

Movie dog gets the word: Behave

BY CATHERINE BAUM STAFF WRITER

[Originally published on: Thursday, October 25, 2007]

For dog trainer Linda Ducharme of Easthampton, a defining time in her professional career came when she worked with a dog associated with the film "Cider House Rules," which was filmed in Northampton in 1999.

The dog's owner, Liz Shelton, was the associate costume designer for the film. Shelton wanted Anouschka, a 10-month-old female Pomeranian, to be trained for a magazine photo shoot in New York City.

Below is a Q&A with Ducharme about that experience:

How did you get the job?

"I received a call from Shelton's secretary, who found me in the phone book. I interviewed her at Eastworks, where she was working. She was very busy because she was doing a lot of costume fitting. They knew they were folding up in December."

What was your initial reaction?

"I went there when she was filming. I didn't know what was going on or who they were at the time. A little boy picked up a hat and she said, 'Don't touch that, dear, that's Michael Caine's'. I mentioned Michael Caine, and she said, 'Yes, we're doing a movie with him in it.' I never asked to get together with him, and my partner Mike was upset about that."

What was training Anouschka like?

"It was a very small dog, and very unruly. The owner said the dog would bolt out the door whenever she could. She was also becoming territorial. She was getting a bit aggressive about her toys and things, and she already had nipped someone's ankle. Speaking as a trainer, when you work with a dog they just have to stop all that. It was a good dog. It just never had listened. I began the training in my own home without the owner. After about three sessions, the owner met with me at Look Park and around town. The dog had to learn how to stay and sit perfectly still and how to walk properly. (Shelton) didn't have time to work with the dog at all, so it didn't know too much. The dog came along very well."

How do you reflect on the experience?

"She gave me a small photo of Michael Caine holding her dog when he was here, and a poem. It's on my kitchen table. She wrote, 'Thanks for being such a good influence on little Anouschka pup, xoxo Liz, Happy Holidays.' It is important to me."

The poem is called 'No Time for a Poem.' The last four lines say 'some time for reflection / would surely be nice / but a photo of doggie / will have to suffice.'"

"I felt very confident that I was able to train the dog. I never expected to do anything for anybody who was even semi-famous, so it was a good experience for me. It's a sense of pride."