

Jacqueline Pinol:

The Canine Condition, come, sit, stay. Welcome to The Canine Condition Podcast. My name is Jacqueline Pinol. I am an actor, documentary filmmaker, and animal rescue advocate. The Canine Condition Podcast is a platform to bring awareness to dog adoption and to provide all dog lovers and pet owners with information and resources on how to raise a healthy and well-balanced dog. If you are thinking about getting your first dog or just want to know where and how you can help a dog in need, this is also a place for you.

What are you really good at? All of us have a skill or a talent that we are good at. Whether it is a part of your daily life, or you use it as an escape from your everyday norm, you are very good at something. If you are in a place in your life where you don't know or feel you're really good at something, the good news is there's always room and time for self-discovery. If we stay open to possibilities and have a willingness to learn, opportunities reveal themselves to us every day.

My guest on the podcast today found one of his skills after life-changing moments led him on a journey to connect with man's best friend. I am speaking of Matt Beisner, founder of THE ZEN DOG. Matt's work with dogs and other humans deeply reflects his personal commitment to the possibilities of transformation that every dog and each of us have, regardless of what life has given us. He is a believer that there are no bad dogs, and in learning to help them, we can also help ourselves.

Beisner and his team also recently completed filming season two of the internationally popular show, Dog: Impossible, on National Geographic Wild and Disney+. Letting the dogs guide him, Matt has helped change some of their most dangerous, fearful, and confounding behaviors without relying on the use of fear, force, commands, or control. He truly strives to find the zen in your dog and work with you to maintain it. Hi, Matt, welcome to The Canine Condition Podcast.

Matt Beisner:

Thanks, Jackie, it's really good to be here.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes, I am so happy that you're able to be on this episode with me. For our listeners, I will tell you that Matt and I have not met in person yet, but we were introduced by a mutual friend, the wonderful Shannon Hollander. She knows I am a huge dog lover and advocate for dog adoption. That is how my Canine Condition journey started with sponsoring behavior or basic obedience training for shelter dogs so they would be more adoptable and get noticed. But I especially advocate for homes and families who will keep their dogs and have healthy, successful, joyous relationships for the life of the dog. I think that's where she probably said, "You need to know Matt." And so here we are. Matt, how and why did your journey with THE ZEN DOG begin?

Matt Beisner:

I happen to be clean and sober and I found myself in the early, early days of my detoxing living off of my girlfriend at the time and living at her place. She had a little terrier that was aggressive. She would go to work and I would be homebound with this little dog that would attack me pretty much at every move. It was a nightmare situation. I don't recommend that for anybody that's going through a detox. But what did happen is that he started to get me out of myself because he had to go outside. He had to go on walks, he had to go to the bathroom. And so he and I had to figure something out. I now understand that to be the cornerstone of what I do in my work and what THE ZEN DOG is about, which is if we make it about the dog, we're going to change for the better and also inherently that there are no bad dogs, that this dog was showing behavior that was totally appropriate based on his experience. I just didn't know what to make about it and how to read it, but that's actually how I got started.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay. Yes, I've heard you say that statement. It's a very famous statement of yours, which is there are no bad dogs. It's a big statement, especially for people who are not familiar with canines or are not dog lovers. How do we explain it to them? How do we explain to the general public what that really means?

Matt Beisner:

Well, I'll give you one example. Roughly 90% of aggression in dogs is fear-based. If we just looked at that and if you were to consider 90% of all the behavior that you might judge as aggressive from a dog and then pause and say, "Oh, that dog is actually afraid," it would likely change your consideration of what was happening for the dog in the moment. I think there would be a pivot in that. And in doing so, what we start to do is have a window in which we can see dogs differently, however small that window may be. In seeing dogs differently, we now have an opportunity to change how we relate to the dog, which means we have a way that we can help change how we help the dog.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay, that makes sense actually. We have to put ourselves in their shoes, for lack of a better term.

Matt Beisner:

There is the element of consideration inherent, which is compassion, where I don't take the behavior at face value as having something that I assign to it as a human being. There's this amazing trainer, Sarah Fisher, is based in the UK and her school is the ACE, Animal Centered Education. She has a statement, "The dog is always right," which is a radical statement if you think about how we built the training world.

But if the dog is always right, then it's incumbent on me as a trainer and it's incumbent on me to help those that are living and caring for that dog to see why the behavior is probably actually totally appropriate and why the environment that I'm asking the dog to function in is not. It empowers us in a way because now we have changes that we can make and we can make those changes. Those dogs aren't going to say, "Hey, let's move, or put me on a different leash when I walk, or let's do those kinds of things." They can ask for it in so many ways, but they won't be able to actually make those changes without our support.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I love that you say you teach and not train. Can you expand on that concept a little bit?

Matt Beisner:

I started thinking about that a few years ago and I had some concerns about the way I saw some training and I had questions about how I trained, not just in terms of technique, which to me is fortunately necessarily evolving, but also in terms of what the motives are. When I looked at it, the spirit of training to me is very different than the spirit of teaching. If I teach something, it's with the intent that it becomes yours and it's a value to you and you can use it to do what's best for you.

If I train something, it's a bit of often arbitrary agendas that I have that is about you performing so that I can say that you have been trained properly and I can check off the boxes for what my job is. But more and more, what I'm looking at is how to observe how a dog learns. At this point, I go into a session with somebody and I say, "I'm not going to change your dog's behavior. I'm actually not going to try and train your dog. What I want to do is learn how your dog learns so that I can teach your dog the things that it seems to need to learn."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Ah, okay, I love that. It just tells me that you're very much in tune with walking into an environment and observing before you decide what do we need to do here, right?

Matt Beisner:

Yeah. I'd say that one of my pleasures and one of my strengths is observation. When somebody hires, obviously we're in a results-oriented business. So somebody hires me to come in and help them virtually or in their home, they have concerns and I want to help them address those concerns. But what I really want to do out of the gate is find a way for me and the caretakers that are the humans and the dog to actually have some space around the behavior and observe and see how the dog thinks and how the dog moves and why it might do that and all kinds of things that are easy to miss like, "I noticed that there's a little bit of tension in the back right hip and that might be impacting how the dog experiences things on a walk, or I noticed that there's a bit of a hang on the left ear and maybe there's something going on in the spine or some previous ailment or injury there that indicates that the dog's not comfortable being touched over there." There's a ton of stuff for us to watch. But if we don't start looking, we're going to miss it, which means that the training or the expectations we put on the dog is not going to be fair to begin with.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I love that because I feel like a pair of fresh eyes comes into our home and we miss things every day even with our human children. But somebody else might come in and say, "Hey, have you noticed this or that?" And that might be the one thing that could turn everything around for our family. A lot of training and I have seen a lot of dog trainers and worked with or not worked with some that I've seen. It just feels like sometimes the family has this expectation that you're going to fix the dog, the dog's going to come back and we're going to keep going on our merry way and the dog's going to be great. But I love your approach because your approach is about the family's going to do all this. The family is going to learn to live cohesively and peacefully with this dog. Right?

Matt Beisner:

Correct. The fastest way for me to get the dog that I want is to accept the dog that I have.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I like that. Okay. You have your own pack of dogs. You're a dad of canines and little humans. Tell us a little bit about your pack and what are some of the ways in which you helped your own pack co-exist safely and peacefully, or is it always a work in progress?

Matt Beisner:

There are a lot of good habits that we have built in at this point. My wife Brooklin and I, we have... Our son is four and a half, our daughter is 18 months old. We've got five rescues. I'm not promoting that. But if you want to know how to do it, we did it.

Jacqueline Pinol:

[crosstalk 00:10:12]. Guilty as charged.

Matt Beisner:

I think one of the last times we went to the shelter to adopt, I think that the person at the desk said, "Oh, I see your address that you've already got four. Well, honey, I'm just going to put it under your name instead of his."

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yeah, exactly. We're at our max. The city knows.

Matt Beisner:

Right. What I have to do, especially if kids are there, what I have to do is I have to look at how to set these dogs up to succeed. Each dog has similar general needs and some of them have very specific needs based on their breeds, their genetic predispositions, their personalities, their ages, those kinds of things, their temperaments. The process at this point, we live quite fluidly and we've got a eight and a half year old German Shepherd who is our most recent adoption, and then we've got a 15 and a half year old Jindo, amazing recovery story that he has, and then our pit bull Nama, who we named Nama, so we could say, "Nama stay." She is about 10 and a half. My little terrier, Kingston, that I talked about before, he is at 13 and a half and blind and deaf and you wouldn't know it. And then we have our other Blue Nose Pit, Daeja Blu, and she's about eight and a half.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Daeja Blu. Are you kidding me? That's just so awesome. I love it too.

Matt Beisner:

They all have different needs, but we have found a way to help them get enough of what they need so that it doesn't seem that they are compelled to act out through stress or fear or anxiety or aggression. And so if we set the table for them really well, and we have good daily routines, and then we bring kids into the picture and we make sure that we follow really vital processes for these dogs to be able to succeed with the kid coming in... Brooklin and I had a conversation when we were expecting our son saying, "I'm not sure if we can keep this dog based on our concerns." And so we did a lot of work going into that and then we were ready to do the work when our son came. I cannot stress enough the importance of getting ahead of a child arriving, including if you're even just talking about having a kid, let's look at the behaviors now so that your dog is not set up to fail.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. I really encourage that, especially because in the dog rescue world that I have been privy to in some ways in my involvement in trying to help rescue dogs. There are many dogs in shelters that are there because a couple was having a baby and they felt they no longer could care for the dog because now they had a baby. And that's heartbreaking. You can't explain that to the dog, but I hope that people listening to this podcast, or if you know anyone in that situation would even suggest that they listen to Matt's message because there is a way to make it work out and not have it be stressful.

Matt Beisner:

I can't overstate the value of getting a certified dog trainer in there who works from a positive reinforcement standpoint so that we see if this dog's got a fair shot. I will say that there are homes that dogs don't do well in. The addition of a baby into that home is not a good fit for the dog or the humans. I will support people in whatever decision they need to make, but I want them to be able to make experientially educated, informed decisions. Safety is obviously paramount. There are plenty of situations that I've been in at this point, on the decade I've been doing this where this dog clearly was better off in a different home. But it doesn't mean that we don't make an effort to see what we can do so that we're not undoing something that is meant to be forever.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. I liked that you said get ahead of it if you're even having the conversation of bringing a child into the home, because there are couples who know that their dog currently isn't okay with kids, it gets easily stressed out or anxious. If their home environment is going to change, that's a huge red flag as to do we have to consider rehoming the dog so that we don't end up at the shelter in nine months and abandoning the dog.

Matt Beisner:

Right. Right before our interview, I actually had just finished a session with a couple and they are expecting and they've got three dogs. It turns out that the things that they would need to consider in having a baby in the home are things that these dogs actually need right now. Whatever happens, these dogs are getting a chance right now to get some of the help that they needed in terms of they're anxious and fearful and unstable behavior.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I wanted to ask you this because I've seen some of the work you've done and... In the dog rescue world, so many families love to adopt and just save that dog because the dogs come from so many different backgrounds. There are three things that most dog lovers and pet parents do. And being involved in dog rescue, I can tell you almost every family does this, especially when the dog comes from abandonment and neglect. I want your take on these three things. Everybody loves to have their dogs sleep on their bed with them. Number two, people come home and they say hello with lots of energy or really high-pitched voices and the dogs may bark or run and greet them at the door and it's all happy, happy, so we think. Many people give their dogs also endless affection, free love as I like to call it. What is your take on all of this?

Matt Beisner:

I'm glad you brought those in. I don't have a problem in and of itself with dogs being on the bed. What I'm looking at are the dog's needs. For example, what dog's needs are, we particularly saw this in the COVID impact where most of us were home all the time. What we found soon enough was the dogs weren't resting the same way that they normally did. The dogs weren't sleeping as deeply as they normally did. The presence of us in their space without the break of the day, without the dogs being somewhere else, et cetera, actually was prohibitive for them in terms of their ability to relax. A dog has to have a place to rest that is its own and it is undisturbed. That's not typically the bed. I'm not saying the bed's not comfortable, but that's not typically the bed for a lot of dogs when they actually begin to explore that with people.

In cases where we're looking at resource guarding, which I've seen plenty of, whether it's resource guarding a human or resource guarding a space, the bed tends to be a troublesome spot. I'm mindful about that for the dog. But if people sleep with their dogs and that works for everybody and really it works that the needs get met, and that also includes the humans not losing sleep because they've got a dog that doesn't let them sleep.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That is huge. I have to admit, I would have loved to have the dog sleep on the bed. When your pack starts to get larger, no, you do not have quality sleep. My hubby was like, "All right, we can adopt more dogs as long as they don't sleep on the bed." And I was like, "Okay."

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, I think we tapped out at three. My wife said, "I think three is good." It was crazy. Every night, it's going to be different. It's so delicious falling asleep and every middle of the night is a kind of, "I can't get a leg over this big pit bull head." To your second point, the coming home, this is a question of... This is not about the emotional response, although a lot of us understandably would come home and the dog's behavior is really excited. We will name it as the dog is happy to see me and it's joyful and that kind of thing. That's often not the case. If I just think about it in terms of behavior and I take the emotion out of it, which I can't totally know for a dog, if at all, the behavior that I might be unintentionally rewarding is door, human, jump on me. We just put it that way.

If I'm the primary teacher for this dog, can't reasonably expect my dog to say, "Okay, I'm going to only do this when Matt comes home. But when Matt's mom comes over, I'm going to give her six feet and relax and let her come in and smell where she's been." If I'm going to reinforce behavior that I don't want, then that's a lose for the dog because I rarely as a human going to say, "Oh my bad, dog. Sorry, I've been teaching you all this." Human is going to say, "Sit down, knock it off," without realizing that they've been unintentionally reinforcing unwanted behavior.

If I'm thinking about it in terms of the dog's stress level and really on deeper levels where there are issues of wellness or pain or discomfort, a lot of dogs can actually find themselves jumping or lunging at people or barking or doing things that are indications of stress. Excitement in and of itself, emotions aside, is innately stressful. If the dog is in stress behavior and I'm reinforcing stress behavior, then the dog is challenged to be able to manage and mitigate its own stress in an environment like the door or an experience like me coming in. At the very least, I don't want to encourage undesired behavior that the dog will unlikely generalize. And above or below that, I don't want to encourage a stressful experience the dog is having because it makes me feel good, because it looks like the dog's happy to see me.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. Okay, okay. There might be underlying messages we're getting from our dogs and we're not seeing it because we're just reacting to, "Ha, they're all here. Hey, whatever." You've said each dog is individual, we have to address each dog's needs. Having a pack when I walk through the door and because I've trained some of my dogs, I walk in and I ignore all of them. I just walk in, I have to put my stuff down, I have to settle in before they all get a hello. That's fine. They all react fine. But if my mom comes through the door to visit, or any friend of ours, they think it's just like free range to jump and say hello and get excited. What kind of work do I have to do there if we have dogs that maybe listen to the parents, but not anybody else when they come through the door?

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, thank you. What we're looking at is how to prove the behavior. If we want a dog to be able to generalize the behavior, we got to separate them to succeed. Typically, in a multi-dog home, let's work with one dog at a time, see how it learns, what it responds to. Do we do some capturing and praising? By that, I mean I come in the door, the dog backs off, good, I capture and praise that moment. So the dog is making choices and I happen to be capturing and reinforcing those choices, vis-a-vis my praise or food. We can do some capturing and praising with dogs around that. We can start to role-play, where you have established that when you come home, the dogs are able to settle. I hear that.

I think what you could do, Jackie, in that example is when you come home, you could start capturing and praising all the choices that the dogs make, backing up, lying down, sitting, whatever it is that is a downshift away from the undesired behavior or the behavior you don't want to see show up with your mom so that you are starting to intentionally reinforce the behavior and the series of behaviors that lead to that.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay. So acknowledge them for the good stuff they're doing with me.

Matt Beisner:

Yep. Focus on what we do want rather than what we don't want. We're going to work from this principal that when blank happens, something good happens. When mom comes home, something good happens. When grandma comes over, something good happens. There's something good. We want to be able to get to this something good as quickly as possible. And then if we're also thinking about another option, which is role-playing, "Okay, so I've done calming work around the door with the dogs and I'd let them make a lot of good choices and I'm not asking them to sit or lie down. I'm actually helping them reinforce desired behavior that they're choosing," then I might step outside, knock on the door, come in. And now, I start to get some data.

What happens when we add a door knock? What happens when we add a doorbell? What happens when I say to my wife, "Text me before you're home, five minutes before you're home and you be the guest and now I see how the dog's response." I got to get these dogs an opportunity to practice the desired behavior before I can reasonably assume that they're going to generalize it.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay, I love that. I think as pet parents, we have to do these exercises, take the time to invest in that exercise with our dogs and not just the, "Oh, let's wait until someone comes over and practice it then."

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, no wonder why it's not working. What's really important is that we could do teaching that's a 60-second exercise. I tell a lot of people anymore, "Let's do work that's like a 1 to 10-minute window." You can get five of those in the course of a day rather than spending an hour, two hours, three hours, which most people don't want to do and I think most dogs don't want to do.

Jacqueline Pinol:

The dogs get tired. They have like a 10, 15 minute span and they're ready to move on.

Matt Beisner:

Often, yeah.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay, okay. And then what about the free love, especially for these adopted dogs, some of them with pasts that we are unaware of?

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, it's such an important part of who we are as humans that we are drawn to help these dogs in need. I am a fierce proponent of agency and consent. What I find happening with a lot of dogs is working from the understandable but misunderstood belief that if I just love them enough, they will heal as opposed to if I learn who they are and find ways to teach what they seem to need to be able to feel secure in this world, then I will give a lot of affection and attention without knowing what their stress cues are, without getting consent, without seeing the impact of what it's like when the tone of my voice changes, without seeing the effect of how I touch them and where I touch them. All those things are really important just as they would be in a human relationship.

I often say to people, "I don't want you to love your dogs any less. I want you to see how your love as expressed by verbal and physical affection, I want you to see how your love impacts these dogs and how we can use that to create a more positive experience and to reinforce more of this positive behavior that these dogs are deciding to engage in based on what we've set up for them." You would be shocked how much the trust in a relationship can change just by letting your dog know that you are paying attention to when it does and doesn't want to be touched.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. That's so true because a lot of them, especially if they come from fearful backgrounds or being shy, timid dogs, it takes them a while to settle into that home. They don't want to be smothered, but I do meet adopters that just want to hug and kiss and just constantly be on the dog and the dog clearly is showing signs of being uncomfortable.

Matt Beisner:

What you're saying about an uncomfortable, it's important to, Jacquie, because a lot of dogs, especially the ones that arrive in our lives, let's say at least not having had an easy time of it, there are likely some wellness issues. There are likely to some issues maybe around the head or the mouth, within the teeth or in the body, the spine, the tail, any number of places where a dog might feel discomfort or actual pain. But because dogs have such a high pain tolerance and they tend to mask it very well, if I'm not considerate of where the dog is at, it's really easy for me to start petting a dog in a place where it's not comfortable, where it may tolerate, but that doesn't mean that it's actually going to lean into. Those are things that I look for.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay. We know that it's common for people to have hesitation adopting dogs, one of these being the reasons and the unknown past. But through your work, you've proven that it's possible to help them to learn to communicate and have a healthy relationship. But I'm sure you also meet people and have clients that got their dogs from a breeder or a pet store, or as a puppy. Do those dogs have the same type of issues? Do families come to you and say, "Hey, I don't know where this is coming from. I got my dog from a breeder as a puppy."

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, that's a really important question. I am an ardent supporter of breeding with integrity. I'm not anti-breeding. What I'm looking for is how the dogs can best be set up. There are a lot of issues that dogs that come from shelters and dogs that come from even reputable breeders will have. There's a lot of similarities in the behaviors. One of the things that's astounding that I think doesn't get enough attention and is starting to... A big shout out to a new colleague of mine, Ken Brophy, who's doing amazing work. What we see with a lot of dogs is there is a genetic predisposition.

I'm going to give you an extreme example. A colleague of mine, Trish McMillan, rescued a dog from a fighting ring. If we just look at environment and if we just consider the widely held belief that the environment is what made the dog bad and the environment that we create is going to make the dog good, if we just come from that standpoint, then a dog that's rescued from a fighting ring should by no accounts actually be well-socialized and able to interact with humans safely. But this dog, because of its genetic predisposition, the environment could not change who it was. And so this dog that belongs to Trish, and I actually have had one of those dogs and I've got a lot of colleagues that have had dogs that were rescued from really viral situations, the genetic nature of the dog can't be changed.

Conversely, one could get a dog from a reputable breeder or from a rescue at a very young age and there may be something genetically that indicates that the dog has a certain trait or behavior that is not necessarily trainable. You might be able to manage it, but it's not necessarily trainable. I know that probably a lot of people aren't going to want to hear that. But as we expand our consideration for the dogs that come into our homes, we have to know that there are things that are beyond what we intended to happen for these dogs and beyond even what the most masterful training is going to make happen. And that is regardless of where that dog comes from.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That's huge. That's like a light bulb just went off because I'll tell you a lot of the breed-specific rescues get purebreds from the shelter. If we were able to track down where that owner who left the dog at the shelter, or why they left it there, it usually had to do if it's not because of medical bells, its behavior, but it was from a breeder. That's a big deal. It's important for people to do their homework and research as to the breeding, who the breeder is, and who the parents of the dog are and the genetic lineage of the dog.

Matt Beisner:

Yeah. I encourage people to get a dog from a breeder. If you see behavior that's questionable, contact the breeder. A decent breeder is going to be open to this. In fact, the breeders that I know whose work I trust, they will say, "If this dog doesn't fit, let me know and I'll take the dog back," so you know that dog is going to have a home. A lot of people I speak to, I say, "Listen, reach out to the breeder and say, 'I'm seeing this kind of behavior. Do you have any feedback from the other people that got dogs from that litter that they're seeing the same kind of behavior?'" And if the answer is yes, then typically there's something consistent genetically, even though the dogs have different personalities.

There are also cases where we see a total anomaly, but even then there may be something in that genetic line that just didn't get bred out, or that just happened to show up. And unfortunately, I often see that with some of the working breeds who are not able to maneuver around this particular drive that they have, or the way that they use their mouth, or what they need in the environment that they live in.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Okay. That's really important for our listeners to consider. If you're just bent on having to have a dog from a breeder and you don't want to adopt from a rescue, just to do the homework, I always say please research and ask questions and reach out even to people like Matt at THE ZEN DOG who could give you a nice list of things to consider before you make that purchase and that commitment for the life of the dog. Matt, tell us, you have a show called Dog: Impossible on that Geo network and Disney+, how has that experience been for you and your work? Has it changed you and inspired you to do more?

Matt Beisner:

I'm really moved by having had that opportunity. I feel particularly fortunate and privileged to be able to have a space to work from and at the level that I get to work at with the colleagues that are in my world at this point. It changed my life in ways that I could not have anticipated. It's not something I got into. I had a client who was a celebrity and she had a dog and we were able to help that dog. We always respected privacy and then she went public about it I think on Jimmy Kimmel.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, well, there you go.

Matt Beisner:

[crosstalk 00:31:04].

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yeah, not private anymore.

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, and I think I got it even right.

Jacqueline Pinol:

It's okay, for a good cause.

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, for a good cause. And then a couple of hours later, I got the first call. And so it's been a phenomenal process for me in terms of what it is to make a television show that seeks to do best by the dogs, what I'd want to do the same and differently and better as a trainer. And now, as we expect the airing of our second season in early July-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes, yes, I was going to ask you about that. Okay, okay. So it's coming up in July?

Matt Beisner:

Yes, so it's coming in July. It's a beautiful season. It was shot following COVID protocols. I was never in the home actually because of COVID. We had to get really creative with how we filmed it. The stories are beautiful. I love working with the crew and the producers and the production team. Where I'm at now is I have this rare opportunity, A, to have had this platform to work from in the beginning and, B, to be somebody that's growing in public. For better, for worse, that has its challenges, but growing in public gives other people an opportunity to see that this is a process.

And coming back to what I was saying earlier, if we come at this process with a certain humility inherent in which is the art of consideration, there's something I don't know here, the knowing of which could help this dog for the better. I'm now at a place where I can have conversations and colleagues that can help me help people help their dogs around the world. I'm doing sessions in South Africa, India, the UK, Finland, all through South America. These are all virtual sessions and we haven't even aired season two yet. I'm in a really fortunate position where I'm looking at my work, both in terms of the clarity of what's right in front of me with the dog that needs help and in terms of the consideration of the legacy that I have an opportunity to leave on behalf of the dogs in need.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Can you tell us a little bit about the premise of an episode for those who are not familiar with Dog: Impossible because I highly encourage my listeners to check out season one? I have some questions about some of the doggies in it for you, by the way.

Matt Beisner:

Premise is we will get a dog that is generally deemed impossible to help, whether it's by the owners or the owners experience in working with other trainers. And that's not to say that what those trainers had to offer didn't work, but things didn't change for the dog or for the humans in the way that they had hoped. We'll have a dog that comes in that has a particular intense kind of behavior. A lot of those cases in season one are aggression cases, and again, roughly 90% of aggression is fear-based. So there's just a lot of fear involved. There are different family dynamics, there are different levels of aggressive behavior between these dogs who are particularly sensitive and in need.

And so we're looking at these different worlds that these dogs come from and the kind of homes that they live in and the kind of behavior that they display and the different breeds and ages and sizes and temperaments. This is not a one-size-all-fits approach. I have some ideas about things that are going to show me something about this dog that can help you help your dog. And that's how we make our way in. The changes are real and they're really beautiful to watch. You might know this, but it takes about 80 hours of filming to create a 44 minute episode.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh my goodness, yes. I do sadly know that documentaries are hard to make and it's a lot of work.

Matt Beisner:

Right. When people watch, we've got to go to commercials. That is what it is. It doesn't mean that I just fixed your dog by the time you came back from commercial and bought some noodles or a new blanket. What it does mean is that we were able to jump and show you this is what's actually possible. And if the only thing that you take away is, "Oh, there's something different that I can think about my dog that might make things possible," that's the only takeaway then I think we've done our job.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Right. And again, it goes to that phrase that you teach rather than train because you're teaching the humans, you're leaving them with all of this new knowledge and awareness that they can then continue to work on once the show has moved on, but they have all these tools per se that they can continue to thrive with their dog.

Matt Beisner:

Yeah. I want you to be empowered to empower your dog. That's my job.

Jacqueline Pinol:

I wanted to ask you about one episode specifically in season one because it had two pugs in it, two little black pugs. I have a black pug, my first dog ever who has since passed, was a fawn pug. And to me, they're the most harmless, sweet, friendly, wonderful dogs. But in this episode, there was one that was just like going after the little brother or the older brother, which was a canine. We always talk about, "Oh, maybe families with kids or with lots of family members is chaotic and maybe that affects the dogs." But this was just a wonderful couple, mom and dad, and the two dogs. There were all these issues with the pug and then there was that turnaround. Can you talk to us a little bit about that dog particularly, how the parents may have missed the signs and how easy it was to correct them?

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, that's one of my favorite stories, JB and Moneypenny. Those are the two pugs. Yeah.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Moneypenny. Yes.

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, shout out to Pug Life.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, love them.

Matt Beisner:

What's happening in that home is really common with a lot of dogs, like pugs, for example. When you get a small, beautiful dog with a big personality, it's very easy to not think about what the dog needs and to think about what I want out of this dog and what I want out of this relationship. There were a lot of things that were put on these dogs in really good intention. I'm still friends with the owners actually to this day-

Jacqueline Pinol:

Oh, that's awesome.

Matt Beisner:

... yeah, which is really neat. There's a lot of things that these dogs or dogs like these pugs get put on them that is an unreasonable expectation. For example, you're supposed to be my emotional support. That's separate from an actual emotional support animal. But if I'm making a dog my emotional support and I'm not engaging in emotional support with my partner, then we're missing something there that the dog is unfairly being asked to handle. Also, a lot of those dogs don't get a lot of their needs met because we think of them as cute and cuddly and particularly small so they must not need X, Y, Z. But the reality is these dogs need to be able to socialize, need to be able to engage in the world, need to be able to make decisions that are for their own well-being and get their needs met, whatever those needs are generally and specific to their breeds. In this case, these dogs needed help in a different way. And thankfully, the people that I was working with they saw that they had put a lot on the dogs. There was a lot of consent that was missing, there was a lot of emotional projection that was happening and they didn't have kind, considerate techniques, effective techniques for these dogs to be able to make better choices. They ended up doing that and it was really grateful to be a part of that.

Jacqueline Pinol:

That was a great episode. Also with the Australian Shepherd, I really want my listeners to go watch this-

Matt Beisner:

Whiskey.

Jacqueline Pinol:

...show, Whiskey. Wow, what a turnaround? Australian Shepherd dogs are a working breed. They need a lot of exercise, I do know that, because I recently met someone who bought a puppy from a breeder and he's the most wild puppy ever. She's having a lot of trouble with scratching and jumping up and nipping. Already I'm like, "Please seek training," because they're a high-maintenance breed for the city. Yes?

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, yeah. That's a really tough ask of a dog like that to... We do it, but I wouldn't ever recommend putting a dog like that in an apartment.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And that's where they live. Yeah, yeah, it's a lot to ask unless you're going to be out hiking 5:00, 6:00 in the morning and again in the afternoon and again at night.

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, lots of time in nature. That can be a good balance or lots of time, long leashes when appropriate, off-leash where legal and appropriate out in nature, letting that dog do a lot of what it's meant to do so that it can come back and be itself and you can be right with it.

Jacqueline Pinol:

And that's a really great point you brought up earlier in the episode too is getting to know your breed, how important it is to even research the type of dog you want no matter where you get that dog because your environment will make your lifestyle your schedule, will make a big difference in how that dog comes into your life and a kind of life it can have.

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, yeah, agreed. Only 5% of the dog owners in the US actually get training. The advantage I have having television shows, I can get into a lot of homes where people wouldn't even necessarily think about asking for training. But I can tell you, no matter what somebody's training methods are, pretty much all of us want you to succeed with your dog and we want your dog to be able to stay in your home. If that's the case, then doing what you're suggesting, Jackie, getting informed, reaching out... I take a ton of courtesy calls, which I always appreciate somebody calling ahead of time. I'm about to get this dog, or I've got a situation so that people feel that they can get support when they need it and getting ahead of these potential challenges in the dynamics. I can't stress that enough, the importance of that.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Yes, because there is a dog out there for you. Anyone who's looking, you can call me. I will show you the way because I'm such an advocate for obviously saving so many homeless dogs. And now that you said you have clients in other countries, so you're doing virtual lessons as well and you find that you can help families that way, right?

Matt Beisner:

Yeah, that was really interesting. When the shutdown happened in L.A. last March, I had to pivot and there were a bunch of people that needed help, so I began exploring what these sessions would be virtually. I knew enough on how to get started, that we actually were able to make some progress. And then while I was learning that, we were also filming season two, where, as I said, I wasn't allowed in anybody's home. And so I was in essence doing virtual sessions in somebody's backyard on an iPad, seeing what the cameras were showing me. I have now seen a tremendous amount of progress both on the part of the dogs and the people I work with and also really in terms of what I had to offer and how I look at things. It's remarkable how a conversation with somebody about their dog that is exploratory and open can make real changes in the home that can help the dogs make real changes.

One last thing about that is somebody will call me and say, "Well, I've got a dog that's leash reactive and I don't think a virtual session is going to be useful." I understand why you think that. But I tell you what, show me a video of your dog getting ready to go outside and probably 98 times out of 100 your dog is showing stress cues before it even goes outside, which means that the negative associations have already begun. By the time you get outside, that dog's not set up to have a leash interaction that's a positive experience for the dog. We could spend an hour virtually and just work on that and then you can get out the door and... Working with somebody on the ground is a great thing to do. That doesn't mean that you can't get help virtually.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely. And to give it a try, what do you have to lose, but the fact that you might actually learn something and walk away with even one thing that will improve that canine-human bond?

Matt Beisner:

I'll tell you what I do, Jackie, for your viewers and your listeners. Anybody that reaches out to THE ZEN DOG, wag at thezendog.com, anybody that reaches out, if they say that they came from your show, we will give them the dog mama special. And the dog mama special means that we're going to cut the cost of the session in half from now through the end of the year.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Awesome. Oh my gosh, Matt, that is wonderful to all my listeners. Please know that you can reach out to THE ZEN DOG and I will have the live links in the show notes so anyone can just scroll down and click easily and contact you. Where can our listeners find and follow you or ZEN Dog on social media?

Matt Beisner:

Thank you. On Instagram, it is matt_beisner, Twitter, matt_beisner, Facebook, Matt Beisner.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Great. I highly encourage my listeners to follow and stay up to date with Matt. He offers tons of advice and videos and just really great information that you can just click on and learn each and every day. Our listeners should know that I am not getting paid to advocate for any one organization on this podcast. I choose to interview guests that I know are doing the good work for dogs and for people across America. And in this case beyond, Matt Beisner and THE ZEN DOG have The Canine Condition's seal of approval from me. Thank you so much, Matt, for being on this episode and enlightening us with so much valuable information and such a kind message. I really love the delivery of your message. Of course, if it comes from THE ZEN DOG, how could it not be, right?

Matt Beisner:

We hope.

Jacqueline Pinol:

We hope.

Matt Beisner:

We hope. Yeah.

Jacqueline Pinol:

But thank you for helping so many dogs and families each and every day. Thank you for what you do.

Matt Beisner:

Well, thank you for having me and thank you to your listeners for tuning in and thank you in advance to the listeners for thinking about your dog in a little bit of a different way that can help you help your dog.

Jacqueline Pinol:

Absolutely. Take care, Matt.

Matt Beisner:

All right. You, too.

Jacqueline Pinol:

When it comes to our canine family members, we want them to be happy. Helping them have clear lines of communication with us leads to harmony in the home and a fun, safe life together. I hope you will connect with Matt and also watch his show because you too can have a zen dog. And in the spirit of finding that thing that you are really good at and sharing it with your world, I leave you with this quote from Billy Shore, the founder of Share Our Strength organization, "Everybody has a strength to share. If we can tap into that, if we can create vehicles in which people can contribute whatever their particular unique talent or gift is, then that can really change the world." Thank you for joining me on this episode. Please press subscribe on our podcast and tell your friends about it. Here's to your zen dog and to the strength in you. Until next time, hang onto those leashes, the Canine Condition, come, sit, stay.