**The Incredible Life of Balto** by Meghan McCarthy

TELEGRAM. The year is 1925 and the remote town of Nome Alaska has a diphtheria epidemic. Diphtheria is a deadly disease and extremely contagious. There is a medicine, a serum, that can help save people in the town BUT there is a catch. The only supply is all the way in Anchorage. Also a blizzard has swept through Alaska and they cannot use any planes. Time is running out. It is decided that dog sled teams will set up for a relay to race to Nome. Each team will carry the serum a part of the way and then hand it off to another driver to carry it farther. The men that guide a dog sled team are called “mushers”. Twenty brave mushers and their dog teams spread out along the route from Nenana, where Anchorage had sent the serum. They had to cover 674 miles, a trip that normally took about 30 days by dog team. It was 50 degrees below zero when the first musher left. One of the last mushers was named Gunnar Kaasen. He chose a dog named Balto to be his team leader. This choice surprised some because Balto was inexperienced as a pack leader and not as fast as some of the other dogs. But Balto bravely lead his team through a blinding blizzard and when they finally reached their checkpoint the other musher and his team were still asleep. Instead of wasting any time, because Gunnar was afraid it would take too long for the other team to get ready, he and his exhausted team pushed on. They made it to Nome and instantly the entire world knew Balto’s name. Balto! He was the incredible dog that lead the team that delivered the serum! He is a HERO!

But what happened to famous Balto after that? What became of him? Was it a life of fame, excitement? How did this small hero spend the remainder of his days?

Here are some extra facts, at one point Balto came to a complete stop and refused to lead the team any farther. They detoured to the side and later Gunnar realized that Balto had saved the team from plunging into open water. Another fact is that the serum had a 144 hour time limit that it could be exposed to such extreme conditions. If they couldn’t make it in 144 hours (6 days) the needed antitoxin would go dormant. Also the famous Iditarod dog sled race in Alaska commemorates this historic event.

This is the incredible true story of Balto, a sled dog, and the race to bring medicine to stop a deadly Diphtheria outbreak in a remote Alaskan town.

There is a wonderful article on the History Channel’s website: <http://www.thehistorychannelclub.com/articles/articletype/articleview/articleid/1500/the-history-of-the-iditarod>.

*~Booktalk by Angela Germany*

**Nenana**

