

Inside the Minds of Dogs: *an Interview with Faith Wild*

by *Dr Victoria Sublette*

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had the pleasure of interviewing Faith Wild, an animated and charming animal behaviourist with a unique understanding of the animal psyche. She teaches others how to think like their companion animals and to communicate with them in a way that can alleviate problem behaviours and teach confidence and good manners.

Faith practices what she preaches every day: she currently has two greyhounds of her own, two foster greyhounds, one foster failed crossbreed and a little white fluffy, totaling six dogs in her care. She proudly states that she always has six to 10 dogs happily coexisting at her Sunshine Coast home.

She owns a franchise through Bark Busters, a worldwide organisation offering dog training and behaviour services. Faith works with all dogs as well as the occasional pig and ferret.

In our interview, she offered a wealth of information, some of which I am taking home to my three greyhounds!

What made you want to become an animal behaviourist?

I spent 10 years running an anti-vivisection group. I appeared on TV, debating the scientific world, councils and vets. I fought against animal experimentation and worked with anti-vivisection scientists and doctors.

I focused on pound seizure; in which dogs were sold for 1 cent to Sydney University and hospitals. There, they did heinous experiments on dogs. One “experiment” was to poison greyhounds where they suffered head tremors, ‘vocalising’ (screaming) falling back into their own faeces, emaciation, and eventually....death. It was a nightmare. I couldn’t believe what I saw. That is when my heart truly broke for greyhounds.

I was very outspoken and came to the attention of those who were pro-vivisection. I was continually harassed: I had dead dogs thrown over my fence, and my car tampered with, finding out when I was out driving that the wheel nuts were removed. I was chased in my car, was broken in to and had late night death threat phone calls. It was scary but that made me fight harder.

All of the stress made me sick, so I moved to the mountains. The bright light is that it led to the abolition of pound seizure in NSW so it was all worth it.

I chanced seeing Sylvia Wilson - the founder of Bark Busters on TV and her methods really resonated with me; they were different – not motivating dogs with food, or using the alpha role/domination methods. She did not fit the mold on dog trainers.

I spent a year trying to buy the business and started my career in the Blue Mountains of NSW.

I now have my own website and business under the Bark Buster name in the Sunshine Coast of Queensland: <https://dog-training-sunshine-coast.com.au/>

Do you consider yourself a dog whisperer?

I hate clichés; but a dog whisperer is the closest description of what I do. I take a holistic approach to dog training. Assessing the dog's temperament and the human's temperament, and teaching the human how to communicate with their companion animal... and it's all about communication: voice control, body language, tone of voice, and respect.

You need to learn to speak the dog's language; he doesn't understand yours. You need to be calm and consistent. Once you've resorted to physical or aggressive behaviour, you've lost the battle and training through force is never acceptable.

Do you find that Greyhounds have different behavioural issues to other dogs?

They actually have fewer behavioural issues than the other dogs I see. I see the worst of the worst: biting, aggression, barking, antisocial behaviour, etc. Most Greyhounds aren't bad at all; most of their issues are dog reactivity, socialisation, and destructive behaviour, such as chewing.

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Faith Wild enjoying a beautiful day with two of her greys: Spot and Lolly

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Unless they have neurological issues, all they need is time and space. There is no such thing as a naughty dog. People try to force dogs into situations where they are not comfortable. For example, if they are dog reactive, if a dog is fearful of being with other dogs, forcing them out to socialise makes it worse. Their issues need to be resolved at home first. Training needs to start at home.

What are the most common issues you see with ex-racing greys? And how do you resolve these issues?

Dog reactivity when out walking. Many of these greyhounds have been attacked by larger or even little dogs that become aggressive towards big dogs out of fear. There are also environmental issues that make some greyhounds react. They look aggressive, but they are actually fearful.

Medical issues can lead to behavioural problems as well. Pain from medical issues are very common in greyhounds.

Is there a type of person who should NOT adopt a greyhound?

Yes, someone who has the attitude that you must dominate the dog; military-style, wants the dog outside, and someone who does not teach their children to respect animals.

Other unsuitable adopters are people who are never home.

Can all greys be rehabilitated? In your opinion, is there such a thing as an “unhomeable greyhound”?

My last foster dog was a GAP failure due to dog aggression and I was asked to ‘rehabilitate’ her. She has never shown one sign of aggression so I am at a loss understanding how this assessment was made.....this dog now joins my community walks, lives a wonderful life, and has never shown one single sign of aggression.

The only dogs that might not be rehabilitated are the ones with extensive neurological damage or who are in a great deal of pain, and the cause of that pain can't be fixed.

Finally, at what point should a person bring in an animal behaviourist to help, rather than wait for the dog's behaviour to improve?

If you get a dog who is nervous, aggressive, unfocussed, stealing things, or chasing kids. In general terms, dogs do not grow out of behaviour – they grow into it!

I say, ‘stick with me and we’ll sort it out’. We start with good nutrition. We rule out any illnesses, injuries or pain. We might see an acupuncturist, naturopath or chiropractor to ensure that there is nothing physical causing the problem.

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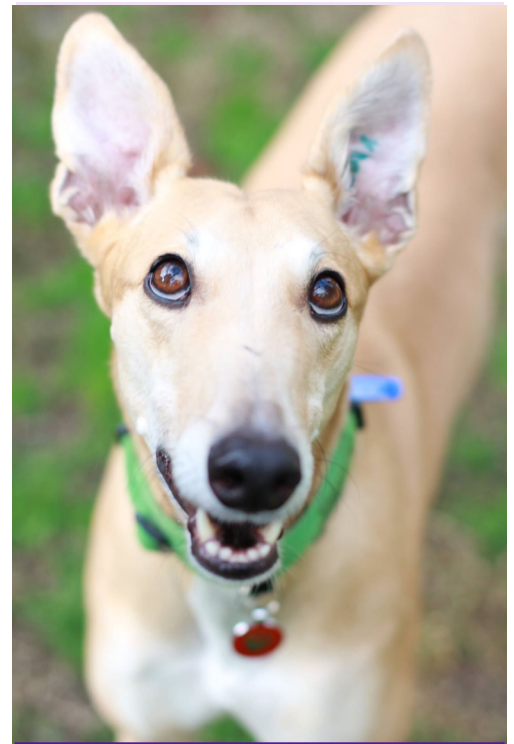
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You let them settle in and be dogs first and get them to start trusting and focussing on you, building up their confidence gradually; if they are terrified, you back off. You can't deal with a major behavioural issue until you've established the groundwork of trust and confidence.

Once you have built trust with your dog, and you can communicate in a way your dog understands, the rest is easy.

Faith is available for phone consultations Monday to Friday, and appointments can be made by emailing sunshinecoast@barkbusters.com.au

Sunshine Coast residents can be serviced by specialised in-home training as well as by phone.



Michelle Koros's darling Ruby



Faith Wild with Missy (couch), Spot (black) and Ralphi (fawn)