



*Kerry and his dog Sugar Bear,
a rare breed Caucasian Ovcharka.*

Kerry Vinson's Thoughts...

As television shows about animals, particularly about dogs, have become very popular during the last decade, I thought I would take the opportunity to share some of my experiences as well as some of the conclusions I've drawn about this. Over the last dozen years or so, I've had the opportunity to appear on several nationally broadcast programs about dogs and their behaviour, as well as on some local broadcasts just in Ontario. I can most assuredly say that I've learned some things about the media from these opportunities. Certainly one of the main things I've learned is that things aren't always the way they appear to be on television, unless of course you're doing a live broadcast. While I have done a few live broadcasts, the most noteworthy being a segment in the Canada AM studio in 2005 with one of my dogs, most of my TV experience has been in shows that were filmed in advance and edited for whatever the subject of the show was.

And there's the rub. Most people who watch dog shows on television do not realize how much film and editing is used to create a relatively short sequence that is the final product. For example, if you've ever seen a particular very popular show on solving dog behaviour problems (I won't mention any names) you may have seen a very aggressive dog become a compliant non-aggressive dog during a 20 minute segment of the show. While this makes for good viewing, to say it is unrealistic would be a gross understatement. In all probability filming was done over a period of hours, days, or even weeks to achieve the finished product. Of course, skillful editing may obscure this fact and make it appear that such transformations are relatively simplistic in nature.

The facts of dog behaviour (based on Learning Theory) are that serious behaviour problems take time to develop, and likewise they take time to rectify. Many dog behav-

our problems, e.g. aggression, are the result of genetic pre-dispositions, and/or early learning experiences combined with the lack of sufficient socialization, as well as inconsistent time and effort put into teaching a dog what is appropriate behaviour and what is not. Unfortunately, there are no magic words to accomplish changing this by making it a quick and easy proposition.

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Getting back to the television theme of this article, my own personal experience has shown me that for a 5 minute TV segment, several hours of filming has been required. The most recent program that I have appeared in was the CBC Doczone and was broadcast in November of 2010. For this particular one hour documentary, which featured the top animal behaviour experts in the United States and Japan, as well as a Veterinarian from Canada and one behaviour person from Ontario (me), the subject was whether it is better to use prescription medications or behaviour modification to affect problem dog behaviour. Although my part is about midway through the program and is only about 5 minutes long, the crew took about 3 hours of film and edited it down to that. Generally speaking, I felt this documentary was very professionally done, although I would have liked to have seen a little more of the film taken in North Bay of my part, as I thought a couple of relevant comments were edited out.



Pictured in a scene from the Pet Pharm documentary is Ian Dunbar, a well respected authority on canine behaviour throughout North America.

In the program several case studies were profiled, essentially looking at the behaviour of dogs before and after they were treated with either medications that can effect behaviour, or just behaviour modification techniques. Also examined is the question as to why there seems to be a growing number of dogs displaying serious behaviour problems. If you would like to watch this documentary (entitled Pet Pharm) it can be viewed at: <http://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/doczone/video.html?ID=1633780618>. An alternate method is to access the CBC Doczone website and then click on to "watch full episodes". Both dog owners and veterinarians I know who have seen it have told me that they found it quite interesting.

In summation, I would assert that viewers of dog behaviour shows on television should always keep in mind that what you're seeing on the screen may not always be all of the things that actually happened in the order that they took place. In the world of TV, sometimes entertainment value is more important than science based knowledge. And if you have a dog yourself with a behaviour problem, be aware that it takes an investment of time, energy, and work to change dog behaviour; but in the long run I think they're worth it! Dog's are not referred to as man's best friend for no reason. 🌟

Kerry Vinson

Kerry Vinson holds a BA Degree in the field of Psychology, and has studied Learning Theory as it applies to both people and animals. Since getting into the animal behaviour business on a full time basis in 1998, he has authored over 70 articles on dog behaviour issues for veterinary publications and pet magazines in Canada. He has been designated an Expert Witness in the area of canine aggression in Ontario, and has testified in several high profile court cases as well as a Provincial Inquest. He has appeared on Canada AM, CBC's Doczone, The Outdoor Life Network, The Discovery Channel, TV Ontario, etc., and presents lectures at Colleges throughout Southern Ontario. Kerry currently resides in the Northumberland Hills east of Toronto with his four dogs (three German Shepherds and a Caucasian Ovcharka) and can be contacted through Animal Behaviour Consultants, which provides formal assessments of dog behaviour, at (905)352-3353 or on the web: kvinson@consultant.com.