

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

Jacqueline Piñol:

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 well balanced dog. If you are thinking about getting your first dog or just want to know where and how you can help the dog in need, this is also a place for you.

Where does the phrase man's best friend come from? Have you ever wondered? I have. So I had to find out. There are two accounts recorded in history of when it was first heard. The first was by King Frederick of Prussia when he referred to his Italian Greyhound as his best friend and made a public statement saying, that a dog is a man's best friend. The second account dates back to 1870 in the Missouri Supreme Court, where a farmer sued for damages after his dog Old Drum had been shot and killed. His lawyer delivered a famous tribute in his closing arguments that said, "The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world is his dog." And at some point he said the phrase, man's best friend in his argument. He won the case. Today, there is still a statue of Old Drum outside the Johnson County Courthouse in Warrensburg, Missouri. And the phrase still rings true 250 years later.

My guest on this episode will definitely have stories to share that give us more proof that a dog is man's best friend. I am happy to have Mr. David Gaier on the podcast today. Dave is a former U.S. Marine and former federal agent who's been in corporate communications for 20 years. Although he grew up with Poodles, he knew little of other breeds until he woke up one day and decided on a whim to join a group of volunteers at a New Jersey shelter. He soon fell in love with the Pit Bull type dogs he encountered. He joined the volunteer group's board and two years later helped his fellow board members found Sammy's Hope. A small private shelter in Sayreville, New Jersey. This private shelter is considered a licensed non-profit dog rescue. David is a volunteer, donor and takes care of their media relations. Hello David, welcome to The Canine Condition Podcast.

David Gaier:

Thank you, Jacqui. It's a thrill. It really and a privilege. I've met you several years ago at Sammy's Hope and the work that you have done. I remember we even worked on a transport together. We got a dog from the South all the way out to Long Island.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's right.

David Gaier:

And I couldn't go that day. I actually hired a car service to drive him out to his final destination.

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

Jacqueline Piñol:

I remember that.

David Gaier:

Yeah.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh yes.

David Gaier:

So, I'm thrilled to be with you on this.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh thank you so much. And so obviously you're a fan of the phrase man's best friend. Does it ring true for you?

David Gaier:

Oh, absolutely. As you mentioned, I grew up with Poodles, including a very large Standard Poodle named Tara. And she was bigger than frankly, most Pit Bull type dogs that I've had since, but the companionship and the unconditional love. I know it's cliché in our animal world, but it is a cliché that's true. My little boy Popeye is my constant companion and he's on the bed with me at night. Everywhere I go, he goes. And honestly, especially in the age of COVID, I don't know how I would have gotten through without him. He is absolutely my best friend, but I'm in Philadelphia now and every day we encounter so many dogs on our walks. This is a real dog town.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh, I love that.

David Gaier:

And I see with the humans walking their pups, they have the same feeling and devotion and love, you can tell the bond. Today, we encountered two beautiful little Corgis. And the dog parents were so enamored of Popeye, but clearly so in love with their pups.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. You can tell people's energy, dog owners, they just have a vibe and I don't know, they own dogs. And then when I find out, I go, Ah, no wonder.

David Gaier:

Right. It's like being a Marine, which is a brotherhood. There's sort of a brother and sisterhood of people who have... I hate to say the word own because frankly Popeye owns me, I don't own him. And I don't like the idea of owning a creature, you don't own the creature, you're the creature's family, the pup is family.

Jacqueline Piñol:

So yes, you were mentioning that you and I had met, I want our listeners to know that I met David in 2016 while filming my Documentary Series. I got to visit Sammy's Hope and meet some

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

fantastic dogs and humans too. David, can you tell our listeners why the shelter is named Sammy's Hope?

David Gaier:

When Sammy's Hope was founded, which was really just a bunch of folks got together and realized that it's this large suburban shelter, these beautiful Pit Bulls, and they were almost always Pit Bulls. I think we had a couple of Rottweilers, but they were always big dogs and they were generally Pit Bull types, were not even getting walked sadly. They were spending their time in wire cages. And we were just volunteers who were there to do dog walking all day, Saturday and on Wednesday evening. And the leader of the pack, if you will, was a big, beautiful brindle named Sammy. And when we finally got him a home, it just struck us. Hey, he was such a beautiful dog, not they're not all beautiful, but he epitomized to us what every homeless dog hopes were, which is a loving forever family. So it was Sammy's hope that he got a home and he did. And he's actually been brought back by his humans to a couple of our annual Christmas parties and the volunteers just fawn over him. He's way beyond a mascot. He's our founder really.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh, I love that. Can you explain to us the process by which Sammy's Hope selects or attains the dogs that get adopted out?

David Gaier:

Yeah, we have an unusual model. So because we're not a municipal shelter and we don't have animal control contracts, we pretty much can do what we want and go where we want. So our model is to go to large shelters. So we go to Trenton Animal Shelter, Liberty Humane Society in Jersey City. We go to East Orange Shelter, which is where Popeye came from. Those are the main shelters, we go to others, Newark, AHS Newark. And so we then temperament test the dogs that the shelters recommend that we take. They're almost invariably Pit Bull type dogs because of their massive population and their unfortunately massive presence among the homeless dogs. And if they pass our little test, which takes about 35 to 40 minutes per dog, and the shelter agrees, we pull them and we bring them to our shelter. And then the Newark shelter may have 200 homeless dogs at one time.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Wow.

David Gaier:

We only care for up to 12 dogs and 20 cats. So with a cadre of volunteers, we can give so much individual socialization and attention, a really good medical care. We're literally physically attached to a veterinary office. So one side is a groomer and the middle is the vet and on the end is Sammy's Hope. And by doing that, we do two things. We save that dog's life and we open

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

up a kennel for another dog, so that a dog won't be euthanized as they unfortunately are all too often in large urban shelters. So we like to think that every dog literally saves two dogs lives.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's a really great point and I have heard that before when municipal shelters advocate for rescues to please pull dogs when they're full. So even though we are using the word shelter as a licensed dog rescue, Sammy's Hope is a no kill facility. Can you explain the difference for any listeners who might not know how a facility like Sammy's Hope differs from a municipal shelter?

David Gaier:

Well, we're private. So we're completely funded by and small measure, by adoption fees, which really don't cover much and by donations. So we have to have a constant string of events and we have to appeal to our donor base to keep us going. I don't think there's actually such a thing as a no kill shelter because unfortunately, using the word kill and of course, euthanize is a euphemism, particularly in kill shelters. Unfortunately, what happens is they have a certain capacity and when they reach the capacity, they start to select dogs to be killed, to be euthanized. And so as a private shelter, we determine our population so we never get overpopulated. We only take as many animals as we can care for. And then, because we're small and we have the ability to vet the animals very thoroughly, we can give them a much more, really good medical attention. And sometimes that's surgery, sometimes it's other procedures that are expensive. And then we tend to try to do crowdfunding on top of our regular donor base.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's a really good point that you bring up because what people refer to as kill shelters, meaning they do euthanize dogs. It is usually because they're full and I want our listeners just to think about why these shelters get full, because I've thought about this and it's full because there are so many homeless dogs, strays, owner surrenders, people who don't want their dogs anymore. So if the shelter gets full game over for some of those guys, right?

David Gaier:

Yes, that's right. We're talking now about COVID and we're going to have to vaccinate our way out of it. Well, the only way we are going to get out of this horrible homeless dog problem and the mass euthanization that tragically takes place every day in large urban shelters is to spay and neuter our way out of it. When we encounter people who seem to turn up their nose at that idea, I can tell you, we aren't thrilled with that. We don't let an animal leave our care that has not been spayed or neutered.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I'm so glad to hear that. That's fantastic. And that's how it should be because sometimes that's the only way we can control before people adopt out dogs.

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

David Gaier:

Right.

Jacqueline Piñol:

In your bio, I mentioned your love for the Pit Bull type dogs, which are the American Staffordshire Terriers or the Staffordshire Bull Terriers, what drew you to this breed? And why do you think there is an influx of that particular breed in most shelters, but not enough families to adopt them out?

David Gaier:

A lot of people think Pit Bull is a breed, and as you just mentioned, it's not. It's a description of a physical type of dog that typically has one or more breeds and it's almost always a Pit mix. The only way to really know is to DNA test, but Pit Bulls have an unfortunate reputation and I think is really not founded in science. They are powerful dogs, some of them are very stout. And occasionally when a dog bites as all dogs can do, if mistreated or if they're afraid, the Pit Bull tends to do more damage, because they're very strong animals. But in my experience in doing this for about eight years now, the only time I have ever suffered anything close to an injury was with a cat that I tried to get out of underneath the seat of a car so that he could be treated and a little Chihuahua that bit really nicely down on my finger.

The Pit Bulls really tend to be so loving and loyal. And I think therein lies may be a little of the issue, because a Pit Bull is so loyal to his or her humans. If a stranger comes into the room and they perceive somehow that that stranger might be endangering their humans, they get very protective, they're territorial, and they're very protective of their humans, but it's because of that bond that they develop with their humans. And frankly, the other thing is just, there's nothing like a Pit Bull smile. It completely mimics a human smile and other dogs will smile, but it's another one of those things that's a cliché, but it's true.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's true. Now that you mentioned it, I've seen a lot of photos on social media and when you look at them, they do look like they smile like humans.

David Gaier:

Sure. And it tends to be when they're relaxed, so their jaws slack, their tongue is out and they are literally grinning at you. And in my heart, I believe that they're smiling in pleasure and happiness and in love just the way humans do. And maybe I'm wrong and maybe the animal sociologists, zoologists, whatever tell me I'm full of it, but I believe that.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I have several Pit mixes and I really believe if the owner properly communicates with their dog of any breed, but the Pit Bull breed being so loyal and so devoted and wanting to do what you

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

want them to do. I think it's on owners who don't teach them proper communication so they can understand, Hey, I see the danger, thanks for alerting me, I got this. And that dog will back off. But a lot of people do unfortunately use them as cheap security systems and that's how we get into trouble. And that's how they get a really bad rap and a bad name. Thank you for bringing that up.

David Gaier:

Well, Pit Bulls were always known as nanny dogs.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's true.

David Gaier:

And the first working military dog, it was in World War I, a Pit Bull. I'm trying to think of his name and he was awarded a medal and he became the standard. So, you'll hear a lot that there's a prejudice against comfort animals and service dogs with a Pit Bull type breed, but because of their attributes and their loyalty and love of humans, they're perfect animals for that.

Jacqueline Piñol:

They're very smart, they learn quickly. I've had all of mine trained and I trust them no matter what. I know that even with my eyes or hand signs, they know what I want and need from them.

David Gaier:

Right.

Jacqueline Piñol:

So let me ask you, I'm sure you've encountered many dogs at the shelter who've had amazing new beginnings. Can you recall a story about one that maybe you thought might never get adopted and suddenly the right person came along and it was a match made in heaven.

David Gaier:

I really can because I got her into the front page of the local newspaper.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh, do tell.

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

David Gaier:

So her name was Jolene and she was found up in a park in Trenton, New Jersey, cold, probably starving, clearly frightened. And so the Trenton Animal Shelter took her in and then we pulled her from Trenton. And this poor thing, she's clearly a Pit Bull type dog, I don't know what else. She isn't the most beautiful animal, but we are especially fond of underdogs, which is perfect coincidence here, talking about dogs. She had a very deformed right front paw that literally made it impossible for her to walk normally and just normal walking was painful to her. And her teeth weren't in the best shape, but all our volunteers and I, and the staff and the board and our shelter manager fell in love with Jolene.

David Gaier:

So we went to the best surgical animal hospital in New Jersey. We raised the money to get her deformities fixed. And before she could completely convalesce from her surgery, a family came in, fell in love with her on the spot, begged us to let them take her. And she was adopted out and she is the queen of her new home.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's so wonderful.

David Gaier:

And they brought her back to the shelter for us. And I just happened to be there the day they brought her back and absolutely the love was, the volunteers, just all lost it with emotion. And so did I.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I would too, just because I've seen so many go through so much and then their human comes along and you just can't even believe you're like, this is that match made in heaven that we all want for every dog.

David Gaier:

She is just one of those animals, one of those pups that we took in that everyone fell in love with, everyone rooted for. Her deformity became something that we were proud because we were able to get it fixed and give her a normal life and a loving forever home. And she wouldn't have lasted in an urban shelter and she wouldn't have lasted on the street. And so we know we saved her life and the Trenton Animal Shelter did too, but we had to work to get her to the point where she could have a good life and just a normal life.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's a wonderful story. Back in 2016, I remember you told me that Sammy's Hope had over a 100 volunteers. And I just remember thinking that's truly the envy of every rescue, having that

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

much help and hands on board. What is it about Sammy's Hope that brings in so many wonderful people to help and change lives like Jolene's?

David Gaier:

Well, I think it's because we are small and because the volunteers get to spend so much time with the dogs. Unlike in urban shelter where the volunteers, if they have a volunteer group, because they're so large and have so many animals, the only time they can spend with them is maybe a brief walk, get them outside to do their business and just to have a little fresh air and a little exercise and a little human companionship. But we have a real life room, which is supposed to mimic what a dog would be like in a home. We have a large kitchen and two huge outdoor runs and weather permitting, our volunteers spend hours, especially in the good weather. Our motto is the dog stays outside with the volunteer, whether we're playing them, we have an agility course set up in one of the runs.

David Gaier:

They jump through hoops and go around barriers. And a lot of our volunteers have some training in dog handling and teaching dogs behavioral patterns that we like to encourage. And it's just because we can spend so much time with our animals and there's so much socialization and so much care.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. And that's really important because I think it does make them more adoptable. I think adopters come in expecting the dog to just be ready to go into the home and know what to do. And some people are more willing to do some of the work they have to do to introduce that dog to home, some people just want it to happen. So at least adopting from a place like Sammy's Hope gives you that extra help and support, or a network of people you can go to and say, Hey, what do I do? And I'm sure you guys would absolutely be more than happy to inform adopters on how to be successful in that arena.

David Gaier:

Yeah. You just mentioned something. The reason we're successful is because of our volunteers, because our volunteers themselves network outward. So they may know someone who's looking for a pup and someone who is particularly fond of a Pit Bull type dog, or they may know someone who knows someone, or they may know someone who's fairly well off and they can go to them and say, we're having our annual golf tournament. Can you kick in please? Because we survive on. And so it's that networking that all volunteers can do with family and friends. We've had, I don't know, at least a couple of dozen adoptions by our own volunteers myself included.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh, that's terrific. And I love that you mentioned you guys have an agility course. I find that in so many shelters, especially having visited during the Documentary Series filming, we saw dogs

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

and they just spin in circles in these kennels, and they get maybe 20 minutes a day walking, but their minds are not stimulated. So they start to fall apart, I guess, for lack of a better term.

David Gaier:

Right. And they're in a loud, barking, closed in environment with mostly just next to a dog on either side. And they lack that human socialization, because one of the reasons if dogs misbehave it's because they're not used to being around some dogs as you well know, and is so horrible, are chained up and left to the elements or chained up in a basement sometimes in complete darkness. And they never feel the touch of a human hand or the softness and love of a human voice. And so they don't know how to react to humans and they get frightened and that fright sometimes can turn into aggression.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. Right. Defensiveness.

David Gaier:

Right.

Jacqueline Piñol:

You mentioned during these COVID times and I thought has the COVID crisis affected adoption numbers? Because the facility, I know it had to close for a time, how do potential adopters still meet dogs and apply to adopt them today?

David Gaier:

Well, we just practice social distancing because we have these outdoor runs. We can do that. And we can also make sure that our volunteers are protected. All of the volunteers wear masks all the time, even when they're outside for the most part. Well, our numbers were down a little bit, but we still had a nice number of adoptions this past calendar year. And we just do it on appointment, we will have potential adopters contact us. We will set a specific day and time for them to come so that we know we can have them there and have social distancing and all the proper protocols followed or on occasion, we have actually talked to the potential adopters and we meet them at a different location, maybe one closer to their home, maybe at a public park, someplace where we can make sure everyone is safe. And we will bring the dog to a different location and then we will do the intro.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh, good. Okay. So yes, there are possibilities and we make changes and we make it happen. Right? We keep adopting dogs out.

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

David Gaier:

Absolutely. You can't stop. The homeless population does not stop because of COVID. A dog isn't aware that there's a virus affecting humanity. They just want to find a loving home. So the only real difference is we don't have people traipsing physically through the shelter, because the confines of the shelter make it hard to social distance.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Gotcha. And what happens if a family adopts a dog from Sammy's and it ends up not being a good match? For whatever reason, even if it's not the fault of the dog.

David Gaier:

Right.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Can they bring the dog back?

David Gaier:

Not only can they, but it's in our adoption contract. Now, obviously we're not a business that can legally enforce it, but we ensure that everyone signs a contract. And it is very clearly written that if you cannot keep the dog for any reason whatsoever, you are obliged under the contract, you signed to bring it back and we welcome the dog back. We don't hold it against anyone. Our view is we want the dog to have the best situation, a loving home, if it's not a good fit, we don't want the dog there either. So we will certainly take the dog back, give him or her the love that they had the first time around and find them a home that is a good fit.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Okay. I noticed on your website that Sammy's Hope had its ten-year anniversary in 2020. So first of all, congratulations for that because that's 10 years of a lot of happy new beginnings as I like to call it. Why do you think after all these years and all the effort that so many wonderful rescues put out there are still so many dogs everywhere that needs saving?

David Gaier:

Well, because there are just too many dogs impregnating other dogs. The way things work, I guess you would call it logarithmically. One turns to two turns to four turns to eight turns to 16 turns 32. So it's just a question of irresponsibility by humans and not spaying and neutering.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Does New Jersey have a spay and neuter law?

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

David Gaier:

I honestly don't know, but I suspect not because of the numbers of animals that reach us, that haven't been spayed or neutered, but like I said, no animal leaves our care without being spayed or neutered. And that's a standing rule that... And it's not terribly expensive, it doesn't take long. It's almost invariably safe with a good vet. And it's the only responsible thing to do.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I agree with you. Los Angeles County has a spay and neuter law, and although it exists in the books, there's no enforcement. Nobody keeps track, maybe there isn't the funding or the staffing within whatever city limits and shelters or whomever, animal control knock on every door and be like, Hey, can we see your space certificate, your neuter certificate? That's what it would literally take to enforce that. So it's unfortunate.

David Gaier:

Yeah. It's almost like dog licensing is in large cities. It brings in a little bit of revenue. It's not enforceable, but one of the reasons I really liked the Animal Legal Defense Fund for example, we need national federal legislation to protect animals from abuse and neglect. And make no mistake about it, neglect is abuse. If you just chain your dog up and leave him or her outside, that is abuse. It's not just neglect. And I'm buoyed by the fact that president Biden has the first White House shelter adopted dog.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yes, yes.

David Gaier:

Yes. And I am personally going to take to figure out how I can lobby president Biden to get some legislators, to introduce some more and more powerful with more enforcement mechanisms, because some States do very well, others do less well. And it's South in general, I think there's a bigger problem, even particularly with Pit Bull type dogs. So the patchwork of laws and enforcement is good as it may be in some places clearly still is lacking. And I think we need national legislation.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yes. I do. I would love that. And I'm constantly seeking opportunity or reading articles, signing petitions, whatever I can do. It's just one voice, but if I add it to thousands of thousands of others, if we all speak up, we'll make a difference.

David Gaier:

No, I know you do. And your voice Jacqui is a powerful voice. I know this and I think you do a tremendous amount of good by raising the issues and bringing them to the public's attention.

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

Jacqueline Piñol:

I hope so, because I know there are a lot of amazing animal lovers, dog lovers, animal rescue advocates out there. And so if you're listening to this or you have a friend who you know is passionate about saving dogs and saving animals, just remember to speak up, connect with me, I will connect you with whomever I can to increase the network of people making a difference, at least starting off with the United States. Why not set an example?

David Gaier:

Right.

Jacqueline Piñol:

So I want to just jump back to the beginning when I asked you about man's best friend and you mentioned Popeye, I don't know about Popeye. I didn't meet him back then. So what's man best friend?

David Gaier:

So, I did the eval with two of my colleagues, including your friend Justina and my friend. And she does a lot of that. We pulled Popeye from the East Orange Animal Shelter, and I fell in love with him because again, he was an underdog. He has, what's called Horner's syndrome on the left side of his face. So basically it's a dog version of Bell's palsy. And unfortunately, unlike Bell's palsy, which often corrects itself, at least in Popeye it's permanent. So the entire left side of his face droops, which it makes it impossible for him to blink his left eye. So, it looks like he can't see out of but we know he can and for some people find a little unpalatable, but it also means he can't really swallow well. So sometimes he will be trailing six inches of drool, but I just fell in love with him.

And we brought him from East Orange to Sammy's Hope. And after about three days, I just went to the shelter manager and I said, I'm taking him home. And she thought, I meant for an overnight visit. And I said, no, he's coming home with me and he's never going to see the inside of a shelter as long as I draw a breath. So I had to go and lobby the place where I was living because they had a weight limit on dogs and he was about 10 pounds over it. But I just said to them, listen, you can have my money and I will stay here, but I'm not staying here for one more day without Popeye. I will move out tomorrow because I'm not letting him... Even as loving as Sammy's Hope is I wanted him to be on the couch with me.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right.

David Gaier:

And he is to this day and he is my constant companion and I have to clean his eye and put antibacterial gel and it twice a day. And I have slobbery rags throughout the house. But when I

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

take him for a walk, peoples when they see him and he is the kindest and sweetest creature I have ever seen and people sense it. And they cling to him and they delight in how loving and sweet he is.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I just love hearing that because when you walk him and you see that, it's almost like, you know that there is a part of you that's adding joy to somebody's day.

David Gaier:

Yes. I got to tell you. He saved my life in a very real way. And he saves it every day. The love that he gives me, I couldn't even possibly return in kind.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh, and you know what? You just answered my question because I always ask my guests, what does the love of your dog mean to you?

David Gaier:

Well, if I woke up and he wasn't on the bed, I would probably have a coronary because I know... And plus it's a high bed and he can't jump up. He can jump down. So I literally, he comes up the steps and I pick him up and I put him on the bed every night and he's there from 11 to seven and cuddled up next to me. And I just can't think of anything nicer than having your pup next to you.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. I love that. So on that note, what advice would you give anyone who's thinking about adopting a dog, might be on the fence or hesitant to get one from a shelter? What would you say to them?

David Gaier:

Well, I would say the president of United States took a dog from a shelter. And if it's good enough for the president of United States it's good enough for you. And I would say, look for the underdogs, give them a chance because you will get more in love than you can give. The underdogs somehow seems to know that they're special and that the love of a human is special for them. And I would also say, if you can't adopt, just do something else donate. If you can't afford it volunteer, if you can't afford that, try to help on social media, if nothing else share posts of dogs that are having a hard time getting adopted.

I have a little program of my own on Sammy's Hope called Dave's Faves. And I just pay the adoption fee for dogs that are somewhat languishing not being adopted and being overlooked because maybe they're not the most beautiful dog or maybe they have a physical problem that requires some extra special attention and some extra costs. We at Sammy's Hope will also try to

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

subsidize special dogs with special needs for our adopters. So just take a chance on a dog that may be being overlooked.

Jacqueline Piñol:

How can people do that? Where do we send them if they're interested in finding out more about Sammy's Hope and the dogs that are up for adoption?

David Gaier:

Well, certainly Sammy's Hope is www.sammyshope.org. So it's sammyshope.org. You can find us on Facebook just by putting us in the search window and you can donate to there too. And I just would encourage people to find out where their municipal shelter is. Municipal shelters are really hurting for this simple reason that especially if they're in urban areas, they just don't have the capacity for the number of homeless animals. And if you rescue and adopt a homeless dog out of an urban shelter, you could very well be saving that dog's life.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah, absolutely. All right. You hear that people Facebook and the website, sammyshope.org and our listeners should know that I am not getting paid to advocate for any organization on this podcast. I choose organizations that I know are doing the good work for dogs and for people across America. Sammy's Hope has The Canine Condition seal of approval from me.

David, I want to ask you about something I read in your bio. You also volunteer in Island Animal Alliance, which brings homeless dogs from hurricane ravaged, Puerto Rico, and transports them to loving homes in New York and New Jersey. Can you tell us a little bit about that experience?

David Gaier:

Well, it was founded by a good friend of mine, Niki Holloway Dawson. She's given her entire adult life to saving animals. She's worked in several shelters and she founded this after the hurricane that ravaged the Island and completely destroyed its infrastructure. She went there to do dog rescue, and then she realized that there was simply an existing, massive homeless dog program. So Island Animal Alliance gets pilots and aircraft to volunteer, to fly from Puerto Rico to Miami. And then people like me will at our own expense or at the expense of Island Animal Alliance will fly down to Miami and then literally drive, in my case back to Bridgewater, New Jersey, it was 1,262 miles nonstop took me 21 hours. I had a co-pilot Elaine, and thank God because it is rough driving 21 hours and you can't stop. And you can't check into a hotel.

We had 29 puppies in our van and of course we had to stop and refresh their water and refresh their food and find out if anybody needed special care. But when we get to New Jersey, either a rescue organization is there with their truck or other organizations. We have homes for them, we don't just bring them to New York and New Jersey and hope for a home, they're ready. In my case, the 29 puppies that Elaine and I brought, we had a rescue from Vermont waiting for us. So the dogs got to get out and get exercised and get fed and watered again. And then they were all taken to homes in Vermont.

The Canine Condition Podcast Episode 4- Who Is Man's Best Friend?

Transcript by: Rev.com

Jacqueline Piñol:

That is truly inspiring. And especially the networking of rescues. A big goal of mine is to help rescues learn about other rescues. So maybe they can work together and help more dogs at any one time.

David Gaier:

Jacqui, that's so key because rescues are made up of humans who love dogs and care about them and will do practically anything to find them loving homes and who have an emotional attachment to these wonderful homeless animals. And so working together is the way we're going to make it work. And that means volunteers because people don't get into animal rescue because they want to make money. Even shelter managers are typically not terribly well-paid, there's not that kind of money in animal welfare and animal rescue. It's just people that love dogs that make this work.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Correct. Island Animal Alliance, I am definitely going to look them up actually, because I filmed a movie in Puerto Rico years ago. And at that time there were so many stray cats, hundreds that I would see throughout the two and a half months I was there. So if anyone out there is moved by any part of this conversation and wants to reach out Island Animal Alliance, look them up. I'm sure that they could also use the extra help in any way possible, if that's something that speaks to you.

David Gaier:

Island animal Alliance can really use donations too.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Truly is amazing that you do all this work. But I know that when you love an animal and something speaks to you, you got to do something.

David Gaier:

Yeah.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right?

David Gaier:

Yeah.

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Jacqueline Piñol:

Even if it's small, like you said, if all you can do is share posts.

David Gaier:

Right. Do something to contribute. It doesn't have to be financial. The volunteerism is the best thing because it's human interaction and human love and human care that saves these animals lives.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Thank you, David, for sharing your stories and inspiring us to take action. I really admire your dedication to helping anywhere that you can. We need more David Gaiers in the world. So please know that you can come back and be my guest anytime.

David Gaier:

And thank you so much also for doing your Dogumentary, The Canine Condition, which I hope people will eagerly look for.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yes, I'm so excited. So if any of our listeners out there would like to see and hear more about Sammy's Hope, please check out our YouTube channel or website at thecaninecondition.com to see the newly released Dogumentary footage from our 2016 visit with David at Sammy's Hope. And please check out our social media pages @thecaninecondition to see pictures of some of the dogs we talked about in this episode. Until next time, hang onto those leashes.

The Canine Condition. Come. Sit. Stay.