

Jacqueline Piñol:

The Canine Condition. Come. Sit. Stay.

Welcome to The Canine Condition Podcast. My name is Jacqueline Piñol. 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.

(How much is that doggie in the window - song)

Uh-uh-uh, no more buying dogs from pet stores or breeders for me. If you had a chance to listen to my first episode, I shared my personal history with dog breeders, pet stores that sell dogs and the pure-bred German Shepherd that once bit me. The real dog rescue experience for me began with Dublin, a 67-pound female Pit Bull Great Dane who I met in 2011. Dublin was the inspiration for the journey I have taken as an animal rescue advocate. Before I introduce my guest for this episode, I have to tell you how she came into my life, because it will explain a lot about my guest's journey and his involvement in the dog rescue world.

Sit back and get comfy, this is a good story. It was a Saturday night in March of 2011, I was in mourning over the loss of my grandmother on my dad's side. She had passed exactly a week earlier in Guatemala. Her relatives here in Los Angeles were having a gathering for a birthday and they invited me. I felt close to her being with them, so I went. It was a nice backyard party. At some point, I am sitting at a picnic table and from the corner of my eye, I see a lean, long, gray and white dog with piercing yellow eyes, walk into the yard and head straight to my table to eat cake.

I'm not kidding, she was going straight for it. The birthday girl, a woman in her 50s, screams at the sight. One of the cousins walks up to the dog, he takes her by the collar and escorts her outside and closes the gate. I wasn't just going to let that happen and not ask questions. Apparently, no one knew this dog. She had wandered in off the street, and I admit, her size and appearance can be intimidating. The black leather, metal spiked collar she was wearing didn't help soften her look either. Given my history with large breed dogs, I don't know why, but I was not afraid of her.

I didn't even flinch approaching her, and I had never been around a dog of her breed or size, at least not this close. She was just standing outside the gate waiting to be let back in. I couldn't just leave her there. That night, I felt as lonely and as lost as this dog looked, I was very close to my grandmother. Suddenly, I hear the breaking of the piñata in the yard, so I decide to wait until it's over and I ask a cousin to hand me the rope that held up the piñata. I looped it into her collar and use it as a leash to try and walk her in the neighborhood.

Most houses were dark, and the few that answered the door had no idea whose dog this was. I get on the phone and call the local shelter. The answering machine said something like, "Due to lack of funding, the shelter in this city is permanently closed." Not what I wanted to hear. So I called the police station and they say, "There's nothing they can do, so I should try another shelter in the morning." In the morning? Well, what do I do until then? So I call Jonny. And this is where I will introduce you to my guest for this episode, Jonny Blu. Jonny is a singer, songwriter and music producer. He is my partner in life, my producing partner on this project, my baby daddy and my doggy daddy. Hi, Jonny, welcome to the podcast.

Jonny Blu:

Hi, Jacqui.

Jacqueline Piñol:

You remember how the story began and when you got that phone call from me?

Jonny Blu:

Yes, I do, very well.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Oh gosh, I'm laughing because it's been such a journey.

Jonny Blu:

It has.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Do you want to tell our listeners what you recall from the phone call when I called you panicked that I had found this dog?

Jonny Blu:

Well, I just remember you were sad, you were happy to see some family. And then when you called me up and mentioned that you had a dog, my first reaction was, "Oh no, here we go." Because I know you're a caring person and you're emotional person, and it's those times in your life where you look for comfort, find things that are going to give you purpose to help you heal from the pain of losing somebody. And all those things just flashed through my mind for some reason, and then all of a sudden, here to this big dog that you found out of nowhere at a family event and wanted to bring home.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yes, I remember you were hesitant because you told me, "Let her find her way home." And I was very reluctant to do that, but I did. I tried, I let her go, I said, "I don't want my emotions to take over since I was so vulnerable." I think I was aware of that. And I listened to you, I let her go, and I walked back into the party, but-

Jonny Blu:

But then came the next phone call.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I left the party though, I got in my car and I didn't see her, so there's a part of you that compartmentalizes and says, "Oh good, she went home," because that's what would make me feel better. And as I'm driving toward the freeway, the house was about three long blocks away from the main highway, I see something moving. And again, from the corner of my eye, it's her. I know she's headed to the freeway, so I stop, I open my car doors and I say, "Baby girl, baby girl, over here." And she literally, as if that was her name turns around, walks toward me, jumps in the backseat of my car, curls up and falls asleep. So then I show up at home with the dog and-

Jonny Blu:

Yes. Well, first, I remember you called me again, you explained to me what happened, what you just said, and it was just one of those things, obviously you couldn't just leave the dog because she was close to the freeway and she wasn't getting home. So yes, I agreed to have her come back to our place. And obviously, I was a little bit nervous because we had the two pugs and all of a sudden bringing this monster of a dog who, although we found out not soon after that she's the sweetest dog in the world, but when you first look at her, you would have thought, wake up in morning and we're going to have a blood bath with two pug callers leftover.

I was definitely a little nervous about that, but I remember it was funny when you said, "Well, let's just fence her off in the bathroom." And we put two fences up, stacked one on top of the other, because she's such a big dog that one fence wouldn't have done the trick. And then it's like you knew she was sweet, but there was still that hesitation. Of course, when you find a dog, you just don't know, especially when you have dogs, little dogs, but then she was just curled up. I remember you got a bunch of blankets and put it all together like a bed, because we didn't have a big dog bed at the time.

And then I was like, "Well, what do we give her as a toy?" And the pugs had these little tiny toys, which she figured she would probably choke on, so we got a coffee can, right? Do you remember?

Jacqueline Piñol:

You got. That was not my idea.

Jonny Blu:

It was something, it's like, "Toss the coffee can."

Jacqueline Piñol:

So the next morning, we stuck to the plan because I had agreed that if I brought her home, we were going to try and find her home. But the best way to do that, at least to our knowledge and the city is you take them to the shelter because if their owner is looking for them, that's where they're going to find them.

Jonny Blu:

Right. That was the first thing on my mind, and I know it was the first thing on your mind was, what if our dog got lost, not to say it's an excuse for people to let their dog out or to be nonchalant about how they're making sure their dog is secure in the home, but at the same time, people make mistakes. And what if it was our dog? What if our dog got out, what if she has a loving family? And our first thought is, "Well, if she had a loving family, she wouldn't have been out and lost and whatever." But at the same time, you have to make room for the fact that people sometimes could make mistakes.

And the best thing to do was what we ended up doing, which was saying, let's bring her to a shelter that was at least close enough to where you found her in the hopes that her family would find her.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. And I do remember we went to this one clinic on Ventura Boulevard on the way, this emergency clinic, and we thought, "Oh, if she has a microchip, then they'll scan her for us, and we'll find out if she has an owner, then we can bypass that shelter visit." Because nobody really likes to leave dogs at shelters, at least I don't. And they scanned her for us and there was no chip. So we did go to the shelter. I do remember that right before leaving the shelter, the girl at the intake desk called us over and she wanted to know if we wanted to be placed on first call.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. I remember that. It was ominous too, because we were like, "First call for what?"

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. I didn't know what that meant, but I learned something that day. So she explains the first call lists means you'll be the first one we call if we reach full capacity at the shelter and have to start euthanizing for space. I couldn't even believe my ears. I guess I just hadn't been in a scenario like this before. Her breed type would be the first one to be put down if they got full capacity and had to start euthanizing. So I said, "Of course, it's not even a thought, put me on the list."

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. I didn't think that she wasn't going to be picked up by the shelter, maybe it was just positive thinking that maybe her family is going to show up and be like, "Oh my gosh, we're missing Butch. We found her, thank you so much." But clearly, it didn't turn out that way. And I also knew that if we were last call we were just not going to let that happen, but my assumption was she was in a shelter that was good, it wasn't a dingy place. I felt uncomfortable leaving her, it was more of the emotional aspect of letting the dog go because-

Jacqueline Piñol:

Well, yeah. But I do remember there's this moment, and it's heart-wrenching to watch a dog look at you. And she'd only been with us a day, but in just that one day, and it was almost like she enjoyed our company or felt safe. She just looked at me with those eyes and her body language that just said, "Please, don't leave me here." So I clearly left in absolute tears. I got in my car and I was bawling, although I absolutely wanted to believe I was doing the right thing for her.

Jonny Blu:

And it was the right thing. And I think that it is important for people in general to know that if you do find a dog, the first thing you should do is at least try and look for the owner, look for the dog family, because trying, allow yourself, even though there is a frustration, almost an anger sometimes, you'd be like, "How did somebody let this dog out?" But at the same time, like I said, making room for mistakes that people might make and just putting yourself in the shoes of the family and just thinking on that positive end first and say, "Let me see if I can find this dog's family."

Then if you can't find the dog's family, you try to make an effort to possibly get it adopted or adopt it yourself.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. And just a note to that, because a lot of thoughts come to mind hearing you say that, she wasn't in bad shape, she didn't look abused. At some point, somebody cut her tail because she does have a nub of a tail. She was skinny, but not starving. Those are all things I assessed because I have seen dogs found in horrible conditions. And some of them actually had owners at one time, but the owner never pursued finding them or just let it go and figured they'll come back or they won't. In those cases, things get sticky and then doing the right thing is maybe having that owner surrender the dog because that dog actually needs to be better taken care of and be in more capable hands.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. I think that seems to be a quandary in rescue in general. Anyways, going back.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Going back because there's parts of the story that taught us a lot about rescue and that we as a couple, want to share with our listeners or anyone who can relate to a story like ours. It was just two days after leaving her at the shelter, we were at Starbucks and we see this girl walk by and she has this beautiful blue nose Staffordshire bull Terrier. What people like to call a pit bull. He was wearing a yellow harness that said, "Adopt me," in big black letters.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. And I remember there was something about saying hello to that dog and I'm like, "I'm going to go say hello to that dog." And that opened up to the conversation with that woman that we started talking to about how we had just gotten Dublin.

Jacqueline Piñol:

That's right. And it turns out because I had to ask what's the adopt me harness about, she said she was a volunteer and a foster for the Jason Heigl Foundation. I remember her name was Britni, and she handed me her card, and she said, if we ever needed any help to call her up. When I got home, I looked up the website on her card, and the actress Katherine Heigl had started a nonprofit rescue foundation in her brother's memory to help find safe homes for shelter dogs because he was a huge animal lover. I kept her card. Seven days passed and on day 10 of the dogs stray hold, I checked in with the shelter.

I was told no one had expressed any interest in her, nobody had walked up to her kennel or asked about her at all. I was pretty stressed, and I didn't even tell Jonny, I just called Britni from the Heigl Foundation. I needed to figure out what we could do and if they could help us. I give her my update, and she says, "If you are willing to foster her, we can pull her for you. We will get her spayed and vaccinated, and if you're willing to take her to adoption events or walk her with an adopt me harness, then she can be safely adopted out." That was music to my ears. This was her ticket out, so I had to tell Jonny.

Jonny Blu:

That was the beginning of a real experience of learning actually how to foster a dog, and of course that was not easy because she was such a big dog. And although she was sweet, we didn't feel her as a threat at all to our pugs, she was just strong, and she was young, and you remember her.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah, she definitely was young. She had no leash manners, there was no proper house dog etiquette, if there is such a term, but she was darling, and she was sweet, and loving and she wanted to listen, she wanted to please you, she just didn't know how. So what happened was when the Heigl Foundation agreed that we could be fosters for them, we filled out an application to get home approved to be a foster and Britni came over. And then the day that she brought Dublin from the shelter to our house, they offered me a crate because I didn't have a crate that size.

Jonny Blu:

And we were in an apartment too. It was a good enough size apartment, it wasn't like a one room studio apartment, which helped, but it was still an apartment. So it was still not going to be an easy thing, especially because we had the two little pugs also.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. And the Jason Heigl Foundation did get her fully vetted, so all we had to do was literally provide love, care, guidance, feed her, any supplies we needed, they would provide, but we offered as part of us being fosters to just take care of her daily needs. And that same week, Jonny found an adopter. He was that desperate. And you were Jonny. Do you remember you shared a Facebook post? He took pictures of her. He put this whole thing, I shared it, our friends shared it. He wanted to reach out far and wide, not just for her owner, but for anyone who was willing to either foster her as well or adopt her.

Jonny Blu:

I think this is a good moment for me to explain the... Well, I'll put it as the guy's point of view here. Again, I'm somebody who's always loved dogs, it was never really about whether or not I would want to have dogs. For me, it was simply just the practical aspect. We're two artists, I'm a singer, you're an actor, there's fluctuations in our income we are in an apartment or renting, and we already have two dogs. Of course, there's the cost involved, the time involved.

Jacqueline Piñol:

And can I interrupt you real quick since you mentioned that we were in an apartment? Having three dogs in an apartment building, you don't find that to be the norm. Luckily, our apartment building manager was an absolute dog lover and she had a German Shepherd. And I had forgot, we had to ask permission and say, "Hey, we're going to foster this dog, it's temporary, but she's very safe, she's fully vetted." And she said, "No problem. We know you guys, you guys got this. That's awesome. Don't worry about it." And we were approved to foster.

Jonny Blu:

For me, it was about, could we give this dog the best life that it possibly could? And at the same time, the practical aspects of like, this is three dogs, this is three mouths to feed, all those things that come with it. So it wasn't necessarily about keeping her and wanting to keep her, it was really more about, can we? Can we keep her? Is this the right thing to do for us, and is it the right thing to do for her?

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. Well, given the fact that he texted me while I was on a job and the text said, "I found her a home." I mean, what do I say to that? I freak out, and at the same time I have a million questions. I get home that afternoon, and apparently the guy that he had met, fell in love with her at another Starbucks that Jonny was having coffee at this morning. You want to expand on that, Jonny?

Jonny Blu:

My brother had met this guy up at that Starbucks, and long story short, he was a young guy, he came from a very well-known Hollywood family who happened to also be and still are, very big donors to dog rescue. And the kid had money, he had the wherewithal, he expressed to me that he really wanted a dog as a companion, he goes out a lot. He was just enthusiastic about the idea of having a dog just like Dublin, that he could take in his car with her and go on hikes with her. So I went over to the guy's house, I think he was 21 years old.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. I remember because you have to be at least 21 to adopt.

Jonny Blu:

So young guy, and this kid, basically had a multi-million dollar house. Beautiful. So I was like, "Well, okay, financially, you can obviously handle this dog." He didn't have any other dogs, had no attachments as far as wife, girlfriend, kids. So I brought that back to Jackie and saying, "Look, let's just keep open minds about him. Yeah, he's young, but if he's enthusiastic about her, why not?"

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. To his credit, he did fill out the application that very night, I called Britni and sent it to her, I think, I don't know if I sent it via email, I don't recall that the little details, there was so much emotion involved in all of this for me. But again, I was trying to do what is right for the dog. They reviewed the application, and I think it took a couple of days before they came back and said that he was approved, and if we could do the home visit. So of course, I agreed to do the home visit, there's a whole checklist that you go over to the house and you make sure that everything is safe and secure for this dog to live in this home, or you make suggestions for things that need to be placed or need to be in order before the dog can get there.

The big things with him is that he had a big swimming pool and his backyard looked on to a Canyon, there was no fence, but it's not like she could fall out or anything or fall down or anything. So there didn't seem to be any roadblocks that could justify us saying no. And he could give her the space, he said he would pay for her trainer, so we had to let her go. And we did, she left, it was a Saturday morning and I remember I was too emotional to go with Jonny, but he went to drop her off, and I cried all weekend, but I made peace with our decision.

And he sent us a photo of her on a bed, he had bought a pooper scooper, a bed, dog food. He was into it. He was really dedicated, so we thought, "Okay, this is another chapter in a dog's life, and we did what we could." And then comes Monday night.

Jonny Blu:

I remember. This is what? This is like two days later.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. She left us Saturday morning, Monday night, I remember we were watching a TV show, I actually had a glass of wine because Jonny suggested I should wind down a little bit because I'd been really wound up all weekend. I really did cry all weekend, but don't forget, I had to also take into account, I was mourning a loss of my grandmother and I just felt like this dog leaving me was just another loss at this time. And I had a lot going on, so I had to come to terms a lot of that and not make it about having to keep this dog.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. And I remember we were watching-

Jacqueline Piñol:

Revolution.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. It was like a LOST type of show. I remember we were sitting there relaxed and I get a text from this guy, and all the texts said was, "She's gone." So I text back, "What are you talking about?" And he's like,

"The dog." And I'm like, "What happened?" Literally, this is the text chain, "What happened?" And he's like, "She's gone, the dog got out." No joke, I had my jacket not far from me on end of the couch, and I just started to reach, I'm like, "If I tell Jacqui what he's texting me, we're going to be leaving in probably a minute." And Jacqui then noticed out of the corner of her eye, something's going on. And you're like, "What? What's going on?"

Jonny Blu:

And at first I was like nothing because I was texting the guy and then I was like, "The dog got out." And that was it. I don't even remember the sequence of events, all I remember is the next thing we knew we were out driving with the pugs in our car, looking for the dog.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yes. We thought she might remember their scents so we took the pugs with us because we didn't know her name, and I had bought her a collar when she left Saturday morning, she had a brand new collar and I said, "Please put name tags on her collar as soon as you get her." So when we asked him, what did you name her? And did you put your phone number on the tags? What do you think he said?

Jonny Blu:

Can I rewind real quick?

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah, rewind.

Jonny Blu:

I remember that when we got to his house, and this guy lives in the Hollywood Hills, and I remember we pull up to the guy's house and he's sitting outside with a friend of his, and I just noticed immediately the whole front lawn, and it's a big front lawn, it's just a big house, was covered with dog kibble. I'm like, "Okay. That's one way to maybe get the dog. You could also get all other kinds of animals that lived up in those Hills." But I was like, "That was funny."

Jacqueline Piñol:

That was his way of getting her back. He thought "she'll sniff kibble when she's hungry and come back to the house."

Jonny Blu:

Lazy guy. And he wasn't going to leave the house, he was so-

Jacqueline Piñol:

I mean, seriously.

Jonny Blu:

So that was that. I remember we told him to stay there, we're going to go drive around in case she did come back. So he and his friend stayed there, you and I remember, we drove around for hours, like three hours. We started around 9:00 and we drove around till midnight.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Till midnight.

Jonny Blu:

And then when we went back to his house, and the plan was basically that he was going to get flyers printed and put them all around the neighborhood. I could tell at the time, the guy was genuinely apologetic. I remember when we got home, how frustrated you were and we randomly thought, "Hey, let's just check online." So we were Google searching, I'm like, "Well, where could we look for lost and found dogs?" And so I remember we ended up on Craigslist, and I kept searching for lost gray pit bull. And little did I know right away, but there's also found dog.

So randomly, that's when I typed in found dog, and sure enough, it was like three or four listings down on Craigslist. There was that picture of Dublin, with her face down over, planted down on the floor and her ears splayed out, and she's looking up. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, that's Dublin."

Jacqueline Piñol:

I remember, I rushed to the table and I look at the photo, and I see the collar and I go, "That's the collar I got her." And because he didn't have tags on because this guy never put any on, I knew it was her.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. And this guy was smart enough to have done that. Geez, he did it that day. And I remember, you remember we were like, "Let's call the guy." It was one o'clock in the morning, we were like, "Let's just do it."

Jacqueline Piñol:

He did. I remember because he said that he found her around 9:00 or 9:30, so in my mind, I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, that's when we were searching, she'd already walked into somebody's house, she's having tea, and here we are like crazy just searching for her everywhere in the canyons."

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. I remember, when we called up the guy, and he was totally cool. I was like, "Hey, we were fostering that dog, we just adopted her out to a trial period through a rescue." And he's like, "Oh yeah, she just wandered in to my house." It turned out, the guy lived right down the street from this guy, so Dublin was just wandering."

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. And so we thought, "Oh my gosh, great. We're going to tell him where the house is so he can return her." And I remember it because we put him on speaker phone, he goes, "She was really sweet, but I'm really allergic, so my roommate had to take her to a shelter." And I said, "Oh my gosh, you took her to a shelter?" And of course, by then, the shelter closed. I guess their intake was up until 10:00 PM, and you can't get through to them. But my fear was that, "Oh my gosh, is she going to be now held at this shelter and can't get out for another 10 days? Is she going to have someone else come see her and she'll get adopted?"

There's just a ton of things that could've gone wrong, and I needed to know how can I get her first thing in the morning?

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. Quick rewind. The way that Dublin got out was really one thing we didn't think of and it was also a learning experience. Dublin was an escape artist, however she got out of the house that she was in the first place, she probably didn't get out normally a dog would just get out, meaning like fence left open or something, because the only way she could have gone out is she jumped up onto the top of a six foot wall where there was landscaping and then just walked out the front of the house. And that was it.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yup. So we jammed the next morning early, even though the shelter doesn't open until past 9:00 AM. And I had called a friend of mine who's in rescue and knew about rescue dogs, and she said, "Try to get her intake number because when you show up at the shelter, they're not going to just have her on display because they just took her in, so she's not even up on the adoption floor. And if she doesn't have a name, you're not going to be able to just go in and say, 'I want this dog back.' So to avoid all that, if you have her intake number, you can go straight to the registration desk and they will be able to pull her kennel card and be able to match you with her, and then you can proceed with saying she's adopted and give all the details."

So I'm on the phone, and here's the interesting detail about calling the shelter. Jonny's driving, I'm on the phone and I'm trying to get this information, and the lady on the phone proceeds to tell me, "Next time, they should really put a phone number on the microchip because it just says the Heigl Foundation and has an address." And I'm thinking, "Yeah, well, then why didn't you search it online and get the phone number and call last night?"

Jonny Blu:

Just type in Heigl Foundation, there's a phone number.

Jacqueline Piñol:

But if I had said that right before she gave me the intake number, you better believe, she was going to get off the phone quick because I could already sense in her tone.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. Make your life difficult.

Jacqueline Piñol:

So we get to the shelter, I got the number, she's on hold for me, thankfully, we pick her up and they say, "In order to pull her, you have to pay the license fee and she has to go under your name because you're the person picking her up." So I do it, I don't care. It's fine. She appears to be my dog. We're going to resolve this with the adopter later. And the adopter did feel bad, but because he hadn't put all those precautions in place or literally three days in is already having these issues with this dog, given that it's a trial period of finding out, is this the right dog for you? Is this the right match? I had some concerns, and I expressed it to the rescue. So they said they were going to talk and call him and they would get back to us. We could keep her in the meantime and foster for that day or however long until this situation was resolved.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. Again, a lot of this was learning experience for us too. If somebody is going to adopt out a dog, it can't be like, "Yeah, I'll take care of that when things like fencing off, checking the perimeter, making sure that the dog is safe just in its surroundings, that's be done before the dog is adopted out.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Don't forget when we asked him why she was able to scale that wall and walk out, he said because he had to go to work unexpectedly and didn't want to leave her all day alone by herself inside so he left the back door open so she could take herself out and come back in. Good one.

Jonny Blu:

And again, some of this is just lessons learned. One reason why we're talking about this whole thing is expressing to people who are hopefully listening to this, that there is mistakes that happen, the best thing to do is trying to do research as much as you can on the troubleshooting that might happen in order to save yourself or other people from the little mistakes that can happen.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. And after the rescue got in touch with the adopter and discussions were had, it was agreed that she was not the right match for him, that perhaps the rescue was asking too much of him and he wanted to not be questioned so much or have to be told what to do with his home. And the thing is, if that was the only way to keep this particular dog safe, maybe he needed to adopt a different dog. So that left us in the precarious situation of, do we foster her or do we find another foster or what's next for Dublin?

Jonny Blu:

Well, I think we all knew what was next for Dublin. At least I did.

Jacqueline Piñol:

So back to training because we thought, "Look, if we are going to foster her indefinitely until we're sure that she gets a great home, she still needs to be trained because I can't even handle her. And if she is going to stay with us, because that's what ends up happening, she needs to be trained." So we took her to a training school that a great friend recommended and it ended up being fantastic. It was a three week board and train, and you get to see them on the camera and you get to visit through the glass where they don't see you, but you see them. It was quite an amazing experience.

I'm going to have other episodes on this podcast on dog training, speak to dog trainers of all different types of dog training and in different states, just to get an idea and a feel for how important and how helpful it is to train your dog no matter what breed and what size your dog is. It really made a difference for us. And when we dropped her off, we were on our way to Las Vegas to celebrate my birthday. And when we left, they said, "Who should we put on the paperwork to get the free followups once the training is done?" And I looked at Jonny and he looked at me and it's just this unspoken thing of, "Come on, are we really going to give her up?"

And training was not cheap, but was it worth it? Absolutely, every single dime. We said, "Put my name and Jonny's, she's ours. And I remember Jonny looked at me, he goes, "Happy birthday."

Jonny Blu:

I said, "Happy birthday."

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yay!

Jonny Blu:

Now let's go to Vegas.

Jacqueline Piñol:

How is that my birthday gift was the training for the dog?

Jonny Blu:

It was. Look, I would say one thing that I appreciated about you and I've seen you do this subsequently with other dogs, is that you allow yourself to say, "You know what, even if I was going to keep this dog or not keep this dog, training is of the utmost importance when you're trying to help a dog." And I really appreciated the fact that you were like, "Let's just put forward the money, even if we don't keep this dog." Even though we ended up keeping Dublin that you were, for selfless reasons, you were going to say, "I'm going to pay for this dog's training even if she ends up in the hands of somebody else." That you knew that she was going to be successful in her home.

And look, she ended up being successful in our home. I remember how emotional you were when we got her back from training where you were crying. You couldn't believe that this was the same dog. She was wonderful. She was easy to walk after that.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I know, it was crazy. And you would say, "Come, sit, stay," and she would do it, literally. It was just night and day. 180.

Jonny Blu:

Yeah. And one other aside, I remember you and I finally were able to take a vacation. We went to Spain, and it was like 2:00 in the morning and we couldn't sleep so we turned on the TV, and if there's somebody who maybe believes in meant-to-be, I remember we turned on the TV and it just so happened they were interviewing this guy and he brought his dog to that same facility and the dog was getting swimming lessons there. Do you remember?

Jacqueline Piñol:

I totally remember.

Jonny Blu:

We were like, "Oh my gosh, okay, that's something right there."

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yeah. And look, I'm not a superstitious person either, but there was something in me that always felt like my grandmother had sent me Dublin. My little abuelita was 4'11", and she was the only one in my entire family who always loved dogs and she always had large breed dogs, German shepherds, and Rottweilers. So when I saw Dublin and had that connection with her, there was just something. And since meeting Dublin, I love all pit bull type dogs, all bull terriers and Staffordshire bull terriers. And I will always advocate to protect them and guide them properly because they are the most loving, loyal, funny dogs one could have, and they are judged on their looks.

And as cliché as it sounds, don't judge a book by its cover because it could be the biggest treasure and you're not giving yourself that chance based on what you see.

Jonny Blu:

Dublin opened up my eyes and my heart and really my general way of thinking of, "Maybe I don't know what I like." Maybe sometimes I have to open my mind and be like, "Maybe I like this." And then all of a sudden I do. I'm like, "Oh, maybe I like that too." And with Dublin, she did, she opened up my eyes to the ideas like, I don't have a type of dog that I like, because once a dog comes into your life, it's the same thing as your kid, you don't question, "Oh, my kid has blue eyes or brown eyes or dark hair, light hair." You're just like, "This is my child." And it's the same thing with dogs. You're like, "This is my dog. This is my child." And you start and create a connection with that dog. And it doesn't matter what breed it is, you'll find out something new about yourself. If you open your minds to that.

Jacqueline Piñol:

So, that is the story of Dublin. Oh, and we named her Dublin because we had been to Ireland just before this whole thing started, before we met her. We loved it. And when you get there, you say to yourself, "Why haven't I been here? I've been missing out. This is the most stunning country. The people are so nice, the food is fantastic." And to me, all those feelings of just wow, was what Dublin was.

Jonny Blu:

It was just a positive experience we had, and let's name our dog after the experience.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Right. I have a few more questions for Jonny because having him here and getting that male perspective from somebody that's not necessarily completely engrossed in the dog rescue world is really important to me. So Jonny, let me ask you a few questions. You've been on this rescue journey with me since the beginning. What, if anything, do you have a hard time with about dog rescue? And what is it that you love about it?

Jonny Blu:

I think the difficult part is, depending on the type of person you are, your heart can get in the way of your thinking. And that is something that I've seen a lot in the dog rescue world, where the intentions are good, you're like, "I want to help this dog." But at the same time, you can get in over your head. To me finding the balance between, do I keep this dog? Do I think that this dog might do better if there's another home? It's difficult. But as far as with rescue overall, the value of rescue is helping a dog, helping a life, having a little bit of purpose even if it's a small thing, is having a little bit of purpose to your otherwise daily routine to not let it get overwhelming where you feel like it's a burden or that you if you don't do it enough that you're somehow not doing enough, whatever little bit that you can do, sign a Change.org petition.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Yes. It makes the difference.

Jonny Blu:

If time-wise, you can handle it, a dog is a great companion and you can take a dog to a lot of places these days. You can take a dog on an airplane with you. So some of the limitations that might've been there before are no longer there. There is a lot of value to it. And number one thing that I have learned personally with dog rescue is that there is something about rescuing a dog and that dog being your dog, having that dog have had a life experience in some way, even if you rescued it as a puppy, the fact that

that puppy might've come from a really adverse situation, there's something special about having that dog in your life.

There's something meaningful in bringing a dog into your home and knowing, I'm giving this dog a really good life in a way that this dog might not have had if I weren't in this dog's life. And it creates a really strong bond, a really strong connection. And in my opinion, much stronger than buying a dog or getting a dog from a breeder.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Having said that, I'm going to put you on the spot a little bit, but I think it'll be good for us to know and hear from someone with this experience. Your family members, they have mostly always gotten dogs from breeders, even in recent times. How does that sit with you personally given that you're on this journey with me advocating for rescue and adoption of homeless dogs?

Jonny Blu:

It bothers me at this point. I think that I've at least personally done enough, without preaching, but I've done as much as I can just to let people know what I just mentioned, the value of rescue. My aunt, who I love, bought another dog from a breeder, and my sister, same thing, bought a dog from a breeder, a bulldog. It's like, "Oh, well, the danger of getting a rescue dog is you don't know where it's from or it's not trained, or it could bite." I'm like, guess what, my sister's dog bit the housekeeper and they had to take her to the emergency room. The idea is, yeah, stuff happens, but there's no formula that says one is less dangerous than the other. If you train the dog and give the dog a good home, it's going to be fine. That's just the way it is.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Now, switching the page over to being a dad-

Jonny Blu:

As long as you're not going to tell me that you are getting another dog.

Jacqueline Piñol:

We're not getting any more dogs. No, no, no, we can't foster anymore. Six is good. Six is good. Now that your dad and your little boy's growing up with multiple dogs, what advice or encouraging words do you have for other parents about rescuing and adopting a dog?

Jonny Blu:

First and foremost, having a dog with a kid is, at least from my experience so far, is one of the most valuable things you can give your child. I've just found that from our son, he has a certain level of empathy, a certain level of compassion, and it's not overwhelming. We still have to keep him in check and make sure he doesn't mess with the dogs. But there's something about having grown up with that around him has given him this element of caring. I think that's just been really valuable. I don't see any negatives of having a dog. And again, we've got "pit bulls" and I've never, ever once, even had them, an iota the feeling of like, "Oh my gosh, it's not safe around my baby."

It was quite the opposite. And there was just something really great about that, and I almost feel that might have given him this energetic comfort that there were these other animals besides mommy and papa looking out for him, whether you're thinking about being a parent or you are parents, there is nothing negative about having a dog with your kid.

Jacqueline Piñol:

Well, thank you, Jonny.. I do want to add one thing based on the experiences we've had in the last five, six years in the rescue world is that, parents with young children should remember that the dogs don't have to be the only ones who are kid friendly, that it is our responsibility as parents to teach the kids to be dog-friendly and to understand boundaries, to understand that if you're poking and pulling and shoving and pushing another human, that humans going to react. So if you do it to a dog, the only way a dog knows to react is by letting you know with its mouth or its paws or its body.

Dogs don't naturally come at you with aggression, but if you don't watch the boundaries, if you don't guide them, if you don't teach them, if you don't respect them, don't expect them to just sit there and take it because you think it's cute or funny, or the kids want to do whatever they want to do. I'm a very big advocate for that, and I want to have other professionals in the dog rescue world come on the show and talk about those aspects because many dogs have been returned or surrendered by families with kids in shelters or rescues for the silliest of reasons, things that could have been avoided.

And all of us just have to learn together. It's not about putting anyone down or insulting anyone, it's really about, hey, let me show you how to make this work. And I hope that through this podcast, we can bring more listeners on board who perhaps will benefit from that information. Jonny, I want to thank you for being my guest on this episode and helping me launch this project, knowing that it means so much to me. I think together, we can make a bigger difference than if I was doing this alone. I love you. And thank you for being my guest.

Jonny Blu:

My pleasure. I love you too.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I love you. I would also like to personally thank the Jason Heigl Foundation and their volunteer, Britni, who all those years ago opened up my eyes to the possibility that we could help a dog in need through them. And I'm sure Dublin is thankful to them because she had clearly chosen her family and we just needed a little guidance. If you are interested in adopting a dog from the Jason Heigl Foundation, or just want to know how to support their mission, you can find them on Facebook, Instagram, or on their website. That is Jason Heigl, spelled H-E-I G-L Foundation.

Jacqueline Piñol:

I hope you will join me for my next episode, where I remotely head over to Upstate New York and chat with the founder of the Kramer Foundation, a non-profit dog rescue organization, saving dogs from death row in city shelters and showing us what is possible when they are given a chance. Embark on this journey with me and let's save man's best friend together.

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