

True Case History

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For details of behaviour courses visit www.coape.org, for details of the Gentle Leader visit www.gentleleader.co.uk and for info on books, training classes, videos, products and Peter's behaviour referral practice log on to: www.pneville.com or write to him at: COAPE, PO Box 6, Fortrose, Ross-shire, IV10 8WB



A gentle giant needs help after a break-in left him

When clients contact me for help, the first thing I usually notice is their overwhelming concern for their dog's well-being. It is a sign of the times, where owners want what's best for their dogs, and this includes the use of modern, up-to-date behaviour therapy services and training techniques. Nobody wants to use the old 'stomp and jerk' methods anymore, not in the UK or down in South Africa where I am a partner in the Thinking Pets Practice, based in Johannesburg, and like to see the odd case when I am passing through!

But in this case, the thing that drew my eye was that Bullmastiffs should not be called Shep! Shep is the name of a famous Border Collie on *Blue Peter*, as everyone of 'my era' knows. One still hears the odd cry of, "Get down, Shep" from time to time, and sometimes from people who are far too young to have seen John Noakes and his famous pooch on TV!

And then, as I explained to my Thinking Pets partner, Karin Landsberg, I always want to see Bullmastiffs. I have such a soft spot for them, having had one myself years ago. Cass was a real lady and appeared on the cover of one of my books and also 'guested' with me on *Wogan* in 1989, when the soon-to-retire Sir Terry hosted one of the largest audience evening chat shows ever in the UK. Being in front of 20 million

Dear Dr Neville

We desperately need your help with our Bullmastiff, Shep. He is such a sweet dog, a little timid, but after a recent traumatic event, he has become even more fearful of people than he was before. We don't necessarily want or need him to be a guard dog, but we definitely don't want him to be scared and unhappy all the time!

Kind regards,
Vivyan and Eric

people on that show one night cured me of any nerves I had about being on TV or public speaking... it's called 'flooding'! Cass was right there with me, sat pressed up close to my leg, keeping a friendly but watchful eye on Terry, and, of course, totally stealing the show! I was stopped in the street with her in Weybridge, Surrey a couple of days later, by a nice lady who said, "Oh, is that the lovely dog from *Wogan*? Are you walking her for her owners?" It was always like that with Cass, huge in frame and character, and I've always loved Bullmastiffs ever since.

Hide and seek

Back to the case of Shep the Bullmastiff! I arranged to see Vivyan, Eric and Shep the following morning in sunny Jo'burg, and, true to Vivyan's word, when I arrived, Shep looked extremely hesitant about saying hello. He hid behind Eric and only approached when I knelt down on the floor to offer him one of my special treats, which he took very gingerly

before running off again. I followed Vivyan and Eric into the house where we sat down to discuss the dilemma of owning a fearful 'Bastiff'.

The couple had bought Shep from a breeder and have always had Bullmastiffs. When their older dog passed away, they decided to go with what they knew best and carefully chose the pup that they thought suited their lifestyle. Shep didn't attend puppy classes unfortunately, as their daughter became ill shortly after his arrival and she took a few months to recover and the majority of the family's time. Since all their previous dogs had been trained, the family felt they could probably teach Shep what he needed to know in terms of basic obedience anyway, and he seemed to be none the worse by the time their daughter was better and family life had returned to normal.

The pup wasn't any trouble and settled into the family's routine quickly. But then, disaster struck. The family

with physical - and mental - scars...

had a break-in at their house when the only family member at home was Shep - a still very impressionable eight-month-old dog. Since they were not at home and only arrived soon after receiving a phone call from the police, they can only guess at what happened during the time the dog was alone with the intruders, but it wasn't pleasant. Shep was injured and required medical attention when Eric eventually found him hiding away under the playhouse in the back garden. The poor dog had lacerations to his face and side, and it looked as if he had been beaten with a sharp object. Thankfully, the robbers were caught shortly after the incident, and were subsequently sent to jail on several counts, including cruelty to animals. After Shep returned from the vet, the family upgraded their security, and got a second dog so that he had some back-up and also so that he wasn't alone during the day.

These measures didn't help Shep to deal with his bad experience, of course, and Vivyan noticed almost immediately that he was avoiding any men who came to visit. He wouldn't bark at the fence, and when there was anyone ringing the gate bell, he would run away and hide under the playhouse, from where they couldn't coax him out at all. If the visitors were female, he'd eventually come out from hiding, but only after about 10 minutes, and, even then, he would not easily approach them.

At this point they decided to seek some help and that's



Case History File

Shep

DOG:	Shep
BREED:	Bullmastiff
AGE:	One year old
COLOUR:	Fawn
SEX AND STATUS:	Male intact
PROBLEM:	Fearful of people
OWNERS:	Vivyan and Eric Melbury
ADDRESS:	Johannesburg, South Africa

Bullmastiff (posed by a model)

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How to walk your dog in a FESTIVE way!!

Well, it's that time of year again, when everything is rebranded with a Christmas theme. Toilet paper is no longer 'white', it's 'Cool Snow'. Chocolate Mini Rolls are, all of a sudden, Yuletide Logs for people on the go. Well, why can't walking your dog have a complete image overhaul too...?

Your Xmas 'Walkies' outfit should start with a staple seasonal item: the Santa hat. If you don't have a pound shop in your town, then they can be purchased from a man with unruly nasal hair and no seller's license on most major high streets. He may also throw in five free lighters into the bargain! Oh, what a magical time of year!



Nothing says 'I've got a Festive Spice plug-in air freshener than musical hair extensions!

OH COME ALIVE FAITHFUL!

Tinsel isn't just for plastic trees and call centre staff to put in their hair, oh no, dog walkers have the right to chaff their skin too!

What better excuse than Christmas to wear your 'Asda Green' fleece! Yep, take it out of that dog basket and give it a quick dose of Febreze. Good as new!

Bells. Nothing brings joy into the heart of other dog walkers than the tinkling of bells as you twirl around the park...



As you flounce around your town, you may notice that some of the other dog walkers don't seem to be filled with the Christmas spirit: they don't have light-up novelty antlers, their clothes aren't fluorescent and, they run away at the sight of you doing a pirouette. Don't be deterred by this, they're just jealous. Attention seeking.

Eric's digging patch was a huge hit - Shep now spent quite a lot of his time happily looking for buried treasure, so, given all the good progress, Karin decided to take things to the next step. Vivyan and Eric would now apply the same technique used with female visitors for when male visitors arrived, again emphasising to the guests that they shouldn't approach Shep directly, but rather give him the opportunity to approach when he felt comfortable

when Vivyan contacted me. I spent some time during the consultation tossing treats at Shep and after about half an hour he decided that he could brave coming up to me for a quick but uncharacteristically unslabby lick and a nudge to see if there were any more biscuits. I obliged happily, and then outlined a programme that I hoped could be implemented with Shep to Vivyan and Eric.

Digging deeper

Before addressing the big problem of how to get Shep comfortable with visitors again, I asked them to implement a few changes around the house. Firstly, Shep needed some chew toys. He was not too keen on going for walks away from the property, and there weren't many places of great interest to go nearby away from roads, so we had to look at other ways to successfully enrich his thankfully large home environment and build his confidence in a way that did not require many 'off property' trips. I insisted that both dogs still went out on the lead for a 20- to 30-minute walk every day, however. At home Vivyan and Eric would give him loads of chew toys and nearly all of his food would be delivered via a Buster Cube or other foraging toys. Eric was already quite keen to install a digging patch and to teach Shep to dig there, as there were occasional holes in the lawn that were fast becoming unpopular with the avid gardener in him!

I gave Vivyan a few examples of confidence-building games to play with Shep when she had some spare time. These included hide-and-seek, tracking games and 'find the biscuit under the cup' clicker training games. I also advised a visit back to the vet, as he was limping and I

suspected that this was due to hip dysplasia. The last thing we wanted was for him to also be in pain every time he moved!

The work that would be done with guests would take a bit more time. Since Shep was better with women than with men, I asked Vivyan to invite some lady friends around, one at a time. They had to bring high-value treats with them, and, as they arrived, Vivyan would wait for them with Shep off-lead. They could then throw treats towards him without making eye contact or trying to touch him. If he approached them, they could hand-feed him treats, but I specifically asked that they did not try to touch him until he was comfortable and relaxed around them. Once he was fine with one person, we would extend it to two, and then more. I also stressed to Vivyan and Eric that they had to respect his choice of fleeing if he wasn't comfortable and that they needed to be patient. South Africans are very social, outdoor and helpful people by nature, and this wasn't to prove a problem at all. Fairly soon, Vivyan had friends bringing their friends and people were organising 'Visit Shep' mornings, armed with treats for the dog and cakes for the people!

I had left South Africa by the time the second visit was required, so Karin took over the case and went to see how things were progressing. When she arrived, she found that Shep was a lot less cautious with her than he had been with me a month earlier, and didn't run away when the car door opened. She came prepared and threw a handful of his favourite treats in his direction and he was obviously keen enough on the food to stick around. This was what we were both hoping for.



Ask why, say no!

If you have a behaviour problem with your dog that you would like help with, please only see a behaviourist recommended by your vet, and only one who is a member of a professional accountable association, such as the CAPBT (COAPE Association of Pet Behaviourists and Trainers - see www.capbt.org).

You can be sure to get proper professional help if you seek help about a pet behaviour problem or dog training from one of the 350+ members of CAPBT, now the largest group by far of specifically qualified behaviourists working on veterinary referral for pet behaviour and training problems in the UK. Many members also offer dog training and puppy socialisation classes and services too.

If you are unsure about what is being recommended for your dog when you seek help from a dog trainer/whisperer or behaviourist, ASK WHY and SAY NO if you don't like it. Don't be fooled by the fact that they may be members of some institute, council or guild. Ask to see their Code of Conduct. If they don't have one, 'SAY NO!' and walk away. If they do have one, see what techniques and equipment are NOT excluded and so might be employed with your dog. ASK WHY they might want to abuse your dog with any physical or psychological unpleasantness. Then, if you are not satisfied that your dog will be safe from harm, protect him! 'SAY NO!' and walk away.

With so much bad and potentially hazardous information blasted out regularly on the tv about dogs and training these days, it's all too easy for owners to be taken in by what is happening on the screen and believe that it is all quick and easy when it appears in highly edited programmes... 'just show him who's boss in your family, then he'll respect you + jerk on choke chain approach'....

It's time for us all to help raise training awareness...please see details of the new CAPBT/COAPE campaign at www.capbt.org or www.coape.org and sign up to the petition, and let's help make life better for dogs and owners alike in the world of dog training and to understand canine social behaviour better.



COAPE Association of Pet Behaviourists and Trainers
www.capbt.org e-mail: pethelp@capbt.org



Shep was less nervous and now we could start working on the male visitor problem. Vivyan reported that he had settled beautifully with her friends and would often lie at her feet while they had tea. He was still a bit cautious initially, but when he saw that it was a lady arriving, he would approach the car with his whole bum wagging, in that characteristic style of a happy BM!

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when male visitors arrived, again emphasising to the guests that they shouldn't approach Shep directly, but rather give him the opportunity to approach when he felt comfortable.

A new life

This, she warned, might take some more time to accomplish than our initial work, as the big problem was definitely with men, and not so much with lady visitors. Karin and I both stayed in touch with Vivyan and Eric over the next few months and Vivyan was always very keen to share their developing story. After four months of hard work from them, Vivyan and Eric were thrilled to report back

with the results of all their input. Shep was a lot more comfortable around guests of any gender, and he was back to his normal, happy self. They could even walk him and he would occasionally engage in a game with new visitors - a previously unheard-of exercise for him, and he was also now happy stopping to say hello to anyone who his owner accepted when out on his daily short walks away from home. Since he was indeed diagnosed with a touch of hip dysplasia, they didn't encourage too many very active or rushing fetch games, but he was just as happy to mooch about at a BM's relaxed pace and find biscuits hidden in

the house or, best of all, in the sand pit, which he excavated on a regular basis.

Of course, if, God forbid, the family ever suffered another violent break-in, and it is an unfortunate possibility that many people in Jo'burg are constantly forced to spend lots of money trying to deter and prevent, then for sure Shep would be expected to be fairly and uncharacteristically useless for his breed as a guard dog. But then, that wasn't why his owners had bought him in the first place, so they were happy to rely on other measures of security that were now strengthened to help protect their 'guard' dog as well! ■

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