

Lessons from the Twenty-Fourth Century

Hello, my name is Dani, and I'm a trekkie. I have the autographs. I own a phaser and a tricorder. I've worn a Starfleet uniform...

to school...

when it wasn't Halloween.

I used to hate *Star Trek*. I thought science fiction was filled only with the vacuum of space. I laughed when my father gave my mother a boxed set of *Star Trek* for Mother's Day. How romantic.

Then I got hooked.

Since watching – okay I admit it – every episode of every *Star Trek* series (more than once), I find the lessons of the twenty-fourth century intruding into my life like a Klingon at a garden party.

A lot of my life is theatre. This year our school planned a production of *La Cage aux Folles*, the gender-bending musical.

What? High school boys in drag? Yup. Our theatre director wanted to push the boundaries.

Unfortunately, our school's Bishop didn't want those boundaries pushed. The resulting controversy was like a photon torpedo hitting an over-filled outhouse. Our theatre department was shocked by the Bishop's reaction, because *La Cage* isn't really about boys in drag; it's about love and relationships and family.

But I wasn't surprised.

In 1995 Paramount received a record number of calls after a *Star Trek* episode depicted same-sex kissing. A production assistant remembers a man who complained, “You’re ruining my kids by making them watch two women kiss.”

The production assistant asked, “Would you have been okay if one of the women had shot the other to death with a phaser and the kids watched that?”

The man replied, “Of course.”

I learned three things:

1. Our values are backwards if violence is acceptable but sexuality is not.
2. People feel threatened by what they don’t understand.
3. Controversy creates great ratings; this was one of the most-watched *Star Trek* episodes ever.

If our Bishop had been a *Star Trek* fan he’d have seen what was coming. Banned from the school, our production of *La Cage* received front-page coverage in the *Orlando Sentinel*, was offered every professional venue in town, and became the most attended musical in our school’s history.

Star Trek has also had a direct effect on my life. I grew up watching one of the characters grow up. Jake Sisko always wanted to be a writer, even at age twelve. So did I. In one of my favorite episodes, Jake is depicted as an old man regretting the things he didn’t do. It made me think about what I might regret someday. So I began work on a novel. Sure, it took me a few years to develop the skills to make it happen. But 50,000 words later, I have a credible first draft. Without Jake’s example I would be regretting instead of writing.

My friends aren't really into *Star Trek*. But when I share the lessons I've learned from the twenty-fourth century, they listen.

So maybe I'll save my Starfleet uniform for Halloween. But the lessons of *Star Trek* come in handy every day.