

# the CANINE CORNER

by Kathleen Crisley, CSMT, CTMT, SCMT

[www.balanceddog.co.nz](http://www.balanceddog.co.nz) / [www.doggymom.com](http://www.doggymom.com)



If you think the last year has been strange for you, give a thought to freelance Scottish sports commentator Andrew Cotter ([www.andrewcotter.co.uk/](http://www.andrewcotter.co.uk/)).

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic locked down the world, sporting events were cancelled and Andrew's work disappeared overnight. Seeing the oddness of his predicament, Andrew decided to commentate on his Labradors, Olive and Mabel, to have 'a bit of a laugh.' He posted the video on his Twitter page and it was viewed 10 million times. The rest, as they say, is history.

Andrew, who had just moved to a new home in Cheshire and still living under tight UK travel restrictions, took time out to speak with me via Zoom about his life over the past year, his dogs, and his new book: *Olive, Mabel and Me: Life and Adventures with Two Very Good Dogs*.

"Sorry, there's boxes everywhere; the dogs think we are at a holiday home. That's what's great about dogs; they deal with whatever is in front of them. As long as they have food and a bed and us for company, they're happy.

"I filmed the first video to say, hey, here's a sports commentator with nothing to comment on but his dogs. It was just extraordinary what happened next. The world suddenly came into my sphere of existence. The second video was viewed 20 million times. It was the perfect storm of social media, a worldwide captive audience, and the moment in time. I was inundated with requests and thousands of lovely messages. I felt bad that I couldn't respond to everyone, but it was physically impossible.

Andrew says that any empathetic person would take on some of the stresses shared by his new fans. "And that's when I would go to my dogs to stroke and tickle them and ask what's going on here? They'd reply, 'I don't know, would you give me some food?'"

Publishers tend to watch for popularity trends and it wasn't long before a local Scottish publishing house approached Andrew about writing a book. Andrew accepted, planning a book about 'Olive, Mabel, the Mountains and Me' because Andrew's favourite place is the Scottish mountains where he

frequently walks with the dogs in solitude. (Because of COVID-19 restrictions, Andrew has been unable to go to his beloved mountains, another source of stress.)

"When they approached me, I don't think they had any idea that I would carry on the videos. When I did, and after the third video, more literary agents got in touch. No-one was sure if I could even write at the time. The book gradually became more about the dogs and less about the mountains."

Publishing rights are shared by three publishers serving the UK, Australia and New Zealand, and North American markets. As of late January, 100,000 copies had been sold.

"The popularity in America is strange since no-one there recognises my voice. In fact, I have had people write to me suggesting that I should try becoming a sportscaster, which is quite funny.

"The book was released in North America in December, but has been available since October in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. I'm still editing the audio version." When I said that my friend had mentioned what a lovely voice he has, Andrew replied, "Olive's voice is nicer than mine; Mabel's is a bit whiny.

"It was very important to me that the book could be enjoyed by someone who hadn't watched the videos. It's about my love for my dogs. I have been touched by the messages and reviews I've received so far. People love their dogs, too."

Andrew has been approached by numerous companies wanting Olive and Mabel to endorse their pet food and other products; Andrew himself was asked to narrate other comedy and parody sketches.

"I don't want to become known as a comedy commentator; sports broadcasting is a serious business. I didn't want to sell out Olive and Mabel, either. They are and always will be my escape into an innocent world."

The only job Andrew accepted was the narration of a parade of Philip Island Penguins in Victoria.

I asked Andrew how he wants to be remembered for his place in pandemic history.

"Looking back, I hope people will say that I took an opportunity and did something nice, making people laugh in a time of crisis. And I didn't sell out.

Thanks to independent Christchurch bookseller Scorpio Books ([www.scorpiobooks.co.nz/](http://www.scorpiobooks.co.nz/)), The Balanced Dog has one copy of *Olive, Mabel and Me* to give away. To enter this competition, simply email [info@balanceddog.co.nz](mailto:info@balanceddog.co.nz) with the subject 'Olive & Mabel'. Tell us your name and postal address and about the love you have for your dogs.

The winner will be drawn over Easter Weekend (2-4 April 2021). 🐾

Scorpio Books