

Lez Graham

Lez Graham lives in Marlborough with her husband, teenage son and two gundogs. She works as a Canine Behaviour Practitioner and Gundog Trainer as well as a Tutor with the Cambridge Institute of Dog Behaviour & Training. Her first book *The Pet Gundog* has just been published.

How long have you lived in the Marlborough area? Three and a half years.

You're from the North East originally, how did you come to live in Wiltshire?

Oh that's a long story, I'll try to keep it short! I left Tyneside in 1986 to live in Worthing, West Sussex. I lived in Australia when my husband was seconded by his work there for a year in 1990. 2004 saw us (husband, son, dog and cat) emigrate to New Zealand but it really wasn't what we were looking for as a family and so we returned to England in 2007. A great believer in moving forwards rather than going back we decided to look along the M4 corridor. The energy of Avebury appealed and St John's clinched it for us.. so here we are.

What led you to become a dog behaviourist, and what does it involve?

I used to work as a kinesiologist specialising with horses and dogs; the more I learned about the psychological side of it the more fascinated I became, for me it was a natural progression. Being a dog behaviourist or Canine Behaviour Practitioner involves visiting people's homes that are having problems with their dogs and helping them understand the psyche of the animal that they have sharing their life. Helping people to understand what the dog needs is the first step to improving the relationship. I then design a plan for them to follow and demonstrate the techniques required. Then the admin starts... it's off home to write a comprehensive report for the client and a summary for the referring vet. It's not just 'naughty' dogs that I go to visit, I also have the pleasure of helping start puppies off at home which includes things like toilet training, crate training, socialisation as well as the basics of 'sit', 'down', 'come', etc.,

You have a particular interest in gundogs, what is it about them that particularly appeals to you?

They are just really great dogs. Each type (spaniels, retrievers etc..) have their own peculiarities and foibles, however, as a group they are biddable and have been bred to want to work alongside us; they're energetic, full of fun, companionable and have savvy... that's on a good day. Because they



are so intelligent and have high energy drives it can all go very wrong very quickly; the challenge for me, and what I love, is to take a pet gundog that's been ignoring the owner, has no recall, destroys the house and so on and help their owners turn it into a dog they can take anywhere and that is well mannered at home and wants to be with their owners on a walk.

However like everyone else that is smitten with a breed, I quite simply fell in love with a friend's Labrador puppy.

You are education and Development officer for the Guild of Dog Trainers. What does this involve?

The Guild of Dog Trainers is an absolute passion of mine. As an organisation it's inclusive of all training disciplines and styles, which is exactly what we need in this climate of "a hundred ways to train a dog". My role as education and development officer is not only to help with the education of Guild members but also to educate the public on the current 'hot topics' in the dog world, for example the proposed legislation change to the dangerous dog act. I also attend The Registration Council for Dog Training and Behaviour Practitioners meetings at the Kennel Club where I represent the Guild and I'm heavily involved with defining the roles within the Dog Training Profession.

What are the most common issues that you are asked to deal with as a dog behaviourist?

It's got to be aggression, either dogs being aggressive towards other dogs or dogs being aggressive towards their owners. That can be from the early stages of the dog growling because

it doesn't want to get off the sofa to a full on blood drawing attack.

Have you ever come across a dog that you couldn't help?

Unfortunately yes; it doesn't happen very often. It's always heart-breaking for the owner and it's a very hard thing to have to come out and voice but if the dog isn't responding and the owner can't rehabilitate the dog then there's decisions to be made for the benefit and safety of all concerned.

If you could give one piece of advice to people thinking of buying a dog, what would it be?

To really look at their lifestyle; have they got the time to look after a dog in the way that it needs to be looked after (which involves taking a couple of weeks off work to settle them in), have they got the dedication to train their dog (and I mean every day for the rest of the dog's life, not just at the puppy training class) and can they afford a dog. If the answer is yes to all of the above then it's a case of researching a breed that best fits with their family, their energy levels and the size of their homes – looks should be the last item on the agenda... health should be first so looking for a breed that hasn't got lots of inherent problems. Don't be misled that the new designer breeds of springadors, cockapoos and so on are healthier... chances are no health tests have been done on the parents and bringing together two different breeds could really be doubling the potential health problems.

You have recently published your first book, "The Pet Gundog", how did that come about?

The book came from my gundog training classes which in turn came from the amount of gundogs that I went to see as a behaviourist that were climbing the walls with boredom and too much energy or were bullying and being aggressive towards the owners... classically high energy working dogs that were over privileged and under stimulated. I started the classes for the owners to give their dogs a focus and to give the owners control and enjoyment during their walks. I wrote the book because I thought it needed writing...

How long did it take you to write, did you enjoy the process? What did you like the most?

I absolutely loved writing it. To watch it go from scribbles to an outline to a book and then published was just magic and took a year of making notes and then about six months of 'going for it' every chance I got. For me the best part was my husband laughing out loud while he was proof reading it for me... he only normally does that for Terry Pratchett!

Who do you think should read the book?

Anyone who has a dog really. although it's about

the pet gundog I would say approximately three quarters of the advice would apply to all dogs.

How is it doing, what have you been doing to promote it?

It's going really well. I've been promoting it in the pet dog world and am starting to promote it in the shooting world. I really am quite honoured by the amount of people who are emailing me saying how much they're enjoying it and it's only been on sale since early July.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I'm sorry, I don't understand the question... what's spare time?

What do you like about living in Marlborough?

I think Marlborough is wonderfully relaxed, open, friendly and safe and has the best of both worlds... the high street to satisfy the 'townie' in me and the countryside and forest for the country lass

Anything you'd like to change?

Oh yes... the road works!

What's your favourite place to eat out? (locally)

Wow, a toughie... The Food Gallery and Appleby's for coffee and a cake or Cole's and The Palm

Where do you like to shop, and what do you like to shop for? (locally)

I love browsing for the unusual and tend to favour Tattinger Marsh, especially at Xmas because they do the most wonderful Xmas tree decorations

What are you reading at the moment?

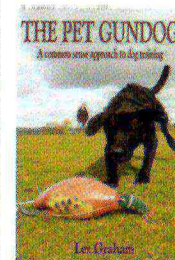
Sherlock Holmes, the complete works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Listening to?

Nothing other than radio 2 at the minute

Favourite films?

History of the World, part I and V for Vendetta



Lez can be contacted on 07927 420049 or visit www.trainedforlife.co.uk or www.thepetgundog.co.uk, where you will find details of her book.