ESL 96: DOGS AND HUMANS

Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Rena Dam.

And I’m Liz Waid. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live.

There is a large square stone near a river in Northern Wales. Grass and trees surround it. This gray stone marks where someone is buried. One side of the burial stone is covered with writing. It tells this story:

“In the 13th century the son of the king of North Wales had his home here. His name was Prince Llewelyn. One day Prince Llewelyn went out hunting. He went without his faithful dog, Gelert. When Llewlyn came home, Gelert joyfully ran and jumped to meet him. But the dog was covered with blood. The Prince was frightened. Quickly, he ran to find his son. He found the baby’s bed empty. The blankets and floor were covered with blood. Llewelyn felt insane with anger. He thought his dog had killed his baby. He quickly killed Gelert with his sword. The dog’s dying cry was followed by a baby’s voice. The Prince searched and discovered his son. The boy was not hurt. But next to the baby lay the dog-like body of a large wolf. Gelert the dog had killed this wild and fierce animal. The Prince was full of regret. People say he never smiled again. The prince buried Gelert here.”

The dog Gelert and the wolf may have looked very similar. But they did not treat the people around them in the same way. Today’s Spotlight is on dogs and their relationship with humans.

So what made Gelert and the wolf so different? Many years ago, dogs and wolves were the same. But about 14,000 years ago, some wolves began to change. They were no longer as wild. No one knows exactly how this happened. Angus Phillips of National Geographic Magazine thinks it may have happened like this:

“Some wolves moved close to human cooking fires after smelling something good to eat. Then they worked to get closer to groups of humans. They did this by being helpful or proving they would not hurt people. The humans might have used the wolves’ better hunting skills to help them hunt animals. The wolves could warn humans of danger at night.”

Humans and wolves both lived in groups. The groups usually had a leader. The smaller, weaker wolves knew how to obey the wolf leader. So it was easy for them to learn to obey a human leader. Both humans and these smaller wolves got something good from this relationship. Angus Phillips explains the result:

“Over thousands of years, humans kept the large, rough wolves out of the human camps. This led to the development of different kinds of dogs that were more friendly to people. They began to look different than wolves. They were generally smaller than wolves, with a shorter nose.”

Today, there are about 400 different kinds of dogs. People can see many of these kinds of dogs at dog shows. At these shows, people bring their dogs to compete for a prize. The dogs run, walk and do tricks for judges. Some of the dogs are as tall as the waist of a person. Others are small enough to be carried in one hand. Some dogs have long hair that reaches to the ground. Others have no hair at all.

Dogs can be very different in size, shape and colour. Peter Tyson works for the science magazine NOVA. He explains why there are so many kinds of dogs:

“There are so many kinds of dogs mainly because of human and not natural selection. Through the late 19th century, humans would mate dogs for special skills they wanted.”

Humans mated or bred dogs such as the greyhound for hunting. This dog is thin and very fast. It can run for a long time without getting tired.

Humans have also bred dogs to work with the police. In Thailand, police use the dog’s good sense of smell to look for land mines. Other dogs work on farms. They help farmers who have many sheep or cows. These herding dogs help move and protect the animals.

Dogs are trained to work with humans in many ways. But humans also breed dogs for something other than work. Peter Tyson of NOVA explains:

“It was not until the late 1800s that breeding for looks more than for behaviour began. Breeders wanting to design the perfect breed are the reason why today we have so many different looking dogs.”

Humans have spent a lot of time and effort breeding different kinds of dogs. But most dogs are not show dogs. Most dogs do not even work. Today, the most common use of a dog is for friendship. Some people even consider their dog to be a part of their family. Scientists are finding that dogs can even understand human emotions.

Around the world today there are more than 400 million dogs. But their relationship with people is not always close. Some of these dogs do not have a home. They are strays. They live on the streets and often eat garbage. Diana Bharucha is from Bangalore, India. She started a program called ‘Stray Dogs Free Bangalore.’ She says that dogs should have a home with a human master. If not, she thinks that the dogs should be killed in a way that does not cause them pain. Diana told the newsmagazine ‘Citizens Matters’:

“If the dog population continues to increase, they will go back to living in a group and turn wild. They will start hunting like wild animals. This will be a danger for human life.”

Rajesh Shukla also lives in Bangalore. He does not want to kill the stray dogs. He offers a different solution:

“If the city begins a waste management system that works well, the food for stray dogs will be limited. This will limit the number of stray dogs in the area.”

Humans are still learning how to live together with dogs. This relationship can be wonderful but difficult - like in the story of Prince Llewelyn and his dog Gelert. But people will continue to share their lives with man’s best friend: the dog.

The writer and producer of this program was Rena Dam. The voices you heard were from the United States and the United Kingdom. All quotes were adapted for this program and voiced by Spotlight. You can listen to this program again, and read it, on the internet at www.radioenglish.net. This program is called, ‘Dogs and Humans’.

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