and they never stop talking, asking each other questions, telling how was the day. The time never seems to be enough for them: they start then to go out in the evening too, for a dinner or a movie night, or just for walk. At the beginning it's a friendship but soon it become something else: a strong and powerful feeling, that join and bond them tight.

What is born between the two women is absolute love: deep, strong, colorful like a rainbow. They love each other so much that they marry not only once but twice! The first marriage was in 2004, in San Francisco, one of the first city in the world to recognize same sex marriage.

Not everyone, though, thinks the same as them. Some people (even very important, like, for instance, George W. Bush, USA president back then) are convinced that only men and women can marry: two men or two women, even if they love each other, can't be married. Darla and Kori's union has been annulled, but the two women don't give up. They both believe in the power of imagination; they both know that what makes their heart beat is true and absolute love. Then they wait, sure that sooner or later their dream will become true.

And so, it is: four years later California, their state, authorizes same sex weddings. Men in love with men and women in love with women can finally see their love recognized by law. It's 2008: Darla marries Kori for the second time, the final one, and for both it's a very important moment. Since then, their love didn't have any value for the authorities. They lived together and loved each other, but they were invisible to the law. Now, they are a recognized couple, with the rights, duties and visibility of all the other couples. It's a huge change for California, that seven year later every American state will adopt.

In the meanwhile, Darla and her wife make a decision: to be in a couple and also work together is too much for them. It's Kori the first to talk about that. "You know, I was thinking... I could ask to move in another department, what do you think?"

"Why?" asks Darla, almost offended.

"You know... I fear that working together could make us fight or get bored."

Darla thinks about it for a while before answering. Within herself, she knows Kori's right. She's scared too that spending a lot of time together, at home and at work, can wear out their relationship. And at the office, you never know what can happen: a bit of tension, some worries for a deadline approaching, a bad word said in the wrong moment can become a fight that, that's for sure, is no good for their relation.

"Ok, then" she says. "It's true. Our love is precious and we can't risk to ruin it for an office argument, right?"

"No, never" answers Kori, hugging her.

So, since 2001, the two women are together in life but not at the office. Monsters&Co. is the last movie they both take care of: since that moment, Kori will still be part of Pixar, but following different projects. Even if the office is the same, their paths almost never cross, both of them busy with their schedule. Every evening, at home, they get together and, with the table prepared for dinner or later, on the couch, they tell each other how was the day, the projects, the ideas for the future. That is way, they can still be a strong and close-knit couple, in life as in their job. Especially Darla had a lot of success: she has even entered the Guinness Book of Records as the female producer that earns the biggest amount of money per movie she works on. Who would have said, just a few years before, that a woman could reach such a milestone? No one, maybe. Or perhaps, Darla, that girl with big eyes to the sky, looking for a rainbow, was a little expecting it...

In the meanwhile, also Kori wasn't remaining inactive: for instance, she worked on The Incredibles, the 2004 Pixar movie with a quite strange superheroes family as protagonist: each of them as a special power that uses to help anyone, at home or outside. Is a story full of creativity and inventiveness that proves a real truth: all families, in their own way, are special and the diversity of each can be a great resource.

Five year later, in 2009, Darla works to another movie, destined to be another great success of the production company: Up. Carl and Elle met and fell in love as kids. They dream to spend a life together and live great adventures that, growing up, they can never afford: they would like to travel, but they never have enough money. And even in everyday life things aren't easier: they would like to have children but unfortunately Elle can't. Still their love keeps growing day after day, strong as a wall built brick after brick. Then Elle dies and Carl falls into despair. All alone, he becomes grumpy and surly and mean with all who tries to approach him. As long as, in order to escape some bad events, Carl manages to transform his house in a hot-air-balloon and makes it fly up in the sky, where he will start one of the adventures that he always dreamed of with Elle...

This is the story of a love that goes beyond anything: struggles of life before, death later. A love that recall Darla and Kori's love: a pure and true feeling, that they are happy to live out in the open.

And no matter if someone turns up his nose, if he disagrees and thinks that two women shouldn't be together or even, if they do, they should be ashamed or even hide.

Criticism can't wound Darla and Kori: it makes them stronger. They are more than a couple: they are a family, a team, a power. Their love is a light in the sky, enlightening the way for many others people in the same situation.

One of them is Adrian Molina, a guy of Mexican origin working at Pixar as director and animator. Adrian has a relation with a man but, unlike Darla, he's ashamed to say it. Maybe he fears that his feelings can be a problem or that someone won't except him for what he is. To his colleague, he doesn't tell his life or thoughts, but a story coming from Mexico, his family land. Every year, the 2nd of November, they celebrate the Dia de los Muertos (the Day of dead), a joyful and colorful celebration during which the living shows their love to their dearly departed with songs, dances, costumes and food.

Darla and Pixar had already faced this theme with Up but decided to give a chance to Adrian's idea. So, after years of work, they finish a new masterpiece, in theaters in 2017: Coco. The protagonist is young Miguel Rivera, a Mexican boy dreaming to become a musician and, in order to follow his passion, goes even in the realm of the dead, where he'll discover some incredible things about his family. It's a funny, exciting and even touching movie, engaging the audience and that, like Tin Toy did, got the greatest prize of all: the best animation Oscar.

In an interview after the victory, Adrian Molina doesn't forget to warmly thank the woman who helped him along the way, professionally and personally. "I never told anyone that I was in love with a man, before working at Pixar. Then my first producer here was Darla K. Anderson, who never hid her love for her wife, Kori Rae. Watching her being so free and happy, living her relationship out in the open, made me understand that is always possible to be yourself, without hiding. When, in the end, I took courage with her example and told to my colleagues my love for my husband, I finally felt complete and satisfied. Telling the truth made my creativity to fire up."

There it is, Darla's rainbow shining in the sky. There is the girl who, once grown up, remained loyal to her dreams and fed her imagination to make it shine in front of everyone eyes. Here's the woman who showed that only the heart matters. And everything that makes it beat is a treasure that we all have to cherish, to give importance to, to take care of and to make it grow as you'd do with a plant. Because only listening to your heart, without shame nor fear, you can be free and great and maybe even enlighten the way to happiness for many other people.