

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 young Cocker is abused for resource guarding in

I saw Louise and Hilton just recently on a visit to the ThinkingPets Practice in Bryanston, of which I am a very proud partner now. I went with Karin Landsberg, who runs the practice day to day. I flew home shortly after the first consultation and it was Karin who handled the case. So this is basically her account of what she encountered and how she approached and successfully treated the problem. The comments throughout this True Case History, however, represent our totally concordant views!

Milla's owners were referred to the ThinkingPets Practice by one of the vets in Bryanston after she was seen there for a possible bowel obstruction. It turns out that she had swallowed a small piece of plastic toy belonging to the Thomsons' son, Mark. When the vet had asked why they hadn't tried to take the toy away from Milla when they saw her chewing it, they had admitted that they were afraid of going near their dog whenever she had anything in her mouth.

Upon further investigation, the vet discovered that she had been an enthusiastic resource guarder for the better part of her life, and that the family had already been referred by their puppy class trainer to a 'behaviour specialist'. His 'cures' had proved absolutely impossible and dangerous to

Dear Peter

We've sought advice from a so-called 'expert' in the past about our young Cocker's guarding issue, but fear that it has made the problem worse and jeopardised our relationship with her. Our vet assures us that Milla's problem can be addressed - without any harsh treatment - so we're hoping you can help us. We feel terribly guilty for implementing the harsh programme advocated by the last behaviourist, so we're really hoping you can help us!

Louise and Hilton

follow, and so they had decided to live with the problem and manage it as best they could. Their vet had then thankfully referred them to ThinkingPets, and Karin agreed to see them as soon as Milla had recovered from the operation to remove the plastic. Fortunately, I had been in town that week and was able to accompany Karin on her first visit.

When we arrived at Louise and Hilton's house, we were met by a very sweet, albeit hesitant Cocker Spaniel. Milla was obviously keen to say hello, but did appear a tad timid. After being offered a treat, she decided that we could be trusted and we were duly escorted into the house by Louise and her tail-wagging Cocker.

I asked the couple to tell me a little more about their dog's history. Milla was originally meant to be a pet for their nine-year-old son, Mark, and

was obtained from a breeder, after months of reading up about which dog was most suitable for them. They collected her at eight weeks and, knowing the importance of socialisation, they enrolled her into a school at 11 weeks. It was during puppy classes that they first noticed her habit of stealing other dogs' toys and then growling when they or their owners approached and tried to take them back. The instructor told them that she was just trying to show all the other pups that she was the 'dominant one in the class', and that they didn't have to worry about it, provided she didn't growl at them.

Unfortunately, this behaviour escalated quite quickly over the following weeks and eventually Milla was growling at people and dogs alike whenever she had something in her mouth. The trainer agreed that it was now becoming a problem, as she was

the name of behaviour therapy...

'obviously challenging them for status' in the 'pack' and that she had to be shown that she didn't actually lead the family. That was when the 'specialist' was called in.

Milla, at that point, had been very enthusiastic when greeting all visitors. When the specialist arrived, she ran to the gate as usual, and jumped up to say hello. Louise, following closely behind, was horrified when the man jerked his knee up into the little dog's chest and sent her flying backwards. When he saw Louise's expression, he explained that he had to show Milla that he was higher up in the hierarchy and that by jumping, she was trying to get higher than him in order to dominate him! By kneeling her away, he said, he was teaching Milla that she was lower in the pecking order and that she had to respect him.

The consultation went from bad to worse after that, with the man telling them to completely ignore Milla. She didn't really know what was going on, but after a few attempts to get some reassurance from Louise (who battled to ignore the poor little dog, but only because she was being watched and had been told that the dog was trying to manipulate her), gave up and went to lie down in her basket again. The explanation for that was that Milla was starting to learn that the family was in charge, and that she couldn't just demand and receive, like 'only the pack leaders' can.

Finally, the topic of the

actual problem of the resource guarding was raised. The man went to Milla and gave her a chew toy from his briefcase. She tentatively took it, and, after being allowed to chew it for a while, he leaned over her threateningly. Of course, she stiffened and started to growl. What happened next was so upsetting that Louise burst into tears remembering it. As Milla growled, the man quickly reached over, grabbed her by the scruff of her neck and flipped her over on to her back. He then proceeded to pin her down, glaring at her, and, in a loud deep voice, shouted "NO!" until the poor dog urinated and stopped struggling.

After keeping her there for a few minutes, he let her go and picked up the toy. He then explained that Louise and Hilton would have to do the same thing, as that would be what happens 'in nature' if a subordinate challenged a 'higher-ranking' wolf. Little Milla, unaware that she was a wolf at all, let alone a high-ranking one, wisely decided at this point to evacuate the building as well as her bladder and went to hide under the plants in the garden.

Louise and Hilton were then given a programme of treatment that explained all about how to go about changing Milla's 'status' in the 'pack'. Louise produced the programme, and, after reading it briefly, I saw that it was the long-outdated 'nothing in life is free' (NILF) programme, with a bit of gratuitous violence



Case History File

Milla

DOG:	Milla
BREED:	Cocker Spaniel
AGE:	Eight months
COLOUR:	Golden
SEX:	Spayed female
PROBLEM:	Resource guarding
OWNERS:	Louise and Hilton Thomson
ADDRESS:	Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa

thrown in via the equally long-outdated, but physically abusive, 'alpha roll'. The family was told that Milla would, from now on, not be able to initiate attention, that she had to work for every single thing of value in her life (including being

petted, getting fed, going for walks, and getting into her bed) and that they had to start all this by ignoring her totally for three days - a new and particularly unpleasant, twisted piece of psychologically abusive and unfounded nonsense. ▶

Cocker Spaniel (posed by a model)

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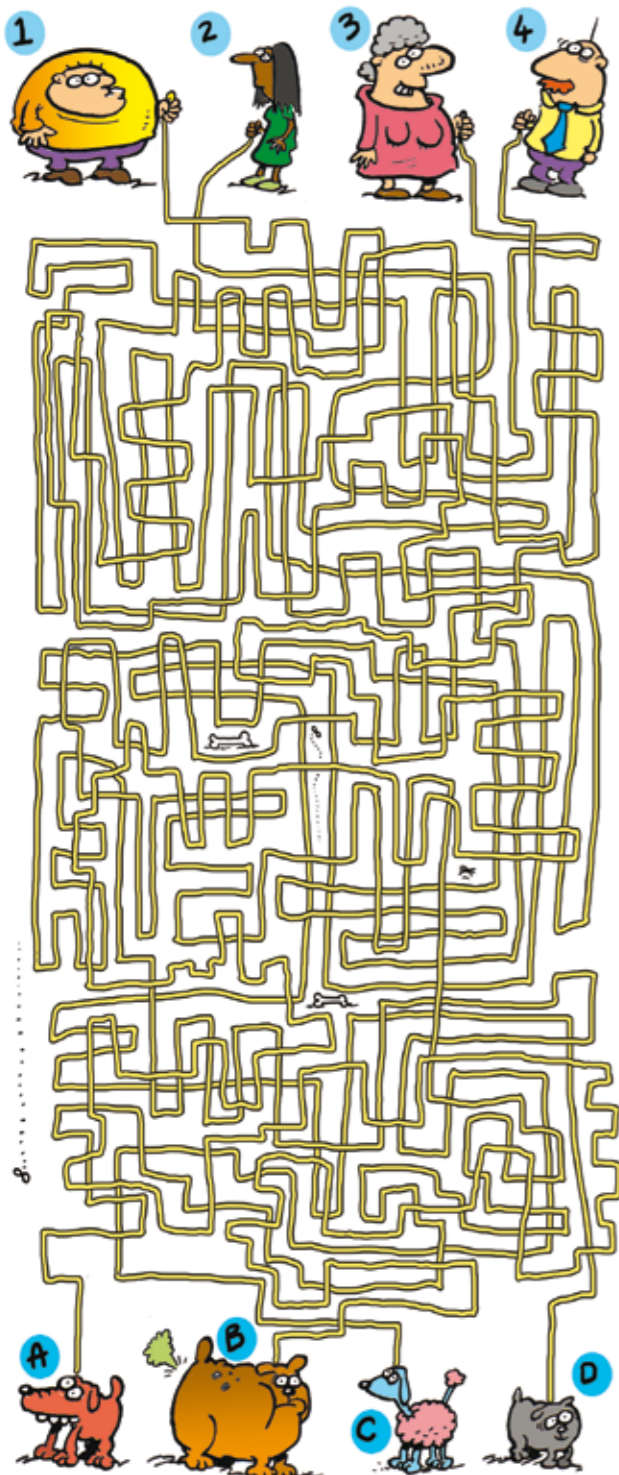


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FOLLOW my LEAD

Well, you certainly seem to like your competitions! The last one I did saw SIX TRILLION entries (ok, I'm rounding up from about 200), so, with this in mind, here's another one! If you'd like a chance to win an original dog cartoon, then simply work out who owns which pet below. Email your answers (eg 1B 2C etc), name and address to: follow_my_lead_comp@hotmail.com



CLOSING DATE: 30th January 2010

A few days after this dog-bully's visit, Milla stole another toy from Mark's room and when Louise went to retrieve it, Milla growled at her. Following the 'expert's' example, she bravely gritted her teeth and tried to grab Milla to roll her over, and Milla duly bit her hand badly enough to prompt a visit to the doctor's clinic. Louise phoned the 'dog bully' after returning from the doctor for a tetanus injection, who then told her that she had to try harder, as Milla was just pushing her luck!

◀ He spoke particularly to Louise, saying that 'as a woman', she was the weakest in the pack and would have to be far stricter with Milla; he said Louise would have to start to behave like a man - whatever that means! She also had to take responsibility for Mark's safety by making sure that the dog knew that the child was hers and therefore was entitled to more respect from Milla. With this cryptic last statement, he left the family to start applying his horrid, nasty and abusive 'NILF programme with added violence' on their poor, unsuspecting dog.

No prizes for guessing what happened next! A few days after this dog-bully's visit, Milla stole another toy from Mark's room and when Louise went to retrieve it, Milla growled at her. Following the 'expert's' example, she bravely gritted her teeth and tried to grab Milla to roll her over, and Milla duly bit her hand badly enough to prompt a visit to the doctor's clinic. Louise phoned the 'dog bully' after returning from the doctor for a tetanus injection, who then told her that she had to try harder, as Milla was just pushing her luck!

Three more incidents and two bitten owners later, and the Thomsons decided to just leave

the dog alone when she had something in her mouth, and that had worked just fine until she had swallowed the piece of plastic toy that ended with her having to go to the veterinary surgery.

After listening to this, Karin started to explain to the family why we don't employ those outdated NILF techniques. Not only is it impractical - who would want a dog you can't pet or cuddle or play with? - but it's also the equivalent of emotional abuse to the poor dog. Milla's problem could have been resolved much quicker had they been given the right information and tools to address it specifically when it first appeared in puppy classes.

Karin explained about Milla being a gundog and that having goodies in her mouth felt nice, which was one of the reasons why she was so focused on chew toys. She also explained that by punishing Milla or by taking the objects away from her, they had actually made her even more protective of her toys. Neither Karin nor I wanted to go into that in too much detail, as we could see that Louise and Hilton were already horrified at the torture they had put their usually lovely dog through. And anyway, they had already long ago rejected the advice they had been given by the 'dog bully', so we started to focus more on the positive aspects of resolving the problem.

Milla wasn't particularly concerned with guarding her food at meal times, and thankfully was very enthusiastic about treats. Karin needed to get them to see the positive side of interacting with their dog again as much as we needed Milla to start seeing her family as safe again. In order to accomplish this, Karin decided to put Milla on to a

For help with behaviour problems, dog training and puppy socialisation, in Johannesburg and all over South Africa, contact CAPBT member Karin Landsberg and colleagues at: ThinkingPets Behaviour Practice, 33 Devonshire Avenue, Bryanston, Sandton, South Africa. Telephone: +27 11 463 0296, mobile: +27 82 049 9202. Email info@thinkingpets.com or visit www.thinkingpets.com



Ask why, say no!

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. 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.

Please help raise training awareness - visit www.capbt.org or www.coape.org for more details about the campaign and to sign the petition.



COAPE Association of Pet Behaviourists and Trainers
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hand-feeding routine. She would receive her breakfast and dinner from various members of the family, who would sit and hand-feed her all her ration of kibbles at every meal. They could also use the food to play games with her, such as 'find the food under the cup' or mock tracking games, or simply for just being cuddled.

Karin was also going to help Milla learn that people approaching when she had a chew or a toy were not a threat. Initially, only Louise and Hilton would be doing this, until Milla was relaxed with them and then Mark could start getting involved, too.

In order to teach her this, the adults would walk past Milla when she was chewing something, and would toss a super-yummy treat to her before walking away. By repeating this, Milla would learn not to see their approach as a threat. They could gradually walk closer until they could drop the treat at her feet.

Karin spent the next few weeks working with the family.

She was really pleased to see the progress, and emailed me back in cold, wet England to update me. Milla had quickly started to anticipate the delivery of the treat, and when she stopped growling when they approached, Karin rewarded her heavily with high-value goodies. The next step was to get the dog to take food from her hand instead of dropping it on the floor, which Karin initially did for safety reasons. Milla quickly realised that Karin wasn't going to grab or hurt her, and, soon after this, her owners were also able to walk up to her, give her a treat, and then walk away.

When dealing with resource guarding, it's always wise to remember that you're not dealing with a dog that is trying to 'take over your family or household' at all. The dog is just doing what we all do when faced with a threat to something that we value. None of us would blink at the story of a human protecting his/her family or possessions, but when a dog growls over a bone, suddenly is it an evil dog before us, hell

bent on becoming the family despot? Milla was not being evil, or plotting a political and violent coup to take over the family. She was just an anxious little dog who had to learn to trust people around her chews and toys.

The final step was to get Milla to swap items. Karin described how she walked up to her and offered a treat, which she took happily. Then, by offering her a chew toy of equal value and letting her sniff it before putting it aside, she could ask her to 'give'. She was, of course, usually more interested in the new toy, so she dropped the old one and walked over to get the other one. A few more repetitions and Milla grasped the concept of the game. Since all was going well and there wasn't a stiff body posture or an 'evil eye' in sight, Karin showed Louise and Hilton how to do this simple trick. They were asked to practise it with Milla regularly and to give Karin some feedback in a fortnight.

When she arrived for her last visit with the family, Karin found that Milla was a different

dog. She was waiting at the gate, tail wagging, and bounced ahead of her enthusiastically. Louise mentioned that her faith in visitors had been restored and she no longer ran a mile whenever one arrived. Her 'give' command was coming along nicely, and so Karin implemented the final step by offering her a treat, asking her to give, and then swapping the toy for the treat. She had to repeat this a few times, but she quickly caught on, and, after another few trials, even Louise and Hilton could try it.

Louise promised to keep Karin updated and when she emailed her six weeks later, Karin was delighted to hear that they had not had a single incident since her last visit. Good going, Milla! Good going, Karin! Good riddance, dog bully, and good riddance, we hope one day, to all unthinking NILF programmes.

NILF? That should stand for 'never instigate lousy falsehoods' or maybe readers can think of a better replacement for 'nothing in life is free'? Do write and tell us! ■

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