

Farewell America

I have been coming to the USA every year since 1989 and have been lucky enough to work with dogs and trainers in 37 different States but this fall will see my last lecture/workshop tour after 22 years.

It has been a difficult decision to make because I have made so many friends in the US including meeting my wife Judy at a seminar in Alaska!

911 changed the world forever and since that happened it has become progressively more and more difficult to get a Visa to come and teach and now, my US 'O' Visa costs a great deal of time and expense to get hold of every year which means that this cost has to be passed on to seminar organisers plus the amazing inconvenience of having to get to central London to the Embassy and the myriad of rules and regulations that I have to abide by. I do know that there are other trainers from Europe who come to the USA to lecture but, to my knowledge, they do so illegally. I have always been honest and played by the rules, which means that I, and all of the people who organise my seminars, have to go to more expense.

I have seen many changes take place in the country during the last 22 years, the saddest one is the widespread use of food to stuff into the dogs mouth at each and every opportunity in the name of dog training. Man used to be our dogs best friend but now it has degenerated into Man being a dog's best food container! The lack of emotion and good old fashioned physical and verbal praise is depressing, it appears that fewer and fewer trainers actually know how to get a dog to play games with a toy and actually have fun with a dog.

Probably the biggest reason that I have made my decision is that there is a lack of facilities where we have access to public outside areas to train dogs. Of course I can work with dogs in an indoor facility but this is not where we should be training dogs. We should be doing it outside where the general public can see. This not only encourages other dog owners to come along to training sessions but it also lets the non dog owning public see that we are being responsible about educating our canine friends.

Despite having so many dog trainers and behaviourists the USA is still building more and bigger shelters to house unwanted dogs. We are doing the same in the UK! Something has to change as the present system is not working. Education surely is the answer but not by making dog training and behaviour the subject of university courses! We have been training dogs for thousands of years, it is simple but now it seems that you have to go to college or university to learn how to do it – ridiculous!

On the positive side, the USA does have some great and innovative training programmes. We (the UK) stole your Canine Good Citizen test, your Guide Dog programme, your Hearing Dog programme and many more. Because of inspirational figures from the dog training world we now have therapy dogs, bite prevention programmes in schools and medical alert dogs.

I believe that what is now needed is one such inspirational figure that will campaign for fully trained and assessed dogs to be allowed off lead in public parks. By using a system of rewarding the dog owners who train their dogs to a high standard instead of punishing all owners because of the irresponsible ones who do not bother to control their dogs we might see a world changing difference. Is anyone out there up to the challenge???

I am going to close by thanking each and every event organiser who believed in me enough to take a chance and book me to run a seminar. I have fond memories of each and every one of you and have made many friends as a result. Also a big thank you to everyone who has attended my seminars and workshops, it has been an honour and a pleasure to meet up with you all, plus your dogs of course.

I would also like to thank my agent and friend Jill Marie O'Brien for the excellent work that she has done on my behalf over the years in arranging seminars and working each year on the dreaded 'O' visa.

Farewell and God bless America.