



The Original Dog Whisperer

By Andy Sternberg

Five years before *National Geographic's* "Dog Whisperer" became a worldwide hit, Paul Owens released a DVD and book with the same name but an entirely different approach. Andy Sternberg met with Owens to discuss the bastardization of the art of "dog whispering."

"The original meaning of the term "Dog Whisperer" was treating any kind of animal with kindness, respect -- in other words without physically forcing them to do anything," according to Paul Owens, a dog trainer who coined the phrase "Dog Whisperer" when he published a book in the 1990's.

The more famous dog whisperer, National Geographic television's Cesar Millan, displays a training philosophy that is much more aggressive and warlike than Owens's.

Millan's methodology assumes that dogs are more apt to follow the leadership and energy of an aggressive owner as opposed to a passive one, according to Owens

But Owens takes a more zen-like, Gandhian approach. When you train your dog, you're actually training yourself to be a better human being, he says.

"Basically this whole program is about teaching people how to raise and train their dogs using non-violent methods."

In describing this holistic point of view, Owens launched into song: "We call it the nine methods: food and play and socialize; quiet time and exercise; give your dog a job to do; lots of rest when days are through; train with love respect and care; and see your vet throughout the year."

Owens hesitates to describe what he calls Cesar Millan's bastardization of his dog whispering concept, after all he continues to reap the benefits.

"Everytime he's on the news or he's on a program like Oprah or something else, our book sales and DVD sales go up, so inadvertently he's introduced a lot of people to positive training," says Owens.

But this positive, pacifist training method, apparently isn't cut out for prime time television.