

by Tobi  
Schwartz-Cassell



HAVE YOU EVER ENVISIONED YOURSELF DOING THE WEATHER ON THE 6 O'CLOCK NEWS? YOU MIGHT THINK YOU'D GET TO GO TO MAKEUP AND HAIRSTYLING AND PUT ON A DESIGNER OUTFIT BEFORE GETTING TO TALK IN FRONT OF A BLANK GREEN WALL ON WHICH YOUR VIEWERS SEE A WEATHER MAP. WELL TAKE THAT VISION RIGHT OUT OF YOUR HEAD, SAYS CAROL ERICKSON, BECAUSE THE ONLY THING THAT'S REAL IN THAT FANTASY IS THE BLANK GREEN WALL.

**CAROL ERICKSON** has been standing in front of that green wall at Philadelphia's KYW-TV since 1978, with a brief stint off camera to give birth to and raise her daughter Lexie, 26 and an attorney who's married to one.

Carol first came to KYW-TV, now known as CBS 3, in 1978 as a weathercaster. She also served as a weekend news anchor and a New Jersey beat reporter before leaving the station at the end of 1984. She rejoined CBS 3 to become a part of its news team in 1991 and now forecasts weather for CBS 3, The CW Philly, and a number of radio stations including

KYW-AM and WOGL-FM. She also serves as a reporter for the TV stations.

Carol began her career in TV broadcasting in Tucson as a weathercaster, later moving to a TV station in Dallas where she served as a news reporter, weathercaster and talk show host.

She holds a BS from the University of Arizona, and has been awarded a certificate of approval from the National Weather Association (NWA), a Seal of Approval from the American Meteorological Society (AMS), and the more recent CBM (Certified Broadcast Meteorologist) Seal from the AMS, which is considered the gold standard of accreditation in her field.

She's been nominated for numerous Emmy Awards, and has won three. The Seattle native now resides on a farm in Burlington County with a variety of pets.

METEOROLOGISTS CAROL ERICKSON AND KATHY ORR AT THE LAUNCH OF THE NEW CBS 3 MOBILE WEATHER LAB AT THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE IN NOVEMBER 2010.

I had the opportunity to chat with her on Christmas Eve day.

**TSC:** Did you always know you wanted to be in TV news?

**CE:** No. I don't think I'd ever watched a newscast until I graduated from college and literally stumbled into a television station to sell TV time, but they had no openings in sales. Let me rephrase that. I'd never sold anything and while they might have had openings in sales, they didn't have one for me!

But because a friend of my father's took me to the station, and the general manager was very nice, I was told to look around. I was in the studio and the weatherperson—the 'weather girl' as we all love to be called—saw me through the window. They weren't planning on replacing her, but she saw me in there in front of the weather board and quit later that day because she *thought* they were planning on replacing her. They called me that afternoon and said, 'Remember you were in the studio...? Do you want to start on Monday?' That was on a Friday and I started that Monday. It was not a field I'd ever thought about. It was just out of the blue!

**TSC:** Since then, you've become a meteorologist, and have added news reporting to your repertoire.

**CE:** I do reporting three days a week, though generally I'm not covering the top news story of the day unless it's somehow weather or science-related. I've done every bit of hard news reporting that anybody could do, and still do it of course, but primarily I'm filling in the other niche—the interesting story that is not the topical news story of the day.

**TSC:** And you have your own technique for doing the weather.

**CE:** To me, when I'm in the studio and looking at the camera, I'm looking at one person. I don't feel that I'm lecturing to 5,000 people. I'm talking to a friend. I think I'm telling a better story that way, because weather *is* a story. Anyone can find out the atmospheric processes on their own, but time is short, and what most people really want to know is: 'Do I need an umbrella? Do I need a coat?' And the weather usually is a story. It's increasing heat, increasing cold and then all of a sudden it's a couple of unsettled days. So I try to make a story out of it. I think it's more interesting for people to listen to. At least I hope it is.

**TSC:** And you enjoy mentoring people who are interested in the type of work you do.

**CE:** One of the things I really like to do in this job is mentor. So if people write to me and say they're interested in TV news, I'm going to help them do whatever they can do to get where they want to go.



**TSC:** In addition to all your other assignments at the station, you have one that is very close to your heart.

**CE:** I do a segment on Eyewitness News every Sunday morning called *Ask The Vet*, which most often is done with Dr. Jerry Geffen, and now we're bringing in holistic vets, too. We do topics of interest to people who love animals.

**TSC:** And you *really* love animals.

**CE:** My mission is to create responsible people. Animals aren't usually knocking on our doors to come in. People are bringing them into their homes, and in too many cases

they're neglecting them, they're bringing them in for the wrong reasons, or they're not understanding the animal's needs and rights. So if we're going to bring an animal into our lives, there are many things we should be very cognizant of. We need to give them every opportunity to live fulfilling and pain-free, emotionally-rich lives.

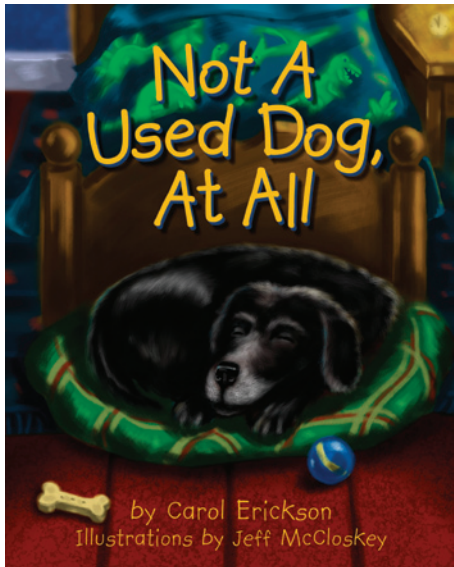
**TSC:** You hold a certification in K9 behavior counseling.

**CE:** Yes. I'm very interested in how dogs think. They have very rich emotional lives and that's the kind of thing I really wish people would understand, so they can pro-

vide for these lives instead of sticking them out in their backyards. Dogs are social creatures. They've been with us for many thousands of years, which just proves that we bred these animals for specific purposes. They hung around us in camp fire days. So today we owe it to them to do as much as we can to make their lives meaningful.

I went for my certification because I deal with so many people who write me about their animals' behavior problems. And they're not that hard to figure out when you get the overview and start to understand how they think. It's not that much different from how people think.

Positive reinforcement versus punishment works wonders. People don't seem to get it. They think a couple of sharp tugs on the leash, slapping them or kicking them, is going to get the message across and it doesn't any more than it does with a kid. There's just way too much of it. From the variety of emails I get I hear from people in every city, town and country and there's a lot of stuff going on you'd love to be able to close your eyes to and so would I, but you can't because it's going on, and sadly the laws (that relate to the humane treatment of animals) are so antiquated.



CAPTION??

**TSC:** One of the ways you've addressed humane education is to write a children's book, "Not A Used Dog, At All." Your book encourages the adoption of shelter dogs and it's won several awards including the Dog Writers Association of America award for Best Children's Book. All its profits benefit local animal shelters and rescue groups, and it's also on the recommended summer reading list for the Philadelphia Archdiocese. In the book, you also put forth the case against puppy mills.

**CE:** It's so much easier to go into a pet store (which is where the puppies bred in puppy mills are sold) and see a cute little fluffy puppy than it is to walk into the shelter and see the sad eyes of the animals that



CAROL COVERING A STORY ABOUT A RESCUE AT THE RESCUER'S HOUSE

may have come from one of the pet stores and then were rejected for whatever reason. Maybe they weren't socialized enough, maybe they had a million health problems because of inbreeding at the puppy mill farms, where really the only thing that has improved is how wide the wire floor on the cage can be that they have to stand in for their entire lives. At some point you have to shut off the pipeline and the only way to do that is to stop creating a market for them.

**TSC:** And now you live on a farm with how many pets?

**CE:** I've got horses, dogs, cats, geese and ducks, but I try not to get into the numbers.

**TSC:** I know that another cause that is

near and dear to your heart is breast cancer awareness and research, because this was a personal battle for you. Your series of reports called "Carol's Story," won an Emmy, and you created the series to help other women in their struggle.

**CE:** Yes. I'm involved but not super involved in the cause. I'm tremendously, involved to my core with the animal thing. And there are so many better spokespeople out there for breast cancer than I. They are more eloquent and have a better story to tell that I've left that for them. The things that the station is involved in, a lot of which is for Koman, and I think we've raised a lot of awareness. I am proud to be a part of a team on that. But it is a team! It's a team of the entire station.

**TSC:** In terms of your age you told me, "I'm still not taking social security, but I could soon." So what are your thoughts on retirement?

**CE:** I look at my friends who are retired and I think 'I'm not sure I envy any of them.' Maybe years ago I would have. But the more people say, 'Oh, you're still working?' the less likely I am to want to stop working. I don't want to *not* be able to juggle all the things I'm doing and I think the easiest and best way, and the quickest way to keep juggling is to just keep juggling. And so I don't have any plans to leave and I hope the station doesn't have any plans for me to leave. I'm just going to keep doing as long as I can keep doing. **g**



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