



*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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***“In the world of TV, sometimes
entertainment value is more
important than science based
knowledge.”***
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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.

