



**PAST LIFE:** FIVE-YEARS AS AN RCMP DRUG DOG HANDLER  
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# EX-COP GOES TO THE DOGS

Former RCMP drug dog handler Terry Downs has morphed into a community service maven on a mission to use pooches to help women, kids, military vets, people with disabilities and breast cancer research

by Laurie Carter

**F**our women, each connected by a loose leash to a calmly attentive canine, are assembled on a grassy field in Kelowna's City Park. They've taken time from packed schedules to show me first hand how Terry Downs changes lives.

Terry, standing among them with her year-old black Lab, Cole, is instantly recognizable as a person of authority. Nothing overt, there's just something that tells you this woman is in charge.

Not surprising, Terry is a former Mountie, a veteran drug dog handler who decided to put her experience to work in unique ways. One is to help women gain new self-confidence and enhance their lives through their relationships with their dogs and by networking with other women.

Everyone in this group has graduated from Terry's Floppy Ears dog training program. No doubt that's why all these pooches, some big enough

to munch their neighbours (canine or human) for a quick snack, are so relaxed with each other and so easily managed by their owners. Terry explains that she aims to train dogs to be respectful versus obedient. Dogs who recognize the women they're with as Alpha in the family, dogs that are confident and at ease with other dogs and people.

"You can take a respectful dog anywhere," says Terry. But her experience as a police officer made her realize that the dog's behaviour is only one part of the equation. Terry realized that no matter how good the dogs, many women still lack the confidence to take their pets out and enjoy life with them.

"I've talked with many police officer friends about how to help women get the confidence to go out with their dogs and feel safe, whatever they like to do—country or city."

Enter her Pink Dogs seminars.

Through Pink Dogs, Terry teaches women how to keep themselves and their dogs safe. "It's important to carry yourself with confidence," she says. "If you don't look weak, people won't take advantage."

Along with confident posture, the women learn several basic self-defence techniques, which the group in the park eagerly demonstrate. The training also includes important tips for safety in the backcountry where a knee to the groin isn't the best strategy when confronted by a bear.

Now lounging on the grass with the dogs lying about, completely easy with each other, one presenting its belly for a rub, the women give me details. Linda Burbidge, a former London, England, police officer, taught women about city street safety, but when she moved to the Okanagan

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## A DAY IN HER LIFE

**8:00 am**

TAKE ONE OR MORE WOMEN WITH DOGS (AND MAYBE A TODDLER) FOR A HIKE. TRY TO CHOOSE PLACES THEY HAVEN'T BEEN LIKE ROSE VALLEY, KNOX MOUNTAIN, TELEMAR...

**10:00 am**

TRAINING SESSION WITH COLE. NARCOTICS DETECTION DOGS NEED CONSTANT WORK TO KEEP UP THEIR SKILLS

**11:00 am**

CHECK FACEBOOK (NEARLY 4,000 FANS) AND EMAIL. HEAR FROM WOMEN WHO ARE SUFFERING ABUSE OR HAVE MORE SIMPLE QUESTIONS. REPLY TO PLEAS FOR ADVICE. REFER TO RESOURCES

**1:00 pm**

WORK ON PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT. SHIP ORDERS OF PINK DOG T-SHIRTS, WATER BOTTLES, TOTE BAGS, HATS AND E-BOOKS. PART OF PROCEEDS GO TO BREAST CANCER RESEARCH

**3:00 pm**

DO ANOTHER GROUP HIKE. GO FOR A SWIM OR GET IN A TRAINING SESSION FOR THE NEXT IRONMAN COMPETITION

**7:00 pm**

CONDUCT FLOPPY EARS GROUP DOG TRAINING SESSION OR PREP FOR WEEKEND PINK DOGS SEMINAR

**9:30 pm**

WORK ON FINAL EDIT OF HEALTHY LIFESTYLES GUIDEBOOK FOR WOMEN AND THEIR DOGS. CHECK FACEBOOK AND ANSWER MORE EMAILS

PHOTO BY LAURIE CARTER



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and teamed up with her new puppy, George, she was afraid to venture into the unknown of forest trails. Not any more.

Ingrid Lang, who had a dog killed on a city street, didn't want to take her nine- and 10-year-old pets out. She says, "My goal was to sit outside a cafe and have the dogs with me." Now she does.

"I love seeing changes like Ingrid," says Terry. "Through gaining control of the dogs, she's gained confidence in her own life."

Terry encourages networking. Pink Dog women call each other, or her, and meet for hikes. They all wear Pink Dog hats or T's or carry pink water bottles, a concrete way of getting involved. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of these products goes to breast cancer research. "It's my goal to sell a million water bottles," says Terry. "That will mean a million dollars for cancer research." The group also fields a team for the annual Run for the Cure.

And Pink Dogs has gone global. Through her Facebook page, Terry has connected with women around the world, hearing stories of abuse from far off Japan, Egypt and the UK. Much of her time is spent online, answering requests for advice.

Here in the Okanagan, she volunteers at the SPCA kids summer camps. Terry says she loves the smiles when kids teach a dog to sit, proving that they can take control of something. She also works with Pawsitive Links, helping with the program to train service dogs for children with developmental disabilities and military veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder.

Terry trains her own dogs as well. Cole, who was born with a deformity and destined for a quick needle, owes his life and health to her. He works in her K-9 detection service and moonlights as a therapy dog. "My life revolves around the dogs. Dogs can teach us so many things." OL

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