Living an Elmo

When teenagers are asked what personality they most admire or have learned from, the answers could not be more varied. Among my own circle of peers, they ranged from Mother Teresa to Grace Kelly. As for me, the answer has always been Elmo from "Sesame Street." Elmo had to overcome the stigma of being called a monster. For young children, monsters hide in closets or under the bed at night. But Elmo defies this, and with this wide eyes and childlike manner, he proves that sometimes a monster isn't something to fear. He adds a new layer of understanding to "Sesame Street," which has always been a forum for learning to live with differences.

Elmo belongs to both poor and rich, transcending class and race. He shares friendship with everyone on Sesame Street, whether Bert and Ernie – who live in a comfortable house – or Oscar, who lives penniless in a garbage can. Elmo's friendships with Snuffleupagus or The Count are not dependent on their varying degrees of intelligence, and he does not judge Grover unfairly or resent Big Bird because of his leadership abilities.

Elmo contributes to the shaping of today's youth by giving us important lessons. Through him, we learn to share, to be more compassionate, and to go to and adult if we have a problem. This is important, because as children we need adults. While later we scoff at their aid and struggle for independence, Elmo's lesson stays with us: sometimes it's okay to accept help.

Today, as his first fans graduate from high school and enter college, Elmo is a cultural icon. Rising above the stigma of being a monster, Elmo spreads his message of love and acceptance. Young adult and small child alike sport the popular t-shirt that features nothing more than Elmo's smiling countenance. Despite the looming differences between children of the 80's or 90's, we are joined by one symbol of innocence and understanding as we enter the new millennium. Elmo's large eyes convey a message, and bring us closer together in a time when we are being driven apart.