**Ministerial Meandering**

*Cruelty and ignorance*

We were walking the dogs in the Rec centre this morning when one of our group said, “Look, there’s that guy wrenching his dog around - I’ve a mind to report him to the SPCA!”

It was true, an older man with his dog (probably a Labrador) on a head harness (very bad idea) was trying to get his dog to do this and that, and when he wasn’t getting what he wanted, he would wrench the poor dog off its feet and then punch it. If the dog actually ***did*** what he thought he had been asked to do, then he got a cursory pat on the head at best.

As a dog person, it was as much as I could do not to go over and punch the owner, but a rare flash of blinding common sense told me this would not be a harmonious gesture, nor likely to result in the dog getting any better treatment. So I fished out one of my professional ‘dog trainer/therapist’ cards from the car, and wisely asked Sheila to go and give it to the man, so that I wasn’t tempted to klop him when I got close.

As always, my diplomatic wife came back saying that the man was extremely grateful as he was having awful trouble with his dog - even though he ‘had been training dogs for 10 years’ (!) and would give me a call later.

On first impression this man was clearly abusing his dog; but it was not because he wanted to be vicious and hurt his dog - he just didn’t have a clue how to deal with his dog - despite his ’10 years of training dogs’.

When we lived in South Africa I saw so much of the same thing with babies and small children, who made up 50% of my burns, with the other 50% made up of male and female adults, whose burns were the result of other motives or misunderstandings.

The children and babies were usually burned because of ignorance. Their mothers were often dead - having died of AIDS - and so they were frequently brought up by their ‘gogos’ (grandmothers) who devolved the supervision on a day-to-day basis to the older siblings.

Thus, it was common for a 4 or 5 year old to be supervising a toddler or baby.

Given that cooking was still done on open fires most of the time, it was a frequent occurrence for toddlers to pull cooking pots off the stove and be scalded with whatever was in the pot. Oftentimes this would be mealie-pap, which is a thick porridge made of maize, and sticks like napalm - and burns like it too.

Then, of course, when little nippers are naughty (really?) the older sibling would want to punish them, and the usual way was to try and immerse the said infant into a tub of boiling water. When this failed, and the screaming infant withdrew forcefully from such an attempt, all that would be burned would be the buttocks and heels. The alternative was to grab the forearm and plunge the hand into a kettle of boiling water. The results were not pretty.

My point is really very easy and obvious; from a distance and with a knee-jerk reaction, we can draw the wrong conclusions; what looks like deliberate cruelty (and ***is***) is the result of ignorance of how to deal with situations that are beyond our control. I suspect that many cot deaths are the result of similar desperation and frustration.

So let’s be careful how we jump to conclusions then; all may not be what it seems, and the perpetrator of the cruelty may well be making a cry for help.

If they are not, however, then please feel free to black their eye - I’ll be right behind you to black the other one.

P+.